

JNCC

NatureNews

The national and international conservation digest

Issue 20: Spring 2009

End of an era

Preparing the path for a new Managing Director



ALSO FEATURING

- + Falklands protection
- + Marine Conservation Zones
- + Recognition for experts



Chair's Introduction

It is with great sadness that I heard of the death of Sir Martin Doughty, the Chair of Natural England. His public service with the Countryside Agency, English Nature and, until his death, as founding Chair of Natural England established nature conservation and the wise use of the English countryside as a key priority for Government and the public. British nature conservation is the poorer for his passing, and we offer our condolences to his family and to Natural England's board and staff.

This coming September, our Managing Director, Deryck Steer, will be retiring from JNCC. Deryck first came through the doors at Monkstone House in February 1998, as the interim Managing Director. Successful in open competition, he became permanent in October of that year. Through his commitment, and energy, JNCC has gradually established itself as the organisation that "if it didn't exist we'd have to create it". His 'Conservation Conversation' this issue reviews the past and looks to the future – the Committee and I are already searching for a replacement, hopefully to be in post by September.

At the end of April, we will bid adieu to Wyn Jones, currently our Head of Overseas Territories. Wyn has had a variety of roles with JNCC, and formerly English Nature, and we will much miss his sage advice and wealth of knowledge. I should also record the formal recognition of the expertise amongst JNCC staff, with colleagues David Connor and David Stroud receiving richly deserved awards.

In other news this issue, it is pleasing to be able to note the additional £150,000 of funding for our work in the Overseas Territories from Defra. This will certainly help our reaching out to the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies which, after all, contain significant and globally important biodiversity.

This issue does place a strong focus on our international work – covering projects in the Falkland Islands, plus a succession of meetings and conventions for which JNCC provides valuable support.

On the home front, JNCC arranged meetings of the Wildlife Law Enforcement Working Group, and an event that focused on the UK's global impact on biodiversity

– held successfully and without irony at the London Stock Exchange.

With the continuing and steady flow of bad economic news, it becomes easier to dismiss any work on nature conservation as being less important. However, not having fully functioning ecosystems will have an even bigger impact on our quality of life than anything national and international economies can do for or to us. Biodiversity conservation and wise management is essential to the long-term provision of services from our ecosystems.

In these troubled times JNCC's work has become more important than ever, and we will be playing our part to help find solutions. As the early paragraphs of this introduction reveal, conservation is actually about people. I wish you happy reading!

Peter Bridgewater, Chair, JNCC

Front cover images:
Deryck Steer © Cathy Gardner/JNCC

Elephant Seal pup, Sea Lion Island. Its population has been in decline over the last few years.
© Nikki Chapman/JNCC

View from North Caicos (Turks and Caicos Islands) taken on a visit by JNCC staff. © Dr Eric Salamanca

This is one of a range of publications published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. JNCC advises the UK Government on national and international nature conservation issues on behalf of the Countryside Council for Wales, Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside.

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jncc.gov.uk

Convention on Migratory Species

9th Conference of the Parties (CoP9), 1-4 December 2008, Rome

There were crossroads and controversy to negotiate at the last Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in Rome in December. The CMS is a species-based, action-focused Convention, which creates a framework to develop other treaties for specific species or groups of species. CMS has grown significantly in the past decade. With 110 Parties, CoP9 was therefore at a crossroads. CoP recognised this by passing resolutions that consolidate and review direction, in parallel with continuing action. JNCC and Scottish Natural Heritage staff provided scientific advice as part of the UK delegation led by Defra.

Most of the new species listings were uncontroversial, but proposals to list the saker falcon on Appendix I, and several shark species on Appendix II, generated considerable debate, both in formal session, and in the corridors. The proposal for listing the saker was eventually withdrawn, but only after adoption of a resolution which will bring it back for listing if there is not a significant improvement in its status by the next CoP. The shark proposals eventually went through, after

agreement to restrict listing to the Northern hemisphere populations of the spiny dogfish, as South American Parties did not consider that there was scientific evidence of declines for southern hemisphere populations.

Key resolutions can be found at www.cms.int/bodies/CoP/

COP9_Pre_final_res_rec_en.htm and included:

- developing an inter-sessional process to determine the future shape of the Convention;
- reducing the impact of climate change on migratory species;
- convening a taskforce on wildlife diseases;
- recognition of emerging evidence of the impact of ocean noise; and
- continuing to work to mitigate the impacts of bycatch.

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Aberdeen action

Office relocation north of the border

A naming ceremony has launched a multi-million pound development in one of Aberdeen's most deprived areas, into which JNCC's Aberdeen office will relocate.

Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment Richard Lochhead christened the £12 million development 'Inverdee'. The joint scheme by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Grampian Housing will provide a mix of houses and low-cost flats. SEPA's existing buildings, no longer fit for purpose, will be replaced with additional office space to be shared between SEPA, JNCC and Scottish Natural Heritage.

JNCC's Aberdeen office will move from its Dunnet House location to Inverdee early in 2010.

