

Blue Belt Programme

Annual Update **2022/23**



Introduction

The UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) are home to around 90% of the UK's biodiversity, hosting a huge range of rare and unique species, with some found nowhere else on Earth. The Blue Belt Programme is the UK Government's flagship international marine conservation initiative.

It works closely with UKOTs in protecting and maintaining healthy and productive marine ecosystems. Driven by United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on Biological Diversity, it underpins the 25 Year Environment Plan and global target for 30% of the world's oceans to be protected by 2030.

We were delighted to welcome Anguilla as the newest UKOT joining the Blue Belt Programme in the last year. It joins the other UKOTs currently within the Programme: Ascension Island, British Antarctic Territory, British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), Pitcairn Islands, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Turks and Caicos Islands, and South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI). Combined, their marine zones span over 1% of the global ocean, covering 4.5million km², and therefore the UKOTs make a significant impact in addressing the global effects of marine pollution, climate change and illegal fishing.

This report covers 2022-23, the seventh year of work across this flagship Programme, showcasing the UKOTs' continued commitment to ocean protection and sustainable management of marine resources.

Lord Goldsmith, UK Minister for the Overseas Territories, Commonwealth, Energy, Climate and Environment:

"The UK Overseas Territories' Blue Belt Programme continues to be an inspiring exemplar for the protection of our ocean. In a year in which the global community has come together to finalise a historic agreement to protect our high seas, raise our ambition to protect our global biodiversity, and drive down our emissions, the UK Overseas Territories have also continued to demonstrate that small island communities can make a really big difference.

"This year I'm delighted to have welcomed Anguilla to the Blue Belt family. Making a commitment to enhance marine protection and sustainable development is the start of the Blue Belt journey. Our ambition continues to grow across the Territories engaged in the Programme, with work continuing apace on adaptive management, advancing compliance and enforcement frameworks and tackling new and emerging threats such as marine pollution and impacts of climate change."

This year I'm delighted to have welcomed Anguilla to the Blue Belt family

Themes of Work

The Blue Belt Programme provides a range of advice and assistance to UKOTs, working across five themes:



Strengthening Governance and Management Frameworks

- Enabling UKOT governments to protect, manage and conserve their marine environment through governance, legislation, enforcement and research plans.
- Protecting and conserving natural resources through management frameworks, such as Marine Spatial Planning.



Understanding and Protecting Biodiversity, and Building Resilience to Climate Change

- Understanding the environmental, social, and economic benefits of the marine environment, and using evidence to support decision-making and adaptive management to protect and enhance the marine environment.
- Assessing the current and potential impacts of climate change on the marine environment and using evidence to inform adaptation and resilience strategies.



Managing Human Impacts

- Ensuring UKOTs with sustainable fisheries meet the requirements of relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and other regional organisations that have competence for marine conservation.
- Helping UKOTs in understanding the impacts and have measures in place to reduce the risk posed by marine plastic, litter, and other pollutants to the marine environment.



Supporting Compliance and Enforcement

- Enabling detection and deterrence of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and other activities that may negatively impact the marine environment, through cost-effective compliance and enforcement assistance and innovative technology.



Capacity Building and Ocean Literacy

- UKOTs have the skills, resources, and financial solutions to ensure governance and management frameworks are sustainable, securing long-term protection for the marine environment.
- Enable UKOTs to demonstrate the benefits of long-term protection and enhancement through ocean literacy.



Strengthening Governance and Management Frameworks

To support the UKOTs in meeting their environmental commitments, the Blue Belt facilitates the creation and maintenance of governance, legislation, management and enforcement plans. It also helps to ensure environmental protection of marine environments through management frameworks, ensuring these areas are protected for future generations.

- The Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area (MPA) was awarded a prestigious Platinum Blue Park Award. This Award recognises the ongoing outstanding efforts by the Government of Pitcairn Islands to protect and sustainably manage their marine environment. Over the last year, Blue Belt provided support to Pitcairn Government through the development of an MPA operational plan, which is used for the day-to-day management of the MPA. The Programme has also begun supporting financial planning for the Pitcairn Islands MPA to help develop resourcing

strategies for effective marine management long into the future.

