Summary

- The environments of the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) are of global significance: they hold 94% of our unique species, pristine rainforests, vast coral reefs, a quarter of the world’s penguins and the fifth largest marine estate on the planet.

- These small islands are at the forefront of our biodiversity and climate crises: three quarters of the world’s known extinctions since 1500 have occurred on islands, whilst extreme weather events pose a potentially existential threat.

- As their biodiversity assets far exceed those in the mainland UK, the Territories offer funders incomparable impact and value for money.

- John Ellerman Foundation has achieved transformative impacts in the UKOTs over eight years of responsive grantmaking worth £1.8m.

- To celebrate its 50th anniversary, and in recognition of the need for strategic philanthropic leadership in this area, Ellerman is building on its experience and launching a special fund for the UKOTs.

- Ellerman is contributing £800k in honour of its anniversary and invites other funders to join this collaboration or align their funding with it.
The Funding Context

As of 2019, the UK Government provided only £3.5m per annum of environmental project funding to the UKOTs, likely due to the territories’ lack of political representation and profile in the UK. Whilst this is set to rise in 2021, such Government funding is typically unavailable to support core NGO capacity-building, policy advocacy, land purchase, youth work, smaller grassroots projects or seed-funding for nature-based climate solutions. A number of UK funders including John Ellerman Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation and The Prince of Wales’s Charitable Fund, have supported Territory projects in recent years. Their projects have helped protect 1.1% of the planet’s oceans and deliver the world’s largest island restoration, but there is a clear need for further funder support and co-ordination.

Background

There are 16 UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) for which the UK retains sovereign responsibility. Mainly small islands spread across every major ocean basin on the planet, they are the UK’s most valuable environmental treasures, home to every significant habitat type on earth, including rainforest, tundra, desert, coral reef and icefield. Many may not realise that the UKOTs are home to at least 94% of the UK’s unique species, from blue iguanas to yellow woodlice, flightless moths to giant tree daisies, along with a third of the world’s albatross and a quarter of the world’s penguins. Collectively they comprise the fifth largest marine estate on the planet, with some of the clearest, richest and deepest parts of the world’s oceans under their stewardship.

The UKOTs are at the forefront of the biodiversity and climate crises our planet is facing. The most recent global extinction to occur on British soil was the disappearance of the beautiful St Helena Olive Tree in 2003. Our changing climate meanwhile is inflicting devastating hurricanes, severe droughts and altered oceanic foodwebs on these vulnerable islands. The UKOTs present a compelling opportunity to model a best practice response to these crises that we must act upon now. Local environmentalists are passionate about safeguarding their natural treasures but are few in number and highly constrained in their resources. Without funding and support, the capacity of these small island communities to respond to the threats they face is highly limited.
A New Collaborative Fund

Over eight years of responsive grantmaking in the UKOTs, John Ellerman Foundation has seen first-hand the transformative locally-led change it can enable. Its grants have supported policy work as well as practical conservation efforts. Partnerships and community empowerment have been key features of this grantmaking, and it is clear from the final reporting that nearly all of their grants have successfully delivered on all aspects of their project proposals and secured a lasting legacy.

However, more can and must be done to address the UKOTs funding gap. John Ellerman Foundation is therefore launching a special collaborative fund for the UKOTs as the centrepiece of its 50th Anniversary celebrations in 2021, to which it will contribute £800k. The fund will build on Ellerman’s expertise and provide a strategic response to UKOT needs, ensuring that the most urgent priorities are supported and joined-up implementation is achieved in these limited capacity jurisdictions.

Ellerman is keen to welcome other funders to join this collaboration or align their funding with it. The Environmental Funders Network has been collating a strong new pipeline of grants that can be made to UK-registered charities based in the UKOTs, as well as via UK-registered charities that are working in partnership with these local UKOT NGOs. This pipeline already exceeds the £800k budget, and covers a wide range of needs, from National Park restoration, climate resilience and preventing extinctions in the Caribbean, to youth engagement and NGO capacity-building in the South Atlantic. The proposals range in size, with some requiring several thousand and others requiring circa £100k of multi-year funding. A public call will undoubtedly elicit further applications, especially from the many UK NGOs who work in the Territories.

Ways of Working

All proposed ways of working with the fund are welcome. Those joining can be as hands on or hands off as they would like. When you join the collaboration, ways of working will be agreed to ensure that you are comfortable with the guidelines and processes we have in place, taking on board feedback and ideas you have. Ellerman would be open to your contribution being directed to specific issues or geographies and would particularly like to invite those funders who are new to the UKOTs to consider joining with them.

Whilst Ellerman intend to work with others to refine the exact process and criteria, they broadly aim to launch the Fund with a call for applications in September and an early December deadline. Funding would commence in April 2022, allowing for a two-stage process if and as appropriate. The Fund will be supported by the grantmaking and administrative capacity of Ellerman, as well as expert technical support from Jonathan Hall, who has spent over a decade working with the UKOTs.

Outputs

In this pivotal year for environmental action, a new UKOTs environment fund has the potential to invest in vital and under-funded work that can address our climate and nature emergencies. These local communities have already demonstrated global environmental leadership by committing to protect 4.3m square kilometres of ocean. The fund will build on these achievements and support the UKOTs to showcase good environmental practices for people and wildlife in every major ocean basin on the planet. Subject to a review of implementation, there is also clear opportunity for this one-off fund to be further renewed and developed into a permanent supporter of the remarkable environments of our Overseas Territories.

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Example Territory NGO projects and their costs

Caribbean

Anguilla
- Seed-funding an innovative ‘mainland island’ solution to Invasive Alien Species: £97,500
- Discovering and promoting Anguilla’s threatened shark populations: £93,000

British Virgin Islands
- Ecosystem Restoration of Three National Park Islands: £36,000
- Sustaining the Critically Endangered Anegada Rock Iguana: £6,500 per annum
- Urgent Response to Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease: £22,500

Cayman Islands
- Youth Stewardship Pilot Programme: £10,000
- Cayman Islands Bat Conservation Programme: £20,000

Montserrat
- A Vital Conservation Officer Post: £30,000 per annum
- Educational Outreach and Research on Key Endemic Species: £60,000

Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI)
- Saving the flora of East Caicos, the Caribbean’s largest wilderness island: £27,000
- Stony Coral Species Survival Plan: £90,000

Mediterranean

Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas
- Setting up an anti-poison dog unit: £60,500

North Atlantic

Bermuda
- Saving open space from development and creating a community nature reserve: £5K–£100K
- Ecosystem Restoration at Nature Reserve used for Environmental Education: £45,000
- Surveying & conserving Bermuda’s Barn Owls: £10K

South Atlantic

Falkland Islands
- A Sustainable Green & Blue Economy: £40k
- Three Island Restorations in the Falkland Islands: £5k
- Falklands Community Conservation Centre: £100k (match-funding)

St Helena
- Save St Helena’s Endemic Forests: £97k
- Building Local Capacity via Upskilling & Two Crucial New Roles: £120k

Southern Ocean

South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands
- Preparing for the Clean-up of South Georgia’s Historic Whaling Stations: £85k