JNCC Managing Director Deryck Steer (right) with (from left): Sue Davies, Scottish Natural Heritage, Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, and SEPA Chairman David Sigsworth.
© Murdoch Ferguson





Shark debate

Sharks were the subject of international debate in Rome recently. The second inter-governmental meeting on international co-operation on migratory sharks under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) took place on 6–8 December 2008 at the Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome.

The meeting attracted representatives from 51 states, together with relevant inter- and non-governmental organisations. Building on the outcomes of a previous meeting in 2007, delegates considered possible texts for a CMS instrument on sharks under the Convention.

There was a consensus amongst states present that the shark instrument should be a Memorandum of Understanding in non-binding form. New wording was

tentatively agreed for the objective of the MoU: "The objective of this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for migratory sharks and their habitats, based on the best scientific evidence, taking into account the socio-economic and other values of these species for the people of the Signatory states."

However, there was significant disagreement concerning the species that should be covered. All states agreed that the MoU should apply to the three species previously listed on the appendices of the CMS: basking, great white and whale sharks. However, many considered that the four other species added to Appendix II at the 2009 Conference of the Parties should also be covered. A few states considered that species coverage should be wider still

and independent of listings on the CMS appendices. A final decision was deferred to the next negotiating meeting and is likely to remain contentious.

Inter-sessional groups were set up to work on text for Fundamental Principles of the MoU and a Conservation and Management Plan. The meeting accepted an offer by the Philippines to host a further meeting in 2009 with the intention to complete an instrument on migratory sharks, so that it can be opened for signature before the end of 2009.

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An honour to work with you...

Recognition for JNCC experts

The invaluable work of two of JNCC's experts, David Stroud and David Connor, has been recognised.

Senior Ornithological Adviser David Stroud received an MBE in the New Year Honours list for his work on trends in bird populations, in particular the ecology of Greenland white-fronted geese.

Head of Marine Habitats David Connor has been awarded the ICES Service Award in recognition of his work during the last six years as Chair of the ICES Working Group on Marine Habitat Mapping. ICES is the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea. It co-ordinates the scientific work of more than 1,600 marine scientists from the 20 ICES member countries bordering the North Atlantic and Baltic Sea.



David Connor



David Stroud MBE



JNCC staff on a visit to Turks and Caicos Islands with staff from the TCI National Trust © Dr Eric Salamanca

Biodiversity gains

Boost for Overseas Territories nature conservation

New projects to protect rare plants and wildlife in some of the world's most remote places are being backed by an extra £150,000 funding from Defra.

Programme scholarship, managed by the UK Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA) Training Programme.

The schemes, part of JNCC's support for nature conservation in the Overseas Territories, include support of the Turks and Caicos Islands government's habitat mapping, and a contribution to the Tristan da Cunha government's monitoring of seabird populations.

Peter Bridgewater, Chair of JNCC, commented: "Contributions towards projects such as these help them to become a reality, rather than being on our 'most wanted' list. It is gratifying to have Defra understand the importance of this work in furthering our championing of biodiversity worldwide."

Additional projects include:

- investigating priority invasive species projects;
- identifying geoconservation priorities;
- assisting with the development of local expertise. This includes an Overseas Territories Research and Training

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Two decades flow under the bridge

The Conservation and Management of Rivers: 20 years on

In September 1990 the Nature Conservancy Council organised an international conference in York on The Conservation and Management of Rivers. The conference was truly international, attracting 337 delegates from 29 countries.

By September 2010 twenty years will have elapsed since the York conference. A huge amount has changed in the world since then – economically, politically, culturally, scientifically. This conference will examine this period and assess the changes in river conservation – how the environment has changed, how the legislation and policies that drive conservation have changed, how organisations have changed, how techniques for practising river conservation have changed, and how public attitudes have changed. What predictions did we make in 1990? Which have been proved accurate, and which have not? Where have we succeeded, and where have we failed?

The 2010 conference provides an opportunity both to share experience as we look back over the last 20 years, and to use the lessons of the past to look 20 years into the future. It will provide a forum for scientists, policy makers, water

resource managers, engineers and nature conservationists to:

- discuss the theory and practice of river conservation;
- describe progress in different parts of the world; and
- define appropriate strategies for the future.

The emphasis of the conference will be on habitat and wildlife conservation but will be set within the wider context of water management. The meeting will have a broad, international perspective, and will reflect the range of priorities within and between countries in the developed and developing world.

How to register your interest:

E-mail

RiversConference2010@jncc.gov.uk

or write to Zena Bailey,

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Where land use and policy meet

Two key events affecting land use policy are scheduled for March this year: the launch of the Land Use Policy Group (LUPG) vision for the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and the Agri-Environmental Schemes Seminar.

The events mark the end of the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) reign as Chair of the LUPG, which is a very active group consisting of CCW, Environment Agency, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, JNCC, Natural England and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Commissioner Fischer Boel to speak at launch of LUPG vision for CAP

The LUPG vision sets out the principles we believe should underpin a reformed CAP post-2013. The full document was launched in Brussels at the Bibliothèque Solvay, adjacent to the European Parliament on 30 March. Speakers included the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mariann Fischer Boel, as well as representatives from LUPG, the European Landowners Organisation and the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation. The event was chaired by the Institute for European Environmental Policy.