- The St Helena Government has worked with the Blue Belt Programme to review and publish an updated Marine Management Plan, which sets out in detail how the MPA will be managed, enforced and protected. This work has also played a key role in the development of a Monitoring and Research Plan, which is being used to monitor the habitats and species in the MPA. The work set out within these plans is leading to direct conservation and management action while



Coral species, the Pitcairn Islands

also generating evidence on how well management applications are working. A stakeholder working group is also in the process of being established to allow stakeholders to be actively involved in MPA management.

- Working with the Turks and Caicos Islands Government, the Blue Belt Programme team delivered recommendations for a National Protected Area Management Framework, supported the development of



MPA management evaluation workshop underway in Grand Turk, TCI

an MPA designation roadmap, and assisted with consultations and recommendations to implement and strengthen the Marine Spatial Plan. These governance measures and plans are critical tools for managing the complex and competing demands for use and protection of their marine resources.

- The Blue Belt team also provided training and supported the Department of Environment & Coastal Resources in conducting MPA management effectiveness evaluations. In the workshops stakeholders discussed the strengths, weaknesses and major threats around management of three key MPAs. This will inform site level priorities and the developing National Protected Area Management Framework.

- The South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands MPA is one of the first large scale MPAs globally committed to a regular review process from the moment of designation – a process which for the past five years has been supported by the Blue Belt Programme. In preparation for the 2023 MPA review, this year the Blue Belt Programme has led



Cumberland Bay, South Georgia

a comprehensive science review paper, which considers how research and monitoring over the past 10 years has informed the long-term sustainability and evolution of the SGSSI MPA, and how this may be used as an example globally.

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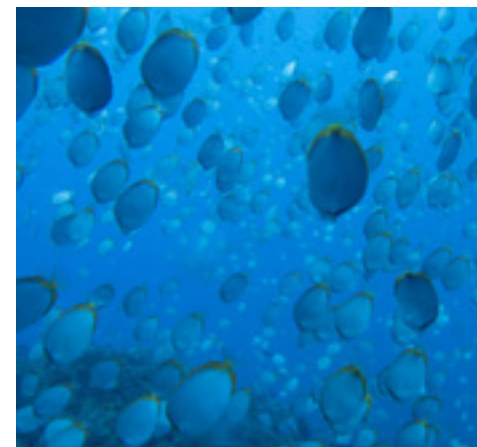


Understanding and Protecting Biodiversity, and Building Resilience to Climate Change

- Using video data of the deep-water tropical corals across the Pitcairn Islands collected during the Operation Fafaia expedition (2021), Blue Belt scientists have assessed the resilience of Pitcairn's corals to climate change. Findings were published in 2022 and will support Pitcairn Islands Government's management and protection of these unique reefs, which are home to a huge range of species.
- A climate risk profile for St Helena waters has been developed, which will be used to inform species modelling work in the coming years.

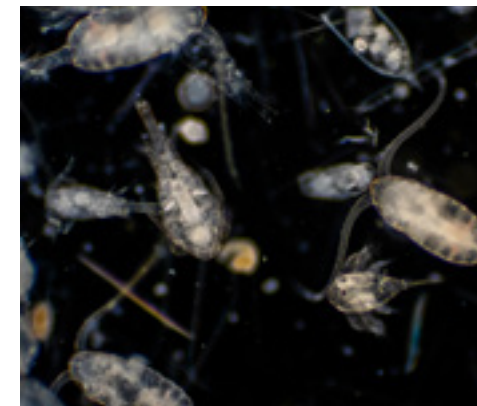
It will also help the St Helena Government to plan for climate response and mitigations.

- Deepwater fishing transects were also undertaken around St Helena to understand fish distribution and to validate the habitat map with the use of dropdown cameras at key points around the island. Understanding species distributions and their available habitat within St Helena waters helps to ensure that local fisheries management measures are sustainable and effective at protecting these important fish populations.

