

The UK Overseas Territories

An unparalleled opportunity for global environmental impact



Environmental
Funders Network

Executive Summary

There are 16 Overseas Territories for which the UK retains sovereign responsibility. Mainly small islands, these Territories are spread across every major ocean basin on the planet. They are the UK's most valuable environmental treasures, home to every major habitat type on earth, including rainforest, tundra, desert, coral reef and icefield.



South Georgia is a spectacular refuge for subantarctic wildlife



Henderson Island, a pristine World Heritage Site in the Pacific

Nature exists here at vast scale: a third of the world's albatross and a quarter of the world's penguins breed in the Territories. With some of the clearest, richest and deepest parts of the world's oceans under their stewardship, collectively they also have the fifth largest marine estate on the planet.

Crucibles of evolution, the Territories hold at least 94% of the UK's unique wildlife species, from blue iguanas to yellow woodlice, flightless moths to giant tree daisies.

The UK has special responsibility for these globally important environments. We must help Territory communities address the threats which put countless species at risk of extinction. And we must help support their protection of over 4 million square kilometres of ocean in some of the world's largest marine reserves. The Territories remain at the forefront of the biodiversity and climate crises our planet is facing. Three quarters of the world's known extinctions since 1500 have occurred on islands, whilst extreme weather events pose a potentially existential threat. Without support, the capacity of these small island communities to respond to these threats is highly limited.

Since the Territories' biodiversity assets far exceed those in the mainland UK, they offer potential funders incomparable impact and value for money. Relatively modest projects can save unique habitats, prevent global extinctions, transform local capacity and facilitate legislative change.

This prospectus lays out the opportunity for UK funders to achieve global conservation impacts. It outlines the UK's shared responsibility, showcases fundable local solutions, and provides testimonials from experienced NGOs and funders. Finally, it proposes that a focussed grant-making collaboration between funders could provide a step change in impact across British Territory that would be of international significance in the race to preserve our planet's precious nature and climate.

Authorship

This prospectus has been prepared on behalf of the Environmental Funders Network by Jonathan Hall, with support from the John Ellerman Foundation. Jonathan has spent over a decade working with UK Overseas Territory communities to safeguard their remarkable natural environments.

“A third of the world's albatross and a quarter of the world's penguins breed in the Territories”

The UK Overseas Territories & their Marine Zones



1 Bermuda

pop. 63,000

Habitats: Atlantic's northern-most coral reefs & seagrass meadows, limestone cave systems.

Species: Unique cave invertebrates, a rediscovered petrel, rare trees, Nassau grouper.



3 British Virgin Islands

pop. 31,000

Habitats: Wetlands, mangrove, dry forests, seagrass, world's third-largest barrier reef.

Species: Unique and highly threatened reptile hotspot, cacti, bromeliads, butterflies, corals.



2 Cayman Islands

pop. 65,000

Habitats: Extensive mangrove wetlands, dry forest, coral reefs, the Cayman Trench.

Species: Blue iguanas, unique parrots, ghost orchids, tropical bats, turtles, stingrays, sharks.



7 Pitcairn Islands

pop. 45

Habitats: World Heritage Site raised coral atoll, 830,000km² marine reserve

Species: Lorickeets, tropical seabirds, rare flowering plants, coral reefs, humpback whales.



8 British Antarctic Territory

Uninhabited

Habitats: Land area seven times the size of the UK. Icefields & krill-rich waters.

Species: Emperor penguins, leopard seals, Antarctic blue whales.



9 Falkland Islands

pop. 3,400

Habitats: Vast carbon-rich peatlands, rodent-free tussac islands, pristine kelp forests.

Species: Penguins, albatrosses, whales, 200 year-old tussac grasses, delicate orchids.



10 South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands

Uninhabited

Habitats: Tundra, glaciers, active volcanoes, pristine marine environments.

Species: 65 million birds, 5 million seals, booming whale populations, vast penguin colonies.

