

New funding to protect biodiversity in UK overseas territories

News story

Threatened species will benefit from funding to tackle invasive species and strengthen climate change mitigation.



Credit: Colin Davies Getty Images

Threatened species across the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) are set to benefit from £6.4 million government funding announced today (Monday 23 May).

Green turtles and the West Indian whistling duck are just some of the species that will be boosted by a share of the [Darwin Plus initiative](#). A total of 20 environmental recovery projects will be supported to deliver marine conservation, research into threatened species, and improve resilience to climate change.

The UK Overseas Territories are unique and globally significant nature hotspots. Made up of thousands of small islands, vast oceans and dense rainforests, these areas are thriving with unique wildlife and contain 94% of the UK's biodiversity.

Since 2012, the government has contributed more than £38 million towards 180 projects in the UK Overseas Territories through Darwin Plus, and has committed £30 million over the next three years to support even more environmental projects in these areas.

Funding through Darwin Plus and the Darwin initiative will help to deliver the commitments set out in the Environment Act to halt and reverse the decline of biodiversity and improve species abundance by 10% by 2042.

Lord Zac Goldsmith, International Environment Minister, said:

From rare sea birds to threatened coral reefs and plants, the

Darwin Plus initiative is instrumental in protecting and restoring our precious natural environment across the Overseas Territories.

This investment will enhance our global capability to respond to climate change, address biodiversity decline and help safeguard the future of these unique habitats for the next generation.

Jonathan Hall, Head of UK Overseas Territories at RSPB, said:

This is some of the most cost-effective conservation funding there is. We're delighted Defra has increased this vital Darwin Plus fund, which is helping Territory conservationists deliver incredible work to protect vast marine reserves, fragile albatross islands and key carbon-rich habitats such as mangroves.

Habitats and projects set to benefit from the funding include:

- A cross-UKOT camera network to enhance marine predator conservation across the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Polar regions. Drones and timelapse cameras will be used to monitor and gather information on green turtles, endemic frigate birds and masked boobies in the Ascension islands, data which is not currently available and will create effective management plans to protect these species
- Investment to improve environmental protections for the East Caicos wilderness area. The funding will support the creation of a locally owned resource management plan to safeguard against inappropriate development on the uninhabited island to protect nesting turtles, plant species unique to those islands, and native birds, such as the West Indian whistling duck
- A project to turn the tide on plastic pollution in Ascension and St Helena. Researchers will explore the drivers of plastic pollution and trial innovative solutions to reduce single-use plastic and improve waste management efficiency
- Action to improve the New Island National Nature Reserve in the Falkland Islands and protect the sites' world-renowned seabird colonies from invasive mammals and conserve its carbon-rich peatlands.

Communities in these areas are reliant on the natural environment for their economic welfare and security. This funding injection will also help provide local people with the skills and tools to manage the natural world and encourage tourism in a sustainable way.

Further information:

- Darwin Plus (also known as the Overseas Territories Environment and Climate Fund) is a competitive UK government grants scheme which is part of the Biodiversity Challenge Fund (BCF) that provides funding for environmental projects in UKOTs
- The funding also supports fellowships for UKOT Nationals to increase

their knowledge and ability to meet long-term strategic outcomes for their natural environment.

- Darwin Plus supports projects across all 14 UKOTs which are: Anguilla; Bermuda; British Antarctic Territory; British Indian Ocean Territory; The British Virgin Islands; The Cayman Islands; The Falkland Islands; Gibraltar; Montserrat; The Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie & Oeno Islands; Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha; South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands; Sovereign Base Areas, Akrotiri and Dhekelia (Cyprus); and, The Turks & Caicos Islands.
- Primary responsibility for biodiversity conservation and wider environmental management in the UK Overseas Territories has been devolved to the OT governments, who, with the support of the UK government, are responsible for developing appropriate, applicable, and affordable environmental policies, legislation and standards.
- The Darwin Initiative provides Overseas Development Aid (ODA) to protect biodiversity worldwide. 2022 marks the 30th anniversary of the Darwin Initiative, to celebrate Defra is raising the ambition for the fund and awarding new, larger grants to environmental projects.
- Since 1992, the Darwin Initiative has awarded over £164m to more than 1,143 projects across 159 countries.

Published 23 May 2022