Agri-Environmental Schemes Seminar

The LUPG has recently commissioned several pieces of work to help develop our thinking on the future direction of agri-environment policy. The Agri-Environmental Schemes Seminar on 10 March aimed to present this work, provide an opportunity to debate the findings, and look at how best to apply these ideas in the context of future CAP reform.

The seminar was constructed around three reports, all available on the LUPG website:

- A review of environmental benefits from agri-environment schemes;
- Delivering environmental benefits through agri-environment programmes: a scoping study; and
- An analysis of the potential effectiveness of the payment-by-results approach to the delivery of environmental goods and services supplied by agri-environment schemes.

JNCC looks forward to working with Natural England in their capacity as incoming Chair of LUPG, and wishes to express our thanks to John Taylor, Chair LUPG, Brian Pawson, Chair, Rural Affairs Group, and Hilary Miller, Chair, Woodland Policy Group for all their hard work over the last two years.

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It's not all about the cute and cuddly!

Action for lower priority species

For many years there has been a need to fill gaps in information for the UK's priority species. Many, but not all, of these species belong to taxonomic groups that traditionally have not attracted funding; many are invertebrates or 'lower' plants. The absence of basic knowledge has meant that conservationists struggle to take the correct steps to ensure the survival of these important species.

In 2007/8, experts in the UK assigned priority actions to the new UK list of priority species and habitats, which was established as part of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Species and Habitats Review. These actions were subsequently categorised in a process referred to as 'signposting'. Two of these categories dealt with the gaps in information about these species.

Independent ecological consultancy Peak Ecology Ltd organised a workshop that tried to deal with this information gap. The workshop was held at Natural England's offices in Peterborough in December 2008, and was attended by 30 UK species experts. Experts were asked to use the signposting work to identify urgent research and one-off survey actions that were ready to be implemented immediately.

After two days' work, 1,300 priority research and one-off survey actions had been identified as ready to go, with over 500 regarded as highly important.

One of the difficulties is to get funding for this work. Because of the nature of research funding both in the UK and internationally, much of the single species-type research needed for these UK BAP species is not a priority for mainstream research organisations. However, a result of the workshop was that some research actions were placed into cross-taxa, taxa, habitat or management groups, making them potentially more interesting to mainstream research. The next step in the process is to send all the urgent research needs to potential funding organisations. This task is underway.

JNCC and the project steering group would like to thank all the experts who have contributed to this workshop. Thanks should also go to the wider expert community without whom the Species and Habitats Review would not have been possible. Their continued interest and input is essential for conservation in the UK.

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Waterbird declines

Governments call for urgent actions

Autumn 2008 saw a flurry of international meetings that included important discussions on future priorities for the conservation of waterbirds and their wetland habitats. These included: the fourth Meeting of the Parties (signatory governments) to the African-Eurasian Waterbirds Agreement (AEWA MoP4), held in Madagascar in September; the tenth Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (CoP10) in the Republic of Korea at the end of October; and the ninth Conference of the Parties (CoP9) to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) in Rome in December.

These inter-governmental meetings gave opportunities to reflect on current issues and set priorities for action. Debates on waterbird conservation at these meetings were significantly influenced by the latest findings of national waterbird programmes such as the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS).

No punches pulled

AEWA MoP4 didn't pull its punches: a series of blunt Resolutions were adopted by the 62 Contracting Parties and these can be found in full on the AEWA web-site (see box). The overall status of migratory waterbird populations in the Agreement area of Africa, the Middle East and western Eurasia was acknowledged as poor and declining. Despite international targets to reduce and even halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010, monitoring evidence suggests that, for waterbirds, the overall situation is actually becoming worse rather than showing signs of improvement.

Causes of declines

The main causes of these declines were identified as continued widespread habitat loss and degradation, and locally unsustainable harvesting of waterbirds. The effects of pollution, including the use of lead gun-shot throughout most of the Agreement area, was highlighted, together with the consequences of climate change on habitats and species, which will result in further unwelcome and unpredictable impacts.

Key wetlands continue to be threatened by or even lost to development, and in recent years many sites of major importance for



Waterbird surveys at Saemangeum, Republic of Korea have demonstrated major declines in waterbirds there. This former estuary was one of the most important shorebird sites in the whole of the Yellow Sea, supporting internationally important numbers of at least 17 species of waders (including several globally threatened species) as well as providing livelihoods for over 25,000 people from local fisheries. However, following the construction of a 33 km barrage, the estuary is now non-tidal and the wetland will now be subject to progressive development. Ramsar Parties welcomed a statement from the government of the Republic of Korea that no further large-scale land-claims of inter-tidal areas are now being approved. © David Stroud/JNCC.

waterbirds have been lost or damaged. A proposal that would have severely damaged Lake Natron in Tanzania - home to 75% of the world's lesser flamingos - is a topical example. The Parties agreed a new process that will allow the AEWA Secretariat to work with a country in the event of future threats to important sites or species.

Ramsar's CoP10 was a larger meeting - as befits a global convention. Indeed, nearly all Ramsar's 158 Contracting Parties were represented in South Korea, together with a very large number of national and international Non-Governmental Organisations including the UK's Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust. Two Resolutions were adopted with particular significance for waterbird conservation.

