

Global Biodiversity Sub-Committee (GBSC)

Meeting papers

**Paper for GECC GBSC on UK Overseas
Territories Research and Training
Programme**

February 2009

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Paper for GECC GBSC on UK Overseas Territories Research and Training Programme

- JNCC undertook a review of the biodiversity research priorities in the Overseas Territories (OTs) in 2007 at the request of the GBSC. The review was based on the top 3 priorities sent in by OTs. A summary paper was compiled (GECC GBSC (07)14).
- The results were presented to GBSC in November 2007. At the request of the JNCC, the BES circulated the key research areas to their contacts, and a number of UK academic institutions expressed an interest in working with the OTs to address some of their research needs. Reading University contacted JNCC with the idea of a holistic concept which would build capacity in the territories and address research needs in the long-term. (see Appendix 1 for concept note).
- JNCC have worked with the University of Reading and the UKOTs to develop this programme concept and have created a Steering Committee, comprised primarily of OT personnel, to drive the programme forwards based on the OT priorities.
- Work has commenced on delivering some of the programmes objectives: a 3 year undergraduate studentship for an OT student will commence in September 2009 (managed by UKOTA¹); a small contribution (two sums of c£3k) will be made this financial year to an OT government for biodiversity research. Furthermore, a significant amount of staff time was ear-marked in the NERC knowledge exchange bid to set up workshops, refine the website and provide a host for the information hub. Unfortunately it was announced that this bid was unsuccessful in December 2008, however alternative sources of funding are being explored to cover these components of the programme.
- This Steering group is very powerful in that it has representation from almost all of the OT governments. The support of the OT governments is fundamental for any research work that is carried out in OTs. The first meeting of the group was held on 26 January 2009 and the main outcomes were an agreed ToR and an action for the OTs to undertake an audit of existing skills both on and off-island which can potentially be shared cross territory. Information relating to the OT Steering Group and the training and research programme can be found at: <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4113>

GBSC Secretariat
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¹ The United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA) which was established in 1993 to promote the interests of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories and co-operation between them. Specifically UKOTA demonstrates the collective and individual partnerships between the territories and Her Majesty's Government. <http://www.ukota.org/>

Appendix 1

Overseas Territories Training and Research Programme in Conservation Science

This is a discussion document for JNCC that is designed to provide an outline of why an integrated research programme for the Overseas Territories (OTs) would be valuable in terms of conservation impact and detail the possible components of the programme.

Why develop an integrated programme?

The OTs need to address a range of baseline survey, monitoring and research issues in conservation, ranging from the protection of native biodiversity and their habitats to the control of invasive species. However, due to their relatively small populations, they often don't have a wide enough range of skills, expertise and time to address these issues on their own. Although there are some research initiatives on individual OTs, there are no cross territory co-ordinated programmes which provide training in order to systematically address research gaps. In addition, access to relevant expertise between and outside the OTs can be difficult in the absence of existing links. As a result, conservation issues are often addressed piecemeal, and there is limited opportunity to share best practice between OTs.

The aim of the proposed programme would be to address these issues through:

1. Training and skill development for individuals and organisations in the OTs.
2. Access to UK-based research and advisory expertise.
3. Activities to enhance knowledge transfer between OTs.
4. Collaboration with tertiary education facilities in the OTs and in OT regions.

These components are outlined in further detail below.

Programme components

Training and skills development for individuals and organisations

This could be directed towards individuals or organisations, and at different academic levels, depending on the need. Individual training could be delivered through existing programmes available at Reading. At under-graduate level, we run a 3-year BSc degree in Applied Ecology and Conservation (<http://www.biosci.reading.ac.uk/prospectivestudents/programmes/appliedecologyandconservation.htm>) that could be used to produce OT graduates with a basic training in conservation science. There is a possibility within this programme to take an additional year as a sandwich placement that could be used to undertake a monitoring or research project relevant to OTs. At post-graduate level, we offer a very popular 1-year taught MSc degree in Wildlife Management and Conservation (<http://www.biosci.reading.ac.uk/Teaching/MScWildlife/MSCWildlifedetails.htm>) designed to prepare students for careers in conservation. This degree includes a 6 month research project, which could be used to address topics of relevance to the OTs.

