

# Birdlife International – connecting to save nature

The greatest challenges to nature and wildlife are global, and in order to rise to the joint crises affecting the climate and biodiversity, we must act locally and internationally. This is why our partnership with BirdLife International is vital to our work and the global effort to protect our natural world.

The UK may be a small corner of the North Atlantic, but we have Overseas Territories that span the world, and our summer and winter migrants are living proof that nature knows no boundaries.

BirdLife International is our most important partnership. As the UK partner, we work with conservation organisations in more than 120 countries. Through the partnership, we work to achieve our international objectives: to save nature wherever it goes, especially across the UK, on the 14 UK Overseas Territories and

along the African-Eurasian flyway – a group of routes that migratory birds take between Africa and Europe.

Through BirdLife International, we can join forces with partners around the world, and play our part in rising to the challenge of halting and reversing biodiversity loss. This is through practical conservation interventions such as SAVE (Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction) and the global marine programme, and also by exerting influence at global environmental conventions.

Our best strategy for saving species and habitats is sharing science and conservation experience with our partners, as well as learning from them. As part of an international partnership, we can work together and speak with a powerful voice, to help secure the comprehensive international agreements we need for nature conservation and the environment.

## Brighter future for blue iguanas on Grand Cayman

The RSPB has purchased a pocket of tropical dry forest in the Cayman Islands. This marks an exciting new chapter in our conservation programme in the Caribbean Overseas Territories, securing the future of the endemic blue iguana.

The Caribbean region hosts five of the fourteen UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs): Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and the Turks

**1,000+**

blue iguanas



and Caicos Islands. Across this region, weak or non-existent controls on development have sadly resulted in the loss of some important habitats such as mangroves, dry forest and wetlands.

Until better development controls are in place and enforced, the purchase of land here is the most effective conservation tool.

The Cayman Islands were chosen for this because they have endemic threatened species, important sites and habitats that are both unprotected and vulnerable, and the RSPB is already working in partnership with the National Trust for the Cayman Islands (NTCI).

Approximately ten acres of tropical dry forest in the Cayman Islands has been saved from potentially damaging development thanks to a joint land purchase by the RSPB and Rainforest Trust. The site is

leased to and protected by the RSPB's partner, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands.

The parcel of land, adjacent to the Salina Reserve – a 647-acre Important Bird and Biodiversity Area in eastern Grand Cayman – is home to around half the Grand Cayman blue iguana population, and many globally threatened endemic trees such as the endangered ironwood.

Due to a concerted on-island effort led by the NTCI and the Department of Environment, the Grand Cayman blue iguana population has recovered from a population of 10–12 individuals to over 1,000. Around half of these live in the Salina Reserve.

Thanks to our fantastic Caribbean conservation and international land acquisition programme, we can continue to do amazing work to safeguard globally threatened species and habitats.

## From minefield to nature reserve in the Falklands

In 2019, we were delighted to contribute funding to Falklands Conservation, our BirdLife Partner, to work with the local community and school to establish a nature reserve in the Fox Bay area of the Falkland Islands, where a minefield had been cleared the previous year.

This reserve is on land owned by the Falkland Islands Government and is one of a small number of community-led reserves on the islands. The minefield, a legacy from the Falklands conflict, was cleared by a team of expert Zimbabwean de-miners from Safelane Global.

The Fox Bay Nature Area is a haven for native wildlife, with plants including coastal nassauvia, a low-growing "cushion plant" which is only found in the Falklands. Dolphins and sei whales can be spotted from the beach.

Re-establishment of native plants in the area has already started, including fragrant fachine bushes, a clifftop Falklands boxwood mini-forest, and tussac grass which is capable of storing significant amounts of carbon. Future plans for the site include coastal walking trails for tourists, and regular beach cleans.

70% of the world population of black-browed albatrosses breed in the Falklands.



David Trilling (rspb-images.com)



Atlantic petrel by Kate Lawrence (rspb-images.com)

Restoration work on Gough island has been postponed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

## STOP PRESS: Gough Island

Gough Island is home to more than eight million breeding birds, including threatened species such as the Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross and Gough bunting.

Mice were accidentally introduced during the 19th century and now exploit all available food sources – including seabirds. We have video footage revealing

how mice eat the flesh of live seabird chicks.

Our major project to restore the island has now been postponed, due to the coronavirus pandemic. But we know that we could save two million seabirds each year. This project has been years in the planning, and so we're in good stead for next year.