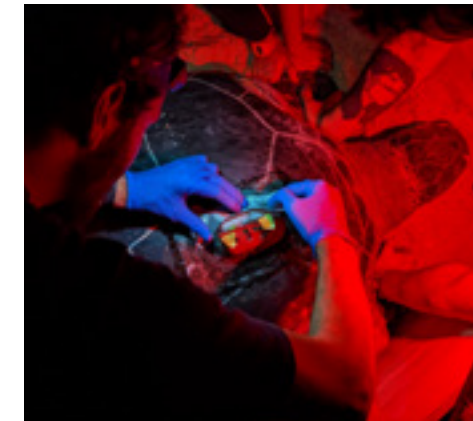


Cunning fish in St Helena

- The Blue Belt team has been investigating climate change risks to kelp forests around Tristan da Cunha – a key coastal habitat for biodiversity and fisheries. The Blue Belt team conducted a global study of giant kelp climate change risk, the findings of which will be released in a peer-reviewed paper during 2023/24 and will form a part of Tristan da Cunha Government's long-term resilience planning.
- Plankton samples have also been analysed, and detailed ID guides supplied to the Tristan da Cunha Government team to help build scientific capacity on island. It will also help them analyse their own samples for future plankton sampling to assess levels of ecosystem shifts that



Krill



Satellite tag attached to green turtle on Ascension Island

- might be linked to climate change, pollution or other challenges.
- Ascension Island hosts one of the largest and globally significant green turtle colonies on earth. Blue Belt funding for satellite tags is underpinning a project between the Ascension Island Government and University of Exeter to better understand the behavioural patterns of these turtles, specifically around their foraging grounds off the coast of Brazil. The knowledge gained from these tags will help to inform the transatlantic management and protection of these turtles.
- The Turks and Caicos Islands Department of Environment & Coastal Resources has worked

with the Blue Belt Programme to collect sargassum (seaweed) samples in order to test for metals, pollutants and genetics. The results will help guide Turks and Caicos Islands Government to develop a response plan, safe management solutions and potential economic applications.

- As part of ongoing research, the Blue Belt Programme continues to work with the fishing industry to deploy deep-water cameras around South Georgia. To date over 700 cameras have been deployed, with camera footage used to understand what impact longline fishing has on seabed environments. Using the camera data, the Blue Belt is working with the Government of SGSSI to help certify that the region's fisheries are managed sustainably, with minimal impact on vulnerable seabed ecosystems. To support this, the Blue Belt and Government of SGSSI have developed safeguarding protocols to ensure enhanced data collection around potentially vulnerable sites during the upcoming fishing season.
- Blue Belt scientists have been analysing fisheries acoustic data

to develop seafloor substrate maps around South Georgia. This information is important in understanding the potential distribution of deep-sea rocky environments which are often important habitats for vulnerable seabed communities such as cold-water corals. Seabed maps alongside habitat models for vulnerable marine ecosystems around South Georgia help improve our understanding of the seabed environment to ensure the continued effective protection and conservation of the region's rich and diverse marine life.



Collecting sargassum samples in the Turks and Caicos Islands



Managing Human Impacts

From fishing to tourism, human activities can have a diverse range of impacts on the marine environment. The Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of the UKOTs are used by the local communities or international visitors for a number of purposes, and the Blue Belt Programme has worked with local governments to assist in identifying and minimising impacts on the marine environment whilst enabling sustainable economic activity.

- The Blue Belt Programme provided funding to enable Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) staff to take part in a ‘Human Rights at Sea’ training course. The introductory course was aimed at increasing awareness of potential issues and identifying mechanisms to recognise risks, and supports a commitment made by SGSSI Government to ensure all vessels operating in their waters maintain ethical and safe working conditions for crew members.
- The Island Council in the Pitcairn Islands approved the new Marine

Conservation Regulations, which control how human activities within the Coastal Conservation Areas will be managed. The regulations make sure that activities, including fishing by the local community, are sustainable. The Blue Belt Programme developed promotional materials for the new regulations and what they mean for the local community in order to raise awareness and encourage compliance.

- The Blue Belt Programme produced advisory reports for monitoring sand extraction and water quality in relation to

fish die-offs in St Helena. The team is also providing advice to St Helena Government to develop a marine pollution policy to tackle this threat.

- The Blue Belt Programme contracted ABPmer to undertake research into the human activities that may impact St Helena’s marine environment over the next ten years. We will use the outputs of the forward-looking research to advise the Government on effective and long-term management of human activities within the MPA.

- The Turks and Caicos Islands Government’s existing measures to manage tourism impacts on marine wildlife were reviewed by the Blue Belt Programme and recommendations were made to strengthen mitigation measures and prevent negative impacts of tourism on marine ecosystems. The Blue Belt is helping to progress these recommendations, which include an accreditation scheme for tour operators and strengthening the marine wildlife interaction policy.

