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Conserving Species and Sites of International Importance by the Eradication of Invasive Alien Species in the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories

Project is undertaken in the Caribbean U.K. Overseas Territories of Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Montserrat, Cayman Islands, and Turks and Caicos Islands

This project addresses the threat of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in the context of the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) which accounts for an estimated 90% of the UKs total biodiversity and over 300 globally threatened species (IUCN 2013).

The project is being implemented in 10 Important Bird Areas / Key Biodiversity Areas (IBAs/KBAs) in 5 Territories demonstrating best practice for the prevention, control or eradication of IAS.

The project will have a positive impact on a range of species including:

- Eleven species of seabird
- Three species of endangered iguana including the Blue Iguana and the Rock Iguana (Cayman Islands)
- Critically endangered Montserrat Oriole and Mountain chicken



Territory Highlights include

Anguilla: The offshore island of **Dog Island** (205ha) is an IBA that is home to Anguilla's largest seabird colonies and several species of reptiles. Ten species of breeding seabirds have been recorded, including sooty terns and Anguilla's only breeding population of magnificent frigatebirds. An operation to eradicate black rat was attempted in Spring 2012 and the BEST project is supporting essential monitoring and biosecurity. Indications are that the rodent eradication was successful and predation sensitive Audubon's Shearwaters have attempted to breed for the first time.

British Virgin Islands (BVI): Great Tobago and Little Tobago are IBAs and National Parks. Great Tobago (104ha) is known for its large colony of nesting magnificent frigatebirds, with other nesting seabird species (e.g. Brown Booby, Brown Pelican, Laughing Gull). Invasive goats are a threat to the seabird colonies by their destructive grazing of the remaining forest in which the birds nest. Goat eradication is being implemented by a partnership including local herders, the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories (AHVLA), Jost van Dykes Preservation Society, BVI National Parks Trust and BVI Police force.

Montserrat: The Centre Hills, Montserrat hold the largest intact forest area remaining on Montserrat which is the last viable enclave for most of the island's critically endangered species of global concern (e.g. Montserrat Oriole *Icterus oberi*, Montserrat Galliwasp *Dipoglossus montisserrati* and Mountain Chicken *Leptodactylus fallax*). The Centre Hills are designated as both an IBA and a KBA. Feral livestock (e.g pigs, cattle) are destroying large areas of the Montserrat Oriole nest plant, *Heliconia caribaea*. In 2010 research was undertaken by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the UK Government's Food and Environment Research Agency and Government of Montserrat which demonstrated that pilot control with firearms made a significant impact on reducing feral livestock populations. In March 2013, the project, through AHVLA, supported training of Montserratian staff for implementation of the Feral Animal Action Plan.



Description of the Project

The threat posed by IAS to ecosystems is well known, and islands suffer disproportionately from their destructive impacts. The overall goal of this project is to protect sites and species of conservation importance by the eradication of IAS in the UKOTs in the Caribbean, sharing best practice and building local capacity.



Invasive mammals have been identified among the greatest threats to biodiversity across all of the UKOTs, including the Caribbean. Seabirds are particularly vulnerable to mammalian predators and many seabird colonies have been devastated by them (e.g. cats, rats, mice). The impacts of predators are often compounded by introduced herbivores (e.g. goats) which degrade forest diversity. The result of the combined impact of predation and habitat destruction is native species at risk of extirpation or extinction.

The threat from IAS is set to increase as a result of climate change, but regional capacity is limited to tackle these challenges. This project seeks to enhance capacity to restore ecosystem-wide benefits including regeneration of native fauna and flora and enhance ecosystem resilience to the negative impacts of climate change.

The project is coordinated by the RSPB and includes participation of six organisations in five Caribbean UKOTs: Anguilla National Trust; National Trust for Cayman Islands; National Parks Trust for the Virgin Islands; Jost Van Dyke Preservation Society; Turks and Caicos National Trust and the Department of Environment, Montserrat.



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