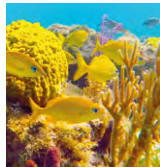
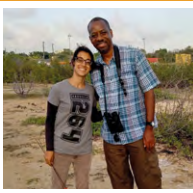


4 Anguilla

pop. 18,000

Habitats: Major wetlands network, one of the Caribbean's most important seabird islands.

Species: Sooty terns, migratory birds, unique lizards, dryland forest species, corals.



5 Turks & Caicos Islands

pop. 39,000

Habitats: Vast & intact natural mosaics of coral reef, tidal flats, mangrove wetlands & dry forest.

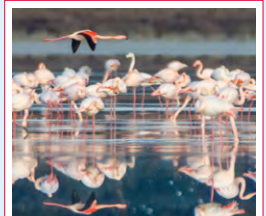
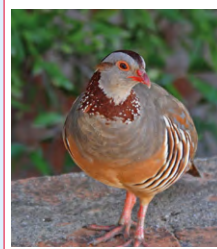
Species: Pygmy boas, flamingos, rock iguanas, conch, corals, turtles, sharks.

14 Gibraltar

pop. 33,000

Habitats: Mediterranean maquis shrubland, limestone cliffs, dynamic marine straits.

Species: Europe's only wild monkeys, bottleneck for millions of migrating birds.



15 Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas

pop. 18,000

Habitats: Cyprus' largest wetlands, Mediterranean maquis shrubland, turtle-nesting beaches.

Species: Greater flamingos, Griffon vultures, Loggerhead turtles, Mediterranean monk seals.

16 British Indian Ocean Territory / Chagos Archipelago

Chagossians forcefully deported in 1970s.

Habitats: World's largest atoll, extensive coral reefs, Indian Ocean's largest marine reserve.

Species: Giant coconut crabs, turtles, sharks, seabirds, corals & 1000+ fish species.



11 St Helena

pop. 4,500

Habitats: Unique cloud forest, regenerating dry forest, and whale shark mating grounds.

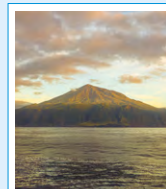
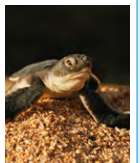
Species: 1/3 of all endemic British species, from giant tree daisies to glow-in-the-dark woodlice.

12 Ascension Island

pop. 800

Habitats: Volcanic deserts, a man-made cloud forest, one of world's largest marine reserves

Species: Vital breeding site for green turtles and tropical seabirds.



13 Tristan da Cunha

pop. 240

Habitats: Pristine World Heritage Site islands, Atlantic's largest marine reserve

Species: 20 million seabirds, world's smallest flightless bird, blue sharks, beaked whales.

“The Territories offer potential funders incomparable impact and value for money. Relatively modest projects can save unique habitats, prevent global extinctions, transform local capacity and facilitate legislative change.”



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Small Communities with Global Treasures

The UK Overseas Territories hold an incredible array of globally significant environments, upon which local communities heavily depend.

The UK and our Overseas Territories' communities are privileged to be the stewards of some of the world's most important and varied environments. They include three World Heritage Site islands recognised as some of the most pristine ecosystems on the planet, vast peatlands that store carbon at double the rate of any other peatland worldwide, and the Caribbean's largest undeveloped and uninhabited island, East Caicos.

Extensive mangrove forests, including the biggest contiguous mangrove forest in Central America, protect Caribbean Territories' coastlines and provide vital nursery habitat for marine life, while mist-shrouded South Atlantic cloud forests hold one of the world's densest concentrations of unique species.

The largest penguin colonies on earth dominate Southern Ocean shores, where the skies can darken with millions of seabirds in flight. And rich Southern

waters are havens for vital whale populations, providing globally important feeding and breeding grounds after decades of whaling. Protected forest watersheds meanwhile provide the majority of fresh water for several other Territories, with internationally-recognised wetlands helping to store floodwaters arising from devastating hurricanes.