A number of Blue Belt Programme UKOTs have active fisheries. With Programme assistance, the UKOTs ensure these fisheries are managed at a sustainable level, which strikes a balance between robust environmental protection and the socio-economic requirements of the local community:

- The Ascension Island Government is continuing to develop an inshore fisheries monitoring strategy that will guide future stock assessments of key inshore species which include the moray eel, squirrel fish and grouper.
- In partnership with the British Antarctic Survey, the Blue Belt

Programme is funding scientific expertise and analysis to support advice to the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). This work is required for the renegotiation of an Antarctic Krill quota and spatially distributed fishery to protect krill eating predators.

- The British Indian Ocean Territory administration has produced information leaflets to promote recreational fishing rules including best practice around catch and release methods, which will help to increase survivability of fish caught.
- The St Helena Government has updated local fisheries advice for key species such as tuna, groundfish (like grouper) and lobster to ensure that populations are fished sustainably. The Programme also helped to develop a long-term lobster monitoring strategy within the St Helena MPA.
- Logbooks have been used by St Helena’s fisheries since 2021. The Blue Belt Programme supported the development of the Shiny app, a tool to estimate how much fish is caught throughout the year to help the Government manage both local and regional quota use.

- In partnership with the RSPB ‘Atlantic Guardians’ programme, the Blue Belt Programme funded the appointment of a specialist legal team to underpin the future concession negotiations of Tristan da Cunha’s main export, the Tristan Lobster, to support the best outcomes for the Tristan community, economy and lobster populations.

- The Government of SGSSI is continuing development of a bespoke management risk tool to ensure fisheries are managed sustainably with minimal impact on associated and dependent ecosystems. Research is also being conducted to further the development of stock assessments focusing on Patagonian toothfish.



Bait fish collected off St Helena for scientific analysis



Lobster fishery harbour at Tristan da Cunha

The regulations make sure that activities, including fishing by the local community, are sustainable.



Supporting Compliance and Enforcement

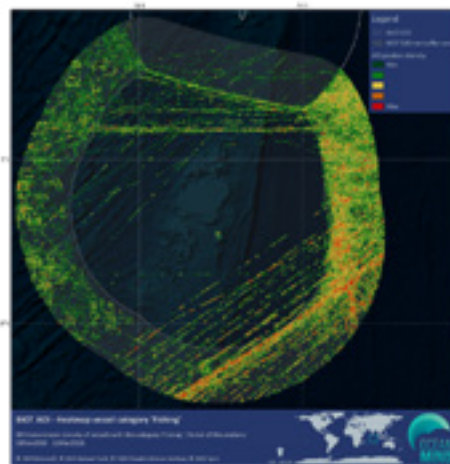


An MPA is only effective if the management measures and regulations put in place by a UKOT Government are complied with and enforced. The Blue Belt Programme assists the UKOTs with a suite of support to help achieve this, ranging from the use of satellite imagery and innovative technology to providing training.

- Intelligence analysts continued to monitor the 4.5million km² of ocean surrounding the Blue Belt UKOTs, providing intelligence and assistance to Territory governments. The team continued to work with Oceanmind and the Joint Maritime Security Council, undertaking satellite surveillance across UKOT waters, and – where vessel activity required further investigation – supporting UKOTs through liaison with flag states.

- ‘Area to be Avoided’ beacons are to be installed in Tristan da Cunha to improve maritime safety by reducing risk of vessel collisions and the Programme has been investigating and regularly contacting flag states to address incursions into these zones.

- A remote surveillance trial was undertaken to support the Turks and Caicos Islands’ Government with tackling transboundary Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. The trial will inform how Blue Belt surveillance can support the Government’s work into the future.