Response to avian disease

The Ramsar CoP adopted Resolution X.21 *Guidance on responding to the continued*

spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza [HPAI] which provides a major compilation of technical and policy guidance related to HPAI H5N1. In particular, it provides a 'roadmap' of such material produced over the last three years, as well as presenting significant new guidance aimed at reducing the risk of HPAI infection at wetland reserves. Further and complementary Resolutions on HPAI H5N1 were adopted by both AEWA MoP4 and CMS CoP9 - the latter also reflecting on the wider issues of disease in waterbirds and other wildlife.

Waterbird flyways

Resolution X.22 *Promoting international Ramsar co-operation for the conservation of waterbird flyways* reflected on the conservation of the world's waterbird flyways. It noted alarm "at the continuing decline in abundance of many waterbirds throughout the world, resulting not only

from unsustainable exploitation, but especially from the loss and degradation of wetland habitats (in particular through both small-scale and larger-scale land claims and other land use changes of intertidal wetlands).”

The Ramsar Parties called for an exchange of best practice approaches to the international conservation of migratory waterbirds, in recognition that there are a number of different legal and other conservation frameworks around the world. Ramsar, CMS and AEWA will be working together to that end over the next few years.

Search for slender-billed curlew


CoP9 endorsed a CMS call for a final search for the slender-billed curlew. There have been no verified records of this critically threatened bird since 1999, and an international working group for the species established by CMS launched a tool kit to assist people to identify and report slender-billed curlew in the field. A downloadable identification leaflet, an mp3 file of its call, and a map of all recent sightings by season (all from www.slenderbilledcurlew.net), mean that travelling waterbird counters will now know what to look for, and when and where to search for this elusive wader.

All three international meetings called for follow-up actions related to the priorities identified. JNCC and other partner organisations in the UK will be contributing to these actions so as to ensure that the UK's long-developed and significant expertise in waterbird monitoring and conservation can be used to help to halt the progressive decline of the world's waterbirds.

Where to go for further information:

- AEWA MoP4: www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop4_docs/mop4_final_resolutions.htm
- Ramsar CoP10: http://ramsar.org/res/key_res_x_index_e.htm
- CMS CoP9: www.cms.int/bodies/COP/cop9/cop9_meeting_docs.htm (final texts of Resolutions not yet available)
- Slender-billed curlew identification tool-kit: www.slenderbilledcurlew.net

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JNCC has commissioned a consortium led by the International Zoo Veterinary Group to conduct a study to look at innovative ways to permanently mark juvenile tortoises in trade. Marking individual animals in trade can be of enormous assistance to enforcement authorities, allowing them to verify the provenance of individual animals. © Rob Quest

Policing priorities

Wildlife Law Enforcement Working Group

In January, JNCC hosted the Wildlife Law Enforcement Working Group (WLEWG) at its fifth meeting since its formation in 2003. The purpose of the group is to provide the police and enforcement agencies with advice on the priorities for wildlife law enforcement from a nature conservation perspective. The group, chaired by JNCC, comprises representatives of the country conservation agencies, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU), enforcement agencies, Animal Health, Defra and some non-governmental organisations (the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, TRAFFIC - the wildlife trade monitoring network, the Bat Conservation Trust and Plantlife).

A key outcome from the meeting was to agree criteria for the selection of priorities for wildlife crime law enforcement, enabling candidate species or topics to be scored and ranked. The meeting reviewed the current priorities and, with some revisions, endorsed them. Thus the recommended revised priorities are:


- freshwater pearl mussel;
- raptors, specifically hen harrier, goshawk, golden eagle, sea eagle and red kite;

- bats;
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, specifically tortoises, ivory, caviar, ramin (a type of hardwood) and traditional medicines.

Some additional topics were also identified as emerging issues for which further intelligence should be sought.

The ultimate determination of priorities for enforcement agencies and the NWCU is undertaken by a high-level group chaired by Chief Constable Richard Brunstrom (ACPO lead on wildlife crime), who was instrumental in stimulating the formation of the WLEWG. With the addition of priorities for law enforcement on other rural crimes, such as poaching and badger baiting, the WLEWG recommendations were adopted and will continue to be the primary focus of NWCU attention.

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JNCC hosts tern workshop

What is the best way of collecting information to protect our tern colonies? How do we identify 'hotspots' for terns at sea? These were questions addressed at a special workshop hosted by JNCC in December last year.

Various tern breeding colonies around the UK are protected within Special Protection Areas (SPAs), but these do not currently include any marine areas used, for example, for feeding. JNCC and the country nature conservation agencies are now looking to identify the most suitable marine areas to be recommended as SPAs for all five tern species that breed in the UK (Sandwich, little, common, Arctic and roseate).

Disadvantages of existing data

Identification of marine SPAs for terns requires a good knowledge of the location of tern hotspots at sea. We need spatially-explicit information on which sea areas are most frequently and consistently used by terns. The first attempt to collect/collate such data used targeted aerial surveys and existing boat-based survey data from the European Seabirds at Sea (ESAS) database. However, terns were significantly under-recorded from aircraft, and coverage for coastal areas by the existing boat survey data was poor, with data generally collected at too coarse a resolution for this purpose.

