



## UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy Review

### **1. Scope & Purpose of the Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy**

- The publication of the 2009 Strategy was of significant importance in providing, for the first time, an agreed framework within which UK Government Departments (Defra, FCO & DfID) should work on supporting OT biodiversity conservation.
- Setting overarching priorities, nominating a lead Department (Defra) and establishing an OTs Biodiversity Group were important and welcome steps.
- The Strategy does not however contain sufficient detail on the methods or the timeframe for achieving its priorities.
- Without the underpinning detail of a prioritised workplan, the Strategy remains too top-level and will not deliver sufficient progress on the ground. UK Government support therefore remains somewhat scattergun. With the limited funds that are currently available, ensuring the most important conservation priorities are funded is crucial.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Building on OT stakeholder (Government and civil society) priorities, as well as those of the UK government as principle funder, an agreed list of actions, with a workplan and concrete milestones leading up to 2020, should be defined as part of an 'Implementation Plan' for the Strategy.
- Lead responsibility for assisting in delivery of the Implementation Plan should be clearly assigned to the relevant UK Government Department (the RSPB recommends that Defra should be adequately resourced to take this role).
- Sufficient UK Government funding must be targeted at supporting the implementation of the priority actions in the workplan.

### **2. Priorities for future action to support biodiversity in the OTs**

- Defra and the FCO are supporting the RSPB to carry out two projects to enable a more prioritised approach to biodiversity conservation in the OTs:
  - The Defra research project will provide a list of the top 25 priority OT islands for vertebrate invasive species eradication, as well as priorities for individual OTs. Draft overall results, as well as sample results for the Turks & Caicos Islands, are enclosed.
  - The ongoing FCO research project '*Assessing Extinction Risk in the UK Overseas Territories*' (finishing June 2013) is compiling, for the first time in the same place, endemic species lists, IUCN red list assessments and monitoring records for all OTs and across all taxa. This will highlight where the most urgent knowledge and IUCN red list gaps are, and thereby help to direct future research, monitoring and funding. A sample of draft results for St Helena is enclosed.
  - The RSPB and the Foundation for International Environmental Law & Development (FIELD) have undertaken a review of environmental protection legislation and policy in all 14 OTs. This is intended to support the UK

Government's White Paper commitments to 'cherish the environments' of the OTs and 'ensure good governance'. It has revealed that whilst there are important areas of good practice, many OTs still have significant gaps in their environmental governance that urgently need to be addressed. Obstacles to progress include stalled pieces of environmental legislation and a lack of technical expertise and legal drafting capacity.

**Recommendations:**

- The outcomes of the Defra-funded *OT Island Eradication Prioritisation* and FCO-funded *OT Extinction Risk Assessment* (mentioned above) should be incorporated into the Biodiversity Strategy Implementation Plan.
- FCO should lead the establishment of a UK Government *OTs Environmental Governance Taskforce* to help draft required environmental legislation and facilitate sharing of good practice. All Departments involved in the OTs should advocate strongly for the passage of stalled environmental legislation in order to enable the UK Government to fulfil its White Paper ambitions.

**3. Issues not adequately addressed by the Strategy, and options for remedial action**

- The resourcing of the Strategy has to date been inadequate, both in terms of UK Government funding and capacity. In particular, the lack of any civil servant at Defra whose role is dedicated to OTs biodiversity has been a major impediment to progress, especially as Defra should be leading this work. A detailed and ambitious resourcing plan to enable provision of both funding and technical support is therefore required.

**Recommendations:**

- Two full-time dedicated OT biodiversity policy posts should be established within Defra to help implement the Strategy, coordinate technical support to the OTs and strengthen environmental governance. They should be supported by a multi-disciplinary *Overseas Territories Taskforce* of staff from different parts of Defra. Such a Taskforce would be able to provide more proactive, structured and expert support to OT Environment Departments and thereby better fulfil the overall policy goals of the Strategy.
- Defra's research directorate should initiate a definitive *OT Biodiversity Research Programme*, agreed with OT Governments, research institutions and civil society, in order to better address the considerable biodiversity data needs existing in many Territories.
- DfID must recruit a new OTs Environment and Climate Change advisor in order to provide more structured environmental support to the OTs in receipt of budgetary aid and to lead on DfID's input to the Strategy.

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