Spread across every major ocean basin on the planet, the UK Overseas Territories offer an important opportunity to showcase global environmental leadership. Local communities have blazed a trail via the 'Blue Belt' of vast marine reserves, which now protect over 11% of the world's oceans (an area 17 times the size of the UK). This enables the UK to make a major contribution to protecting our global environment and, leading by example, advocate credibly for more ambitious international conservation goals.

Small island states are also on the frontline of climate change events. As hotspots of species extinctions, they represent the opportunity to showcase projects which not only lead to successful terrestrial conservation and natural climate adaptation.

The cloud forest of St Helena holds one of the world's densest concentrations of unique species

© ED THORPE

“Small island states are on the frontline of devastating climate change and are hotspots of species extinctions”



Wandering albatrosses on South Georgia. This 3,500km² Territory, home to over 65 million seabirds, was cleared of invasive rodents in 2018 as part of the world's largest island restoration project

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The Constitutional Context: A Shared Responsibility

The UK and Overseas Territories are in a constitutional partnership, and the UK has a significant responsibility to support each community and their precious environments.

The communities of the Territories vary from just 45 to 65,000, with three of the UK Overseas Territories being uninhabited. And each Territory has different economic circumstances; some are highly developed, while four are eligible for development aid. However, a common thread is that all have chosen to remain part of the British family, with the UK retaining international and sovereign responsibility. Together the UK and the Overseas Territories therefore form one realm, and Territory citizens are British nationals. This is a partnership: the UK Government is clear that any Territory can cease its relationship with the UK if that is the democratically-expressed will of its people.



In the UK-Territory relationship, the environment is a devolved responsibility. Meanwhile, the UK Government retains international responsibility for

Territory environments under the multilateral environment agreements they are party to, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The constitutional link to the UK renders the Territories ineligible for all multilateral environment funding, which further increases the UK's responsibility to help protect their unique habitats.



Additional support from the UK is vital for many of these small communities given their capacity constraints and vast responsibilities: the 45 residents of Pitcairn, for example, are responsible for a World Heritage Site, the third largest marine reserve on the planet and over 100 unique species found nowhere else on earth.

“The constitutional link to the UK also renders the Territories ineligible for all multilateral environment funding, further increasing the UK's responsibility”

Highly Threatened Environments

The natural ecosystems of the Territories evolved largely in isolation and are highly vulnerable to environmental pressures.

Numerous species in the Territories have been reduced to fewer than 100 individuals, and global extinctions are a real threat. The most recent extinction on record is the loss of the beautiful St Helena Olive Tree in 2003. The three main threats are:

1 Invasive alien species

Non-native mammals have historically been introduced by humans. Alien species such as rats, goats and feral cats can devastate the unique ecosystems, denuding habitat and exterminating native wildlife. The potential unintended introduction of further species, such as disease-carrying mosquitoes or poisonous ants, poses a major threat to local lives and livelihoods. Action is possible however – over 500 islands worldwide have had successful invasive species eradications, leading to a hundred-fold increase in wildlife and whole ecosystem recovery. Good biosecurity measures can ensure further introductions do not occur.



Introduced non-native mammals can devastate unique island ecosystems



© OMARI RANKINE

Severe development pressures threaten vital natural ecosystems, such as the vast mangrove forest of Grand Cayman.

2 Habitat loss

Poorly planned and/or uncontrolled development is a major threat to key habitats in many Territories. This is exacerbated by incomplete conservation policy frameworks: just 4.8% of the total land area of the Territories is currently safeguarded within protected areas, whilst planning controls are frequently weak or absent. Locally-supported protected area designation and planning frameworks can turn this around.

3 A changing climate

This presents the most existential threat to the Caribbean Territories, which lie in the path of increasingly devastating hurricanes. Protecting and restoring their globally-important natural habitats such as mangroves, seagrass beds and coral reefs can play a vital role in reducing storm surges, minimising flooding and maximising resilience to environmental change.