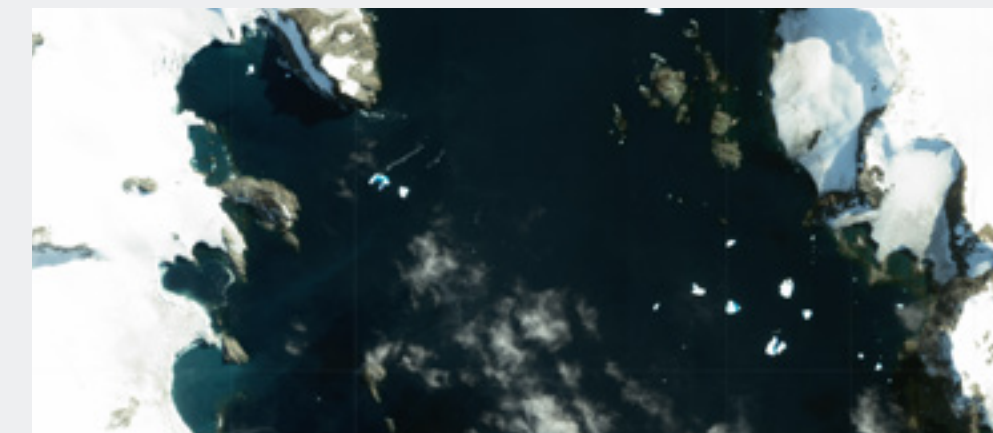
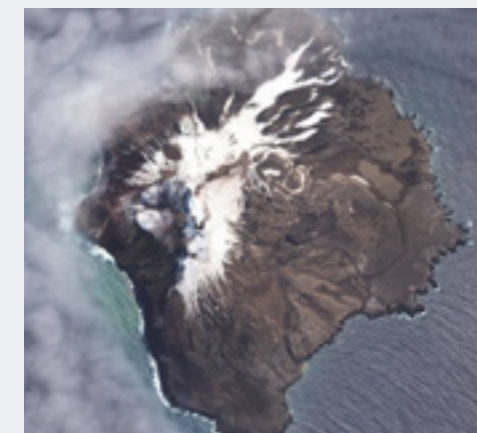


Heat map showing fishing vessel activity

- The Blue Belt Programme has provided the Governments of Bermuda and the Turks and Caicos Islands with bespoke technology roadmaps, which identify and evaluate innovative technologies for addressing marine fisheries compliance and enforcement challenges.



- The Blue Belt Programme is exploring the feasibility and application of developing technology such as tethered platforms and high frequency radar masts to support remote monitoring of vast marine areas.
- The remote waters around South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands lends itself to remote sensing satellite surveillance. Space-based radar sensors are used to image thousands of kilometres of ocean in a single pass. Recently however, the trial of a new layer of technology has been undertaken around SGSSI, which enables the detection of vessels by other means. This innovative process enables satellites to detect vessels operating in the



Satellite images of the Turks and Caicos Islands and South Georgia and The South Sandwich Islands. Credit: Ocean Mind

area and provides results in near real time. This enables vessels which have switched off their tracking beacons to be detected and monitored regardless. The versatile technology can operate at any time and is not influenced by weather. By incorporating new satellite based monitoring methods with existing remote sensing and vessel tracking tools, the Blue Belt team and their partner organisations can monitor risks with increased accuracy.

The trial will inform how Blue Belt surveillance can support the Government’s work into the future.



Capacity Building and Ocean Literacy

The Blue Belt helps ensure UKOTs have the skills, capacity and financial resources to ensure governance management frameworks are sustainable, securing long-term protection for the marine environment.

- The Programme funds a number of staff roles in Turks and Caicos Islands, St Helena and Ascension Island to support on-island activity and build capacity. Roles include marine enforcement officers, fisheries scientists and engagement professionals.
- A detailed training plan is in place for several Tristan da Cunha Government staff. This includes training for scientific deployments and surveys, fisheries observations, MPA governance, and compliance and enforcement. A bespoke training pack was created to support

Ascension Island staff with compliance and enforcement.

- St Helena's new Marine Centre was formally opened on World Ocean Day 2022. This Blue Belt Programme funded project provides significantly greater office and laboratory space for both local and visiting scientists and includes state-of-the-art equipment and facilities. The new centre will be the headquarters for the St Helena Government marine section in the future, and will support their ongoing work to ensure sustainable management of their Marine Protected Area.

- The Ascension Island Government is exploring the feasibility of developing the island as a scientific hub. Howell Marine Consulting has been leading consultations and assessing feasibility of the proposal, working with Ascension and Blue Belt support to develop a roadmap to delivery.
- An environmental DNA (eDNA) laboratory has been set up on Ascension Island, with Blue Belt Programme funded equipment and tools. This new facility has allowed Ascension Island Government to begin using eDNA to support biosecurity

and biodiversity monitoring, adding further scientific capacity to their ongoing research and management of the MPA.

