

The UK's Overseas Territories – An unparalleled opportunity for environmental philanthropy

(5 minute read)

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Written by: Sufina Ahmad, Director

This article is about our special environmental fund for the UK's Overseas Territories, and you can find out more about it [here](#).

I can remember exactly where I was when I first learned about the environmental significance of the 16 UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs). It was under two years ago, in early October 2019, and I was at home preparing for my first-stage interview for the role of Director of John Ellerman Foundation, and I had come across what struck me as a curious statement within the Foundation's funding guidelines: '*We will also support work in the UK Overseas Territories (on land and in the ocean)*'. A quick Google-search revealed that they were mainly small islands spread across every major ocean basin on the planet, and that they are home to more biodiversity than the entire UK mainland. I was embarrassed by my utter lack of awareness...

After joining the Foundation in January 2020, it didn't take much time at all for me to become a passionate advocate for funding environmental work in the UKOTs. I have **three reasons**, which I will set out below. I hope that these reasons will inspire you to join the [special environmental fund](#) that we have set up for the UKOTs this year as part of our 50th anniversary celebrations – more about this fund at the end of this piece.

Reason number one:

Firstly, the UKOTs are 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 in the UKOTs, 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. And that support should, in part, come from the UK, including UK philanthropy, as the UKOTs fall under the UK's sovereign responsibility.

It is not an exaggeration to say that they are the UK's most valuable environmental treasures. They are home to every major habitat type on earth, including rainforest, tundra, desert, coral reef and icefield. They are crucibles of evolution, home to at least 94% of the UK's unique wildlife species, from blue iguanas to yellow woodlice, flightless moths to giant tree daisies. Nature exists here at vast scale, with a third of the world's albatross and a quarter of the world's penguins breeding in the UKOTs. 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.

Reason number two:

Investing in the UKOTs offers environmental grantmakers and philanthropists much by way of impact. Since 2013/14, our Foundation has supported 12 organisations working in the UKOTs with 15 multi-year grants. We have invested around £1.8m, and supported work in seven of the UKOTs – primarily the Falkland Islands, the Caribbean and Gough Island, with some grants covering more than one UKOT at a time. In all cases we have channelled our support through UK-registered

charities, as per our criteria – sometimes the charity has acted as a conduit for the funding, and sometimes they have delivered the work directly.

Our grants have supported policy and advocacy work, such as helping secure protection of 1.1% of the world's oceans, as well as practical conservation efforts, including work to restore Gough Island World Heritage Site through the eradication of introduced mice. Partnerships and community empowerment have all been key features of our grantmaking in the UKOTs as well. Nearly all of the grants made have been successful in delivering all aspects of their original applications and they have had a lasting legacy. The top three achievements can be summarised as:

1. An increased influence in the cause area, usually through increased reporting and by raising government and public awareness of the organisation and their work.
2. The ability to build and expand partnerships and campaigns with other organisations across the UK.
3. Increased biodiversity in their location.

You can read case studies about two of our UKOT grants on the Environmental Funders Network website, as part of their 'Environmental Philanthropy: Stories to Inspire' series. There's a case study about how we supported the protection of one per cent of the world's oceans [here](#), and one about strengthening environmental policy across multiple jurisdictions [here](#).

Reason number three:

And my final reason for supporting work in the UKOTs is the people. Recently, we partnered with Jonathan Hall, in his role as Strategy Advisor for the UK Overseas Territories at the Environmental Funders Network, to organise an event about the UKOTs for environmental funders.

Through this event, I had the pleasure of facilitating a panel discussion with Dr Esther Bertram, CEO of [Falklands Conservation](#), Annick Jackman, Executive Director of the [National Trust of the Cayman Islands](#), and Hugh Raven, our Chair here at the Foundation. Annick, Esther and Hugh offered riveting insights into work in the UKOTs. They all spoke movingly about the importance of legacy and preserving the UKOTs for the benefit of people and planet both now and in the future. All were able to describe many examples of the ways in which through collaboration they had made lasting and positive change, through managing development threats, combatting invasive species, developing and enacting inspiring policy change, connecting meaningfully with landowners and communities so that they are fully engaged in conservation efforts, and much more besides. If you missed the event, you can listen to it on the [Environmental Funders Network Inspiring People Podcast](#) – it should be uploaded to their podcast feed in July 2021.

And finally, the ask of you, dear reader:

You can find out more about the UKOTs [here on our website](#), and [here on the Environmental Funders Network website](#).

If you are interested in environmental giving that addresses the biodiversity and climate crises in an impactful way, and you want to work with great people to do this, then please do consider investing in the UKOTs. If you don't know where to start then get in touch, and I would be delighted to discuss this further.

Happily, right now, there is an easy route into giving to the UKOTs, and that is through the [special collaborative environment fund for the UKOTs](#) that we have launched. We are contributing £800,000 to the Fund, and are looking for others to join us, so that together we can, amongst other things:

- Build capacity in the UKOTs 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.
- Safeguard and restore important terrestrial and marine habitats.
- Develop further nature-based solutions to climate change mitigation and adaptation, such as restoring mangrove wetlands to sequester carbon and combat storm surges.
- Enhance sustainable communities and green economies, such as strengthening fishery sustainability and low-impact eco-tourism.
- Save unique species from extinction, in particular by addressing invasive alien species.

We are open to funders adding to this pooled fund, or simply aligning their funding to it. We can accommodate specific restrictions that might need to be applied too, such as the work being for specific territories or activities only.

The fund will launch to applications in September 2021, and we already have a strong pipeline of potential proposals that our £800,000 alone will not be able to cover. The proposals range in size, with some requiring several thousand pounds and others requiring circa £100,000 of multi-year funding.

2021 is a critical year for making progress on the global climate and biodiversity emergencies we face. Investing in the UKOTs is an inspiring and impactful way of responding to these emergencies, and here at the Foundation we are ready to support environmental funders and philanthropists that might be thinking about directing their giving to the UKOTs in any way that we can.