Both aerial survey and ESAS data offered a general impression of where some of the important marine areas for terns might be, but an alternative method was needed that would give fine-scale quantitative information on tern hotspots. To determine what options were available, JNCC held a workshop with nature conservation agency ornithologists and other tern experts. The one-day workshop, hosted by the JNCC Marine SPA team in Aberdeen in December 2008, considered the best approaches

for identifying important marine areas for terns around the UK.

Presentations and group discussion

A total of 25 attendees joined the workshop: representatives from BirdLife International, RSPB, Birdwatch Ireland, National Parks & Wildlife Service, Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, ECON Ecological Consultancy Ltd and the University of Kiel, as well as from each of the four nature conservation agencies. The workshop began with a series of presentations from seven attendees, putting the tern SPA work into context, and then describing current work to collect data on how terns use the marine environment, as well as examples of approaches to modelling bird distributions in the marine environment.

A breakout session allowed smaller groups to discuss approaches to identifying tern hotspots at sea, with their associated advantages and disadvantages. Each group reported their conclusions to the workshop as a whole, with a general discussion on which approaches were likely to be most viable, as well as possible synergies and linkages between the different approaches.

The tern workshop was a great success, and we would like to thank all those who contributed. JNCC is now considering the potential strategic approaches and data collection methods in more detail and working with the country nature conservation agencies to develop a detailed three-year work plan, with a view to beginning targeted data collection this summer.

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Plugging the GAP

Developments in conserving our geological heritage

Geodiversity as a word is as yet unfamiliar to most people, but it is gaining ground. In essence, it means the natural range ('-diversity') of geological, geomorphological and soil features (that's the 'geo-' part). JNCC continues to help conserve geodiversity through various contributions, and is developing its own geoconservation strategy, which we will report in a future issue of *Nature News*.

In previous editions of *Nature News* we highlighted JNCC's efforts in recording the most scientifically important geodiversity sites in Great Britain as part of the Geological Conservation Review (GCR) programme. The GCR has two main strands. Firstly, publication in book form and on the web of site reports that enable us to justify SSSI status of geodiversity sites. The second strand is in keeping our site lists, and knowledge about our conserved sites, up-to-date.

The GCR continues to be a 'golden thread' that runs through geoconservation work in Britain. With 34 of the 45 GCR volumes already produced in book form, and with 16 of those published volumes available freely on line at www.thegcr.org.uk, we can demonstrate our effectiveness at justifying and publicising the scientific case for conserving GCR sites. Work is now being completed on providing another four GCR volumes on-line – two further Jurassic volumes ('Middle' and 'Lower', including descriptions of World Heritage Site localities), a volume on fossil reptiles, and one detailing our most important karst (limestone scenery) and cave sites. Progress on completing the remaining 11 GCR volumes is well advanced. All of this proves that we are well placed to justify our geoconservation activity in Britain.

Building a UK Geodiversity Action Plan

Building on the GCR work, we are now involved in helping to construct a UK Geodiversity Action Plan (UKGAP), which will form a framework that embraces geoconservation not only nationally, but also regionally and locally. The UKGAP provides a shared context and direction for geoconservation. The UKGAP will facilitate partnership, influence decision- and policy-makers and funding bodies, and promote good practice that favours our geodiversity. A prototype website www.ukgap.org.uk has just been launched and will be developed over time, acting as a focus for celebrating geodiversity, demonstrating the actions we need to take and capturing the actions as they happen.



Volume 10 of the GCR has been out of print for some time. However, JNCC has now commissioned work to convert the contents of the volume to a form suitable for publishing online at www.theGCR.org.uk.

JNCC is also working on geoconservation in the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, with a report about to be published on our geoconservation goals in those areas. Similarly, work is underway to ensure that marine geodiversity in the UK is not ignored.

Geodiversity and climate change

Climate change as a topic is rarely out of our minds these days, and the relevance of geodiversity in the whole debate is about to be considered in a meeting later this year. At this stage the thinking is very much exploratory, but we hope that it will inform planning for the future. The day-long event will be held at the University of Chester on 4 June 2009 and will examine:

- the impacts of climate change and how they will affect sites that are valued for their geological and geomorphological interests;
- the implications for the future management of sites; and, in particular,
- how geomorphological processes in the wider landscape will adapt under this changing regime.

We will report on how geodiversity conservation is developing in a future issue of *Nature News*. It will undoubtedly reflect the massive resource of GCR information that JNCC guards, and will involve our contribution to showing how geoconservation is an integral part of the way that we can contribute to nature conservation in a world undergoing changing climate and land-use.