- In February 2023, the fifth International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5) took place in Vancouver, bringing together ocean conservation professionals from around the globe to work towards effective MPA management. Blue Belt funded the attendance of UKOT representatives, ensuring they had access to this international

platform to both showcase their own MPAs, and to learn from and meet other marine managers. A Blue Belt exhibition stand was hosted throughout the conference and a dedicated Blue Belt symposium and side-event were also facilitated, providing a platform for UKOTs to highlight different elements of MPA management, protection, and impact.

Highlighting the benefits and importance of sustainably managing and protecting the

marine environment to local and international communities also underpins Blue Belt support to the UKOTs. This year:

- St Helena Government invited Blue Belt experts to present at St Helena's 20th Marine Awareness Week. This on-island community event started with an Ocean Festival, which included an ocean clean-up, educational exhibitions and marine crafts. Throughout the week, local schools visited the exhibitions to learn about the marine environment

and the work happening in St Helena waters. There was also a workshop to obtain views on how the local community can learn and be more involved in the management of the MPA.

- Ascension Island hosted their first Marine Festival, celebrating its incredible marine environment and its significance to the community and island. The festival was part-funded through the Blue Belt and due to its success will become an annual event. The festival included events to grow understanding of the Ascension MPA, and more broadly the impact human activities can have on the marine environment, and what is needed to effectively minimise and manage impacts.



St Helena's new Marine Centre

The new centre will be the headquarters for the St Helena Government marine section in the future.

- An educational pack was created by the Blue Belt for KS4 students who are completing work experience placements with the St Helena Government marine conservation unit. The pack outlines the different roles involved with designating and maintaining a Marine Protected Area – from marine biologists to data managers. The pack includes interactive videos and activities for the students to complete, helping them learn more about the wide range of skill sets required and career paths available.

- The British Indian Ocean Territory and the Blue Belt Programme worked together to produce training material that has been delivered to military staff and contractors. Materials include key information on BIOT’s marine environment and aims to increase general awareness of the MPA and its purpose.
- The Programme worked with the RSPB and the Pitcairn Islands to design an interpretation board about biosecurity. The board includes key information about the impacts of invasive non-native species and outlines how those visiting the MPA can prevent their arrival.



Blue Belt colleagues supporting St Helena's Marine Awareness Week

The Programme funds a number of staff roles in Turks and Caicos Islands, St Helena and Ascension Island to support on-island activity and build capacity.



UKOT representatives meet UK Environment Minister Lord Benyon at IMPAC5



"I found it to be very educational and knowledgeable. I also found it quite interesting as I didn't know that there were that many jobs in managing a MPA. I did enjoy the Work Experience page on communications and loved making my video for you guys and had a good experience working with you all". – Rhiann Joshua

Sustainable Finance

The Blue Belt Programme launched a sustainable finance workstream this year to assist UKOTs in understanding and accessing finance to support long-term marine management and sustainable island economies. Consultations, strategic planning, and a roundtable with UKOT representatives and expert speakers have taken place this year.

A new multi-year partnership with Finance Earth was also launched in January 2023, to provide expert assistance towards UKOTs' financial resilience. A diverse range of sustainable financing mechanisms and initiatives for ocean impact and long-term management are now being explored.

Focused feasibility assessments are also underway for Tristan and Ascension, and an MPA financial planning framework has been developed to support St Helena and Pitcairn.

The University of Portsmouth's Centre of Blue Governance have also trialled an MPA financial training programme with Tristan da Cunha representatives. Learning from this trial will inform how the Programme might support UKOTs in building financial management capacity and accessing new MPA financing mechanisms.

Taking a cross OT approach, the development of a UKOT Sustainable Finance 'Hub' has also begun, with the aim to streamline collaboration and engagement, enhance knowledge, support access to appropriate resources and showcase potential examples relevant to UKOTs. As an example of this knowledge, a 'Blue Carbon Insights' document has been developed to illustrate the relevance of UKOT blue carbon habitats and services for sustainable financing opportunities and help UKOTs evaluate and plan investment where relevant.

The Blue Belt is assisting UKOTs in understanding and accessing additional and diversified financial opportunities.



Exploring financial mechanisms to support long-term marine management



Major Expeditions

After a two-year delay due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2022 the RRS Discovery DY159 expedition completed its 9000-mile scientific expedition to the remote and understudied waters of St Helena and Ascension Island.