“Poorly planned and/or uncontrolled development is a major threat to key habitats in many Territories”



Esther Bertram, CEO of Falklands Conservation, at a Black-browed albatross colony. The Falkland Islands hold 70% of this species' global population.

Stretched Human Capacity

Highly committed Territory environmentalists and their associated organisations face huge responsibilities with small teams and limited financial resources.

The UK Overseas Territories' local environmental leaders are passionate about protecting their unique biodiversity. Few in number and highly constrained in their resources, many have nonetheless dedicated their lives to saving threatened ecosystems, rediscovering and recovering lost species, and developing the next generation of conservationists.

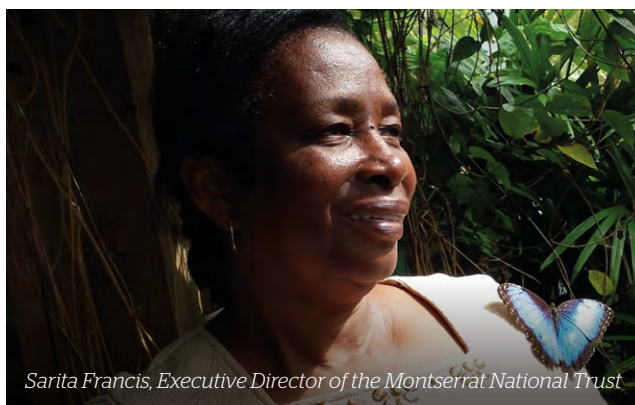
A lack of sufficient manpower and funding are their biggest challenges, as many of the necessary solutions simply need capacity for implementation. The UK Government provided a total of only £3.5m per annum of environmental project funding as of 2019 (probably due to the Territories' lack of political representation and public profile in the UK).

Local conservation groups are nonetheless doing their best to deliver high-impact work on key species and sites across the inhabited Territories. Many of them are local National Trusts, established by local statute modelled on the UK's National Trust Act, though entirely separate from that organisation.

In the very small Territories (fewer than 800 people) it is not possible to staff or sustain local civil society organisations. Instead, the local community Governments strive to cover all environmental needs with support from UK-based conservation NGOs and external funders. The uninhabited Territories meanwhile each have a UK-based NGO with a specific focus on their conservation working alongside the local Government.



Trevor Glass, Tristan da Cunha Conservationist



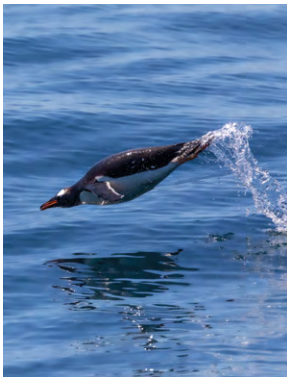
Sarita Francis, Executive Director of the Montserrat National Trust

“ The UK Government only provided £3.5m per annum of environmental project funding as of 2019 ”

The UK's Cost-Effective Opportunity for Global Environmental Impact

As small communities with biodiversity assets that far exceed those in the mainland UK, the Territories offer potential funders incomparable impact and value for money.

Relatively modest projects can save unique habitats, prevent global extinctions, transform local capacity and facilitate legislative change. As small jurisdictions with a limited number of actors, there is almost no duplication of conservation efforts, which presents a rewarding opportunity to demonstrate the material changes caused by a specific funding intervention.



Spectacular results can serve as a showcase for best practice in five ocean regions across the globe, and for humanity's most pressing environmental challenges. Specific areas of funding opportunity include:

Protecting globally important terrestrial and marine habitats

Developing nature-based solutions to climate change mitigation and adaptation

(such as restoring mangrove wetlands to sequester carbon and combat storm surges)

Building Territory capacity for environmental stewardship

(such as supporting local NGOs to cover core costs, conservation delivery, land purchase, policy advocacy, UK training visits and youth/community engagement)

Enhancing sustainable communities & green economies

(such as strengthening fishery sustainability and low-impact eco-tourism)

Saving unique species from extinction (in particular by addressing invasive alien species)

A suite of Territory NGO environmental projects in need of support are showcased on the Environmental Funders Network website (www.greenfunders.org).