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Marine Conservation Zones

Protecting nationally important marine biodiversity

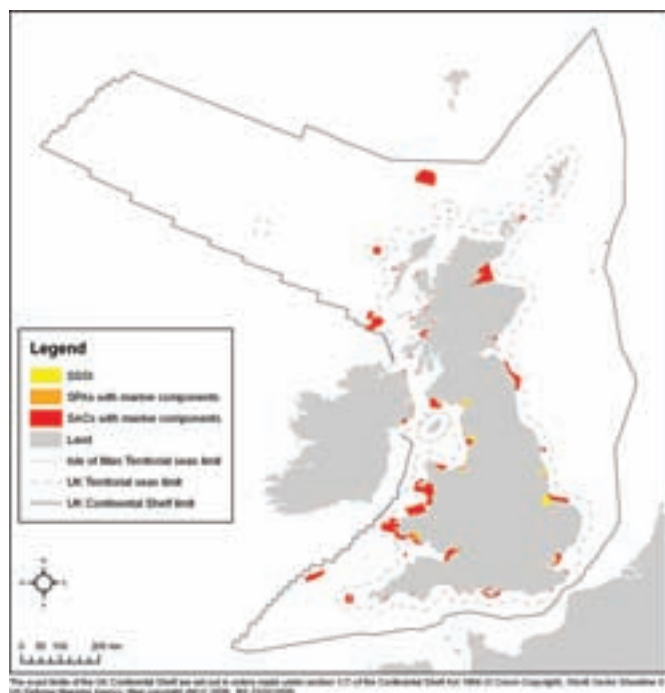


Figure 1: Existing UK MPA network

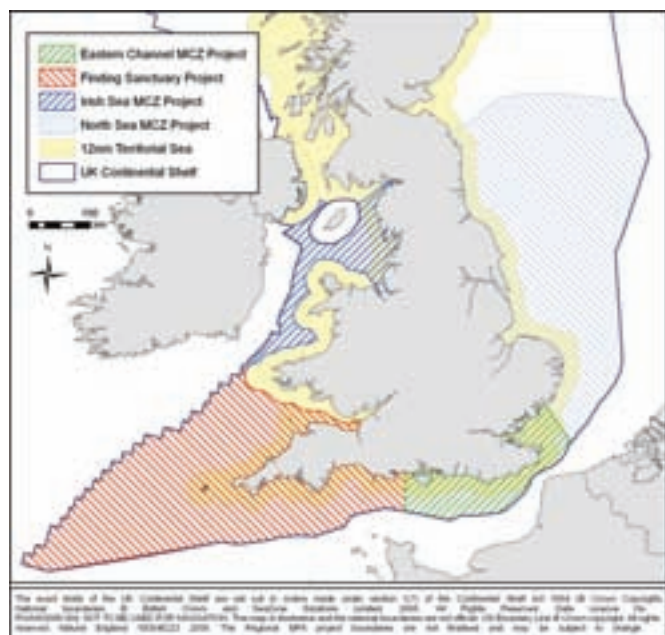


Figure 2: Regional MCZ project areas in England

For more information on UK MPAs visit www.jncc.gov.uk/marineprotectedsites.

With nature conservation at the heart of the most comprehensive marine management legislation the UK has ever seen, JNCC's newly formed Marine Protected Areas Team is busy. The Marine and Coastal Access Bill was introduced into Parliament in December 2008. After a raft of suggested amendments, Royal Assent is expected towards the end of the Parliamentary summer session, bringing with it the requirement for the establishment of a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

MPAs are areas of sea that are specifically managed to benefit marine biodiversity. To date, less than 3% of the UK's waters are managed to maintain or restore the quality of their habitats and species (Figure 1). Primarily these areas have been designated for their European importance as Special Areas of Conservation under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive. The Marine and Coastal Access Bill provides for the designation of new MPAs in English and Welsh territorial waters and UK offshore waters, called Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). These Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) will be established for the protection of marine features of UK importance and, in combination with the European sites and coastal SSSIs, will make up the UK MPA network.

Whereas European sites can be selected only on scientific grounds, MCZs will be selected to conserve biodiversity and ecosystems whilst minimising social and economic impacts, and in ways that seek to maximise wider benefits to society. The UK Government and Welsh Assembly Government recognise that this can be achieved only by ensuring that sea users play an active role in the identification of MCZs.

For English territorial waters and UK offshore waters adjacent to England and Wales, JNCC, Defra and Natural England have established the MCZ Project. This will be implemented through four regional MCZ projects. The Finding Sanctuary Project in the South West was the first of these regional groups to be established. Three additional regional projects are expected to be fully functional by summer 2009 (Figure 2). In partnership with JNCC these regional projects will be inviting regional, national and international sea users to join stakeholder groups that will have the responsibility for recommending regional MCZ networks. These recommendations will be submitted to Defra by JNCC and Natural England in late 2011 with a view to designation in 2012.

JNCC is working with the Welsh Assembly Government and Countryside Council for Wales on MPA work in Welsh waters. Owing to the high percentage of Welsh waters already protected through European designations, the majority of MCZs will be highly protected, restricting all extractive and depositional activities. The detail of how sea users can get involved in the identification of these sites is currently being finalised and will be announced shortly. JNCC is providing the coordination between the Welsh inshore project and the MCZ project.

Under the Marine & Coastal Access Bill, Scottish Government will be responsible for identifying MPAs in offshore waters around Scotland. Scottish Government will be publishing a Scottish Marine Bill in the Spring of 2009 that will set out the provisions for delivering this responsibility. JNCC will be working with Scottish Government to ensure any MPA provisions meet the requirements of the Scottish people and fulfil our UK commitments to international agreements. JNCC will provide the coordination between any Scottish work and the MCZ project.