The expedition builds on a legacy of previous *Discovery* surveys carried out in South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Tristan da Cunha, St Helena and Ascension Island.

The multidisciplinary expedition improved our understanding of unique ecosystems surrounding these two islands. Work involved mapping previously unknown seamounts, surveying open-water environments using the latest Baited Remote Underwater Video Systems technology and collecting video data from deep-seabed habitats. This expedition provided a platform to study and share knowledge across scientists and specialists from the UKOTs, who joined the expedition.



Examining an amphipod trap on board the *Discovery*

The multidisciplinary expedition improved our understanding of unique ecosystems surrounding these two islands.

The data collected will provide vital and new evidence to support the Governments of Ascension and St Helena in their ongoing work to sustainably manage and protect the incredible marine ecosystems present within their MPAs. Specimens collected during the expedition, which include a potentially new species of angler fish, are being housed in the Natural History Museum in London.

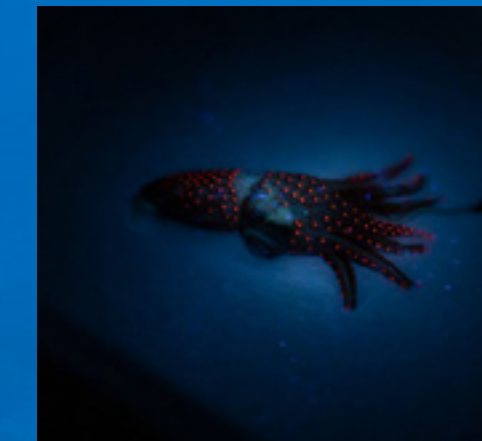
A scientific research expedition took place across the Pitcairn Islands MPA in 2023.

Operation Redfish was jointly funded by the Government of the Pitcairn Islands and the Blue Belt Programme to visit Pitcairn's outer islands of Henderson and Oeno, to further understanding of the marine ecosystems and reefs around the coral atolls and seamounts.



Ultimately, this data will allow scientists to identify how these environments could be impacted by global climate change.

Members of the Pitcairn community were joined by Blue Belt scientists and the University of Edinburgh on the expedition. The Pitcairn Island team undertook intensive training in the deployment and recovery of survey equipment as well as the sampling of fisheries species, including taking tissue samples.



A Jewel Squid found during the *Discovery* expedition

New data was collected on the unique coral reefs found within the MPA. Due to the high-water clarity, these tropical reefs grow at depths of around 30-50 metres below the surface – far deeper than typically found elsewhere around the globe.

Analysis is now taking place to find out more about these potentially globally unique reefs, with findings expected during 2023.



MV Silver supporter during Operation Redfish

Sub-Programmes

During 2021/22 the Blue Belt Programme launched two sub-programmes which support its objectives and also extend support to other UKOTs.

The Global Ocean Wildlife Analysis Network

The global network of Baited Remote Underwater Video Systems (BRUVS) supports 13 UKOTs to monitor their marine biodiversity and habitats.

The underwater video data these cameras collect provide detailed insights of marine ecosystems, such as habitat type, species present and condition. UKOTs can use this data to better inform the management and protection of their marine environments.

The Blue Belt Programme, with delivery partners Blue Abacus, support the UKOTs to design their BRUVS surveys and deployments. This year fieldwork occurred across several of the Territories, including training deployments in the Turks and Caicos Islands, Cayman Islands, Anguilla and Montserrat.

A number of BRUVS surveys were incorporated into the Blue Belt Discovery survey DY159 (see page 18) around Ascension Island and St Helena, where they were used to investigate pelagic communities associated with offshore seamounts.

The Programme supports with necessary data analysis after fieldwork has been completed, and scientific reports are compiled for UKOT governments which provide key findings and recommendations for the management and conservation of their marine ecosystems.

Around Pitcairn, BRUVS were used during Operation Fafaia (2021). Findings highlighted the incredible and world-leading biodiversity present within the Marine Protected Area, and the positive impact the reserve is having on the marine environment.



BRUVS being deployed on RRS Discovery 159

 [MORE INFORMATION](#)

Blue Belt Ocean Shield

Blue Belt Ocean Shield is a sub-programme of Blue Belt. UKOTs can choose to sign up to this part only, rather than the full Blue Belt Programme. It is a maritime domain awareness programme to assess and understand the activities that may impact the health and sustainability of the maritime environment.