Small communities with unique biodiversity assets such as Tristan da Cunha, offer potential funders incomparable impact and value for money

“Relatively modest projects can save unique habitats, prevent global extinctions, transform local capacity and facilitate legislative change”

Territory Testimonials



'Nothing beats giving young islanders life-changing experiences such as rehabilitating oiled penguins or seeing wildlife return to an offshore tussac island they have helped restore. UK funding support has made that happen.'

Dr Esther Bertram
CEO, Falklands Conservation

'Core funding has enabled us to grow and retain fantastic local conservation leaders, building a new generation able to champion our fragile environment.'



Mike Jervois
Director, St Helena National Trust



'Our NGOs are small and have limited capacity, but they have extremely dedicated teams who have succeeded in some brilliant conservation successes. They just need more targeted, reliable support to continue the work.'

Winema Sanders-Penn
Executive Director, Turks & Caicos National Trust

'The UK's Overseas Territories' unique and irreplaceable environmental assets are an important focus for our grant-making. In eight years 15 grants worth £1.8m have gone to 12 organisations – and all have made a big impact. We've supported policy work, such as helping secure protection of 1.1% of the world's oceans, alongside practical conservation like restoring Gough Island World Heritage Site through eradicating mice. We're confident our funding has a lasting legacy. It's a hugely rewarding area to support, which we wholeheartedly recommend to all philanthropists.'



Hugh Raven
Chair, John Ellerman Foundation

'Faced with our planet's enormous environmental challenges, our Trustees are delighted to support charities leading globally significant work in the Overseas Territories, such as the restoration of South Georgia, a crucial breeding ground for over 100 million seabirds. We are a flexible and responsive funder and such projects provide a compelling opportunity to achieve tangible and positive change.'



Philippa Charles
Director, Garfield Weston Foundation



Funding mechanisms for supporting the Territories

There is a strong case for funder collaboration in order to maximise impact and coordination. The UK Government currently provides annual funding for projects approximately £100k-£500k in scale, but the funds are less flexible than those from private philanthropy, and cannot support important elements of effective conservation: smaller grassroots projects, core NGO capacity, policy advocacy, land purchase, youth work or seed-funding.

A funder collaborative focussed on supporting Territory environment NGOs, and their UK supporting partners, would strategically address the gap for smaller non-governmental projects.


A limited number of actors in the Territories and their capacity constraints mean that collaboration between funders is particularly important for ensuring that the most urgent priorities are supported and joined-up responses achieved.

Although not all Territory NGOs are registered as UK charities, a variety of UK-based NGOs partner with Territory NGOs and can provide a charitable UK conduit.

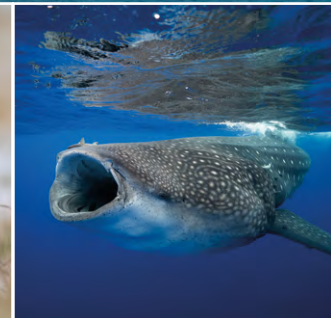
Next steps for funders:

- 1 Explicitly incorporate the Overseas Territories into environment funding strategies.**
- 2 Join a grant-making collaborative for targeted annual support to the UK Overseas Territories.**
- 3 Fund specific projects in the Territories - the Environmental Funders Network can provide details.**

Please contact Jonathan Hall (jonathan@greenfunders.org) to discuss any of these options.



The UK's Overseas Territories are our responsibility and our opportunity. We invite funders to join forces to help safeguard their incredible natural heritage.



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Foundation

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