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The UK economy

The global environment brought into focus



JNCC's Tony Weighell (left) with Kew's Paul Smith at the London Stock Exchange.
© JNCC

JNCC's Global Impacts Programme is examining the links between the UK economy and global biodiversity. Based on a set of thematic studies of imported commodities (biofuels, food and forestry products) and UK foreign investment, JNCC is building a picture of these links in terms of both key trade and investment partners and the global ecosystems that support our economy.

To draw attention to the trade and investment links between the UK economy and global biodiversity, JNCC hosted an event at the London Stock Exchange on 28 January. Attended by over 40 representatives from a range of organisations, the event highlighted

current and future JNCC work in this area. It also stressed the responsibility and roles of the UK government in recognising our dependence on overseas ecosystems for food and fuel, the potential effects on ecosystems, and the responsibilities of UK corporations operating around the world.

During a period when global food and fuel security is creating increased pressure for land-use change, much of it in areas of high biodiversity value, there is a clear need to identify where and how these pressures will arise and the roles and responsibilities of the UK economy, government and business. The JNCC programme is designed to contribute to this horizon scanning exercise, identifying where the impacts of UK economic growth may fall in the wider world.

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Sharing global knowledge

Multilateral Environmental Agreements event

Last year, 2008, saw a cluster of the decision-making conferences or meetings of several of the major biodiversity conventions to which the UK is Party. These Conferences or Meetings of the Parties (CoPs or MoPs) included the Convention on Biological Diversity (CoP9, Bonn), African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (MoP4, Antananarivo), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (CoP10, Changwon) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CoP9, Rome).

It is often difficult for non-specialists to keep track of the various decisions and resolutions that have been adopted at these meetings. Accordingly, JNCC plans to hold a one day event in London on 20 May 2009, to feedback to UK stakeholders the outcome from these international meetings. However, rather than reporting on a Convention by Convention basis, the meeting will address key themes across Conventions – looking, for example, at what key issues arose with respect to invasive alien species across all the agreements. Moreover, through a series of

parallel workshops, the event will also provide a forward look for the key themes – to determine what our future evidence and research needs might be to inform UK approaches to policy development and implementation. The meeting will be by invitation only but any individuals or organisations wishing to attend can contact Vin Fleming.

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A place in the South Atlantic sun

Protecting the shallow water marine environment in the Falklands

Rockhopper penguin. © Nikki Chapman/JNCC



Each year, more than 50,000 tourists visit the Falklands Islands (one of the UK's most remote Overseas Territories) to see some of its spectacular wildlife – emperor penguins, rockhoppers, wandering albatrosses, elephant seals and southern sea lions, as well as a wide range of cetaceans, including killer whale, can all be viewed from the land.

However, for the Falklands, an archipelago in the south-west region of the South Atlantic Ocean, some 480 km from the coast of Argentina, tourism is only the second largest source of income. The greatest provider is the fisheries sector, specifically the sale of offshore fisheries licences, three-quarters of which are sold for squid fisheries. To date, no exploitation of inshore fisheries has taken place and hence the shallow marine environment remains in a pristine condition.

A little-known habitat

Nevertheless, staff of the Falklands Fisheries Department (FFD) recognise that little is known about this delicate and vulnerable habitat and are conscious of the potential effects of future inshore fisheries. As a result, in 2006, the FFD (which is based in Stanley, the Falklands capital, and whose research division provides expert scientific knowledge and advice to make the decisions essential for conservation, sustainable management and development of the Falkland Islands' fisheries resources) established the Shallow Marine Survey Group (SMSG). The core group is made up of FFD staff working in their spare time. It co-ordinates and conducts assessments of the status of inshore resources around the Falkland Islands. The scope of the work includes the splash zone, inter-tidal and subtidal environments on sandy, pebble and rock beaches of the Falkland Islands' shores.

First recruit

The Falklands has a coastline of approximately 1,300 km, representing a substantial amount of survey work for SMSG. The Group has now recruited its first full-time member of staff, Karen Neely, who is responsible for the co-ordination of all the inter-tidal and subtidal surveys, and promotes the Group's work. This one-year appointment was made possible through Falklands Conservation and SMSG personnel Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) funds.

Currently, Karen is developing a survey programme specific to the Falklands marine environment, including establishing an inventory of all the marine species and habitats to help identify areas that would most benefit from management and protection. The survey techniques employed in the Falklands will be broadly based on Marine Nature Conservation Review survey methodologies that JNCC staff employed between 1987 and 1998 around the UK mainland coastline (www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3356).

To assist this process, Nikki Chapman from JNCC, funded by SMSG's OTEP funds, met up with Karen in the Falklands in December 2008. The aims of this trip were to:

- provide an overview of MNCR survey techniques;
- provide information on the functions of JNCC, especially its marine teams;
- provide a link for information exchange; and
- gain a better understanding of the unique marine habitats of the Falklands.