Such activities include but are not limited to Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, commercial and recreational vessel activity and marine development projects. This sub-programme is currently supporting the Government of Bermuda.

- The Blue Belt team advised the Government of Bermuda during negotiations in a key international forum. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) manages tuna across the Atlantic and introduces measures to sustainably manage these vital stocks.

The Government of Bermuda attended the 2022 ICCAT Commission as part of the overall UK/UKOT delegation meeting with the Blue Belt team providing technical advice. This resulted in important measures such as better protections for the southern mako shark and better control of those who own, or are alleged to own, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing vessels. A proposal for a

scientific observer programme required in ICCAT fisheries was developed that will be implemented in the next financial year.

- The team assisted Bermuda with offshore satellite surveillance to better understand the levels and types of activities that pose a threat to its offshore environment. We completed an initial analysis and risk profile for IUU fishing – this assesses when, where and by whom illegal activity is most likely and targets enforcement resources such as satellite surveillance accordingly.
- Work was also carried out around how the Programme can assist with surveillance for activity that poses a higher risk of maritime pollution, such as vessels carrying more dangerous cargo.
- An assessment of historic merchant traffic vessel movements was provided to the Government of Bermuda to inform their assessment of threats to the maritime environment.

 [MORE INFORMATION](#)



Satellite image of earth at night

Looking Ahead

The Blue Belt Programme now supports the protection and enhancement of around 4.5 million square kilometres of ocean. The continuation of this flagship marine conservation Programme demonstrates the UK Government's sustained commitment to tackling global ocean threats, from climate change to illegal fishing and biodiversity loss.

Engagement will continue to take place with other UKOTs that are interested in joining the Blue Belt Programme or sub-programmes, the Blue Belt Ocean Shield and the Global Ocean Wildlife Analysis Network.

The UKOTs continue to set a global example in their work to maintain healthy, productive and biologically diverse marine ecosystems that support sustainable growth, connect people with the natural environment, and are resilient to the impacts of climate change.

They do this through continued leadership in maintaining and enforcing their MPAs and exclusive economic zones across the themes

outlined above. From regularly collecting reliable scientific data on their marine ecosystems and using this data to ensure governance frameworks are up-to-date and meeting conservation goals, to upholding these management measures through a variety of enforcement approaches.

During 2023/24, key elements of the Blue Belt Programme's work with UKOTs and external stakeholders will include:

- Building new partnerships with Anguilla and integrating more with Caribbean networks to support new Programme partnerships in the region.
- Helping UKOTs to mitigate against the impacts of global ocean challenges such as marine pollution and climate change.
- Building of on-island capacity and skills within the UKOTs to ensure a long-term Programme legacy through supporting infrastructure, education and outreach, training, professional development and UKOT leadership.
- Assisting Ascension Island, Tristan da Cunha, St Helena, Turks and Caicos Island and Bermuda with their membership and

representation at the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT).

- Strengthening UKOT capacity for marine management and protection long into the future by exploring and testing appropriate sustainable financing mechanisms with UKOTs, and by assisting UKOTs.
- Looking at innovative solutions to support the UKOTs in tackling illegal activity within their waters. Developing satellite surveillance processes will be a priority for the coming year allowing the Programme to respond to opportunities within this fast-moving sector.

The UKOTs continue to set a global example in their work to maintain healthy, productive and biologically diverse marine ecosystems.

- Organising a Blue Belt symposium to bring together UKOT marine managers and global experts to address key focus areas within their work under the Blue Belt and input to the future development of the Programme.



Anguilla meeting



Masked booby

More Information About The Blue Belt Programme

The flagship Blue Belt Programme is a leading global marine conservation programme, supporting the UK's ambition to protect 30% of global oceans by 2030 and driven by United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

During 2022/23 the Blue Belt Programme was funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and supported by two delivery partners – the Centre for Environment,

Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) on behalf of the UK Government. Cefas and MMO provide knowledge and expertise in fields of applied marine science, management, technology, and enforcement.

They also work with other UK Government bodies and non-governmental organisations to ensure the UKOTs receive the best technical advice, scientific knowledge and support available to protect and manage their marine and coastal environments.



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from the Blue Belt Programme:

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