We have a range of researchers at the University with extensive experience working on overseas conservation projects (e.g. www.reading.ac.uk/caer). This provides the capacity for high quality training at PhD-level, which could be used to develop promising OT students through research projects relevant to the OTs, or to establish projects in the OTs that could be undertaken by UK students.

Bespoke training courses for OT organisations could also be developed for skill development in particular key areas, such as biodiversity or habitat monitoring, and the storage and use of GIS data, where there is a need to develop a number of different individuals within an organisation in order to support their work.

1. Access to UK-based research and advisory expertise

We propose to establish in Reading University a ‘one-stop shop’ that could be used by all OTs in need of access to conservation monitoring or research expertise. This need might include, for example, advice about developing a specific monitoring programme or designing and helping run a new research project. The idea would be to improve access to relevant expertise by having a single point of contact in the UK within the programme that would then either provide the requested input directly or put the OT in touch with someone else in the UK academic community with appropriate expertise. In effect this would mean that all the relevant expertise available at the University and through its contacts would be made available to the OTs through a ‘virtual’ scientific advisory network. This mechanism is unlikely to duplicate existing links since OTs with existing links could continue to access these, but it would provide a mechanism for developing new links as necessary.

2. Activities to enhance knowledge transfer between OTs

One major problem with addressing conservation issues in a piecemeal fashion is that it is very difficult to learn from the experience of others. Given their isolation, small populations and subsequent small numbers of conservation scientists, this issue is particularly acute for the OTs. As a result, we would propose that the programme also establishes a web-based gateway for monitoring and research within the OTs that hosts relevant information about the individuals, organisations and activities involved in the programme e.g. links to project pages, reports and other publications, and data where appropriate. This would be important to give the programme visibility on the internet and would increasingly act as a virtual network for the exchange of ideas and experience between the OTs, and also with the UK.

3. Collaboration with tertiary education facilities in the OTs

To ensure long-term sustainability of the programme, i.e. creating a lasting legacy, it is important that there is a transfer of skills via the programme hub at Reading University to tertiary education organisations in the OTs, where this is relevant. This can be achieved through a variety of activities, including a programme of visits by academic staff to OT tertiary institutions (Reading University and others, where appropriate) and vice versa; support to develop new undergraduate/masters courses or course modules for delivery in the OTs; training OT-based students in the most urgently needed disciplines (likely to be in relation to baseline survey in marine and terrestrial systems, and including monitoring techniques, information management and the use of GIS)

Funding implications

The actual cost of the programme will depend on the scale of activities undertaken, but funding will be required in two main areas:

1. Student scholarships

Funds will need to be made available to enable OT students at various levels to take advantage of the training and capacity building opportunities available within the programme in the UK. A range of options are possible including full or part-funded studentships, or bursaries of various types.

2. The programme hub in Reading

Funds will be needed for student support, organisational training, the research and advisory service and web-based gateway. Depending on the scale of the programme, it may be advisable to appoint a part-time programme manager in Reading to co-ordinate the programme and act as the single contact point for OTs.

Next steps

The programme is a unique collaboration, addressing the nature conservation needs of the OTs in a variety of new and exciting ways. The potential rewards are great, and it is imperative that the collaboration is a true partnership with the OTs. To this end, it is important to establish a joint body, comprising representatives of Reading University, JNCC and the OTs, to act as a Management Board throughout the life of the programme. It is suggested that the PI and one other from Reading University should be core members, alongside JNCC's Overseas Territories Officer, Tara Pelembe, and the Director of Science (currently Dr Malcolm Vincent, but a new Director will be in post from September 2008), and a representative from UKOTA and one from either the Environment or Education Department from each of the OT regions.

The next step would be for us to design a range of programme specifications and associated costs. These options can then be matched against possible funding sources to establish a set of potentially feasible options for further development.

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2nd May 2008.

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