During the visit Nikki was able to participate in SMSG dives and experience at first hand the unique and diverse sea life, some of which has not yet been identified. Nikki's visit also included a trip to Sea Lion Island, a Ramsar site, famous for its breeding sites for rockhoppers, gentoo penguins and elephant seals.

JNCC has also been providing some assistance with this programme by facilitating developments to the Marine Recorder database application www.jncc.gov.uk/page-1599 to enable SMSG to use this for collating and analysing data collected during the project.

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Gypsy Cove, Falklands. © Nikki Chapman/JNCC

Redirected on the Habitats Directive

Changes to Habitats Regulations

The UK has found it difficult to satisfy the European Commission in adequately transposing the Habitats Directive into national law. In October 2005 the European Court of Justice found against the UK on the inadequate transposition of the EC Habitats Directive. As a consequence, changes were made in 2007 to the 1994 Habitats Regulations for England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. In addition, to address the application of the Directive offshore, the Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats & c.) Regulations 2007 were made. However, the changes made did not completely satisfy the European Commission, who issued a Reasoned Opinion to the UK. To avoid further referral to the European Court of Justice and the possibility of a substantial fine and legal costs, additional changes were made to the Habitats Regulations. These came into force on 30 January 2009.

The implications for JNCC are that:

- changes to the provisions with regards to the disturbance of wild animals to ensure consistency with the Habitats Directive will need to be applied in offshore marine waters;
- JNCC will be involved in the drafting of guidelines for Government on the application of offences relating to the deliberate disturbance of wild animals and the damaging, destruction and deterioration of breeding sites or resting places of wild animals in offshore waters;
- changes to the defences to offences against wild animals in offshore waters have been altered to ensure consistency with the Directive. For certain defences to be used they are conditional on there being no satisfactory alternatives, and the action will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the species at favourable conservation status;
- JNCC must determine how and to what extent the surveillance of the conservation status of relevant habitats and species is carried out and advise Government, who must in turn ensure the necessary surveillance is carried out. JNCC may be asked to carry out the surveillance; and
- JNCC must identify the risks and activities with regards to incidental capture and killing of the relevant wild species in offshore waters, maintain records and assess monitoring needs. This advice will be provided to Government, who must ensure that the necessary monitoring is carried out. JNCC may be asked to undertake the necessary monitoring.

The country nature conservation agencies will have to work closely together to ensure a measure of consistency within the UK.

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Conservation Conversation

This issue's Conservation Conversation is a little different from previous issues. Instead of focusing on a new member of staff, we've finally caught up with Managing Director Deryck Steer. Deryck will be stepping down from JNCC in September after 40 years' public service. He has been at the helm of JNCC since 1998 – long enough, he says!



Q Which species inspired you as a child?

A Human beings, because they are the most complex species. As the youngest child, I had the advantage of being able to observe many interactions in my family and that fascinated me.

Q What concerns you most about the natural world in the next two decades?

A The ability of the human race to come to grips with the true value of natural resources on a global basis. There may still be hope if we face up to the impact we are making.

Q What would you do with a £1 million grant for nature conservation?

A Buy a new yacht! But seriously, I'd invest in increasing skills and awareness in the UK Overseas Territories, which contain more biodiversity than important people are willing to admit.

Dinas Head/Pembrokeshire © Deryck Steer.



Q What do you do when you're not saving the world?

A I have a passion for mending and building things, that includes boats, cars and houses. I then get pleasure out of using what I've made – it's twice the pleasure.

Q What have you contributed to JNCC?

A I hope I've brought some order to the way JNCC conducts its business and a sense of community within the organisation that's portrayed by people helping each other through good and bad times. I think JNCC's now recognised and respected as being a key adviser that can work with a whole range of bodies from governments to campaigning organisations.

And it's not all been about JNCC, I've really enjoyed helping the National Biodiversity Network get established.

Q What has been your proudest moment at JNCC?

A There's been so much to do...The creation of the company that supports JNCC was probably the big moment for me, It took five years to negotiate, required changes to legislation and for the first time we were one community. 97% of the staff chose to join the Company and that was beyond my dreams.

Q Who is your human hero in the natural world?

A Our Chair, Peter Bridgewater! No really, in my natural world it's Robert M Pirsig because of his thinking on values and quality. And he loves boats.

Q What are your hopes for the future of JNCC?

A Firstly, that together with the other parties who have an interest in the marine environment, we find a way of achieving sustainable use of our seas and rise above the petty boundary issues.

Secondly, that the skills and expertise we are valued for continue to be respected and used to inform a more balanced order.

Q What is your favourite place?

A Dinas Head, Pembrokeshire. I've been going there for most of my life, four to five times a year.

Q What's your pet hate in nature conservation?

A Those who over-egg the science, continually look backwards and won't admit they don't really know what's going on. Harsh, isn't it!

Q Desert Island disc?

A Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers – *Learning to Fly*. It's a song that drives me onand on.....and on.

Q Place you'd most like to visit?

A Maine. I've a fascination with sailing boats that originated from that part of the States.

Q When I'm reincarnated, I'm coming back as a?

A A peregrine falcon. That way I'd be able to continue to observe Dinas Head.