Chagos News

The annual Newsletter from the Chagos Conservation Trust and the Chagos Conservation Trust US

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Front cover photo: The CCT expedition team onboard the British Patrol Vessel in the Chagos (November 2025) © Andy Bourne @ Provision
Photos p2: (top left) Blue whale (*B. m. indica*) tail fluke © Asha de Vos; (top right) © Dr Peter Leatt
Photos p3: (top left) Dr Joanna Harris and reef manta ray © Annie Murray; (top right) Chris Davies
Back page photo: Manta Ray © Simon Hilbourne, Manta Trust

A Word from our Chair

Welcome to the latest edition of *Chagos News*, packed with articles about the captivating research happening in the Chagos – an archipelago the Trust is dedicated to protecting and conserving. My personal thanks go to our Director, Sarah Puntan-Galea, for the long hours spent ensuring this publication is worthy of its status as our annual publication.

The opening article examines the first sighting of the sliteye shark in the waters of the Great Chagos Bank, written by Charlotte Oulton and Drs Holly Stokes, Kimberley Stokes, and Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) Trustee Nicole Esteban from Swansea University's Marine Conservation Ecology Lab. Their work deploying baited underwater video systems to monitor the importance of seagrass has paid dividends and is a stark reminder that not all is known about the deeper waters around Chagos.

Dr Joanna Harris covers research identifying Egmont Atoll as a key site for the reef manta ray, vital for its conservation. Other members of the mobulid family are sadly hunted, including the elusive devil ray. Due to their low reproductive rates, these are now listed as Vulnerable to Critically Endangered, with the Mobulid Ambassador Scheme an exciting development to help address the issue.

CCT's Youth Ambassador, Martina Reina Canitrot, shares her insight into the journey to becoming a marine biologist – including a summer working on seagrass restoration in chilly Europe, and sea turtle research in the warmer Caribbean – after spending her placement year as our first intern.

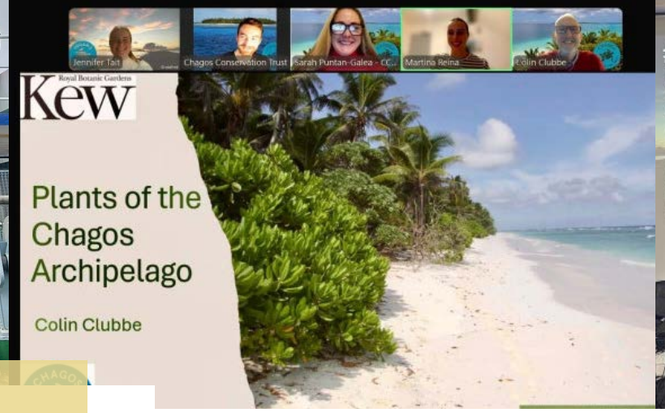
Dr Danielle Harris writes about whales and the difficulty involved in monitoring them in a remote location, despite their impressive size. She proves studies can still uncover exciting discoveries, such as the Omura whale population near Madagascar, with technology helping – especially the use of underwater hydrophones, which has been a game changer.

Our flagship programme, *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs*, has been given the green light following a series of Darwin Plus and Local grants. Led by Pete Haverson, the recent initiative involved removing rats from four key islands of northern Peros Banhos: Moresby Island, Île de la Passe, Île Manoël and Île Yeye. His report states that early indicators are positive, and if successful the project would result in the longest predator-free island chain in the Indian Ocean (covering 145 hectares). He also explains how the rat-targeted bait was delivered by drones, significantly increasing the efficiency of the operation. Part of the project also involved laying down a set of indicators to measure the success of the mission, with scientists collecting pre-determined markers, as well as rat tails for DNA analysis.

Finally, George Balcombe, who has been the British Indian Ocean Territory Administration's Senior Environmental Officer for the last three years, shares his reflections on the role. He describes the privilege of being able to work in a location few people are able to visit, and stresses the importance of collaboration and working with partners – from CCT to the Zoological Society of London – as the archipelago faces challenges ranging from plastic pollution to global warming.

Read on and enjoy!

Chris Davies



Director's Report

After navigating the politics for another year, Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) finished 2025 on a high with the news that our application for three Darwin Plus and Local grants had been successful, and we have been awarded nearly £1 million for three projects – all part of our *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs* (HIHR) key rewilding programme. The first expedition to the Chagos Archipelago took place in November, and was led by Programme Manager Pete Haverson, whose report is on p. 25.

Launching CCT members' talks

February saw the launch of CCT's online members' talks, which I present. Our first speaker was Dr Sam Purkis, the founding Chair of CCT-US and current Professor and Chair of the University of Miami's Marine Geosciences Department, who spoke about 'Scaling coral reef conservation – Biodiversity assessment from orbit'. This was followed in October by CCT Trustee and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew's Dr Colin Clubbe's talk on 'Plants of the Chagos'.

Advising and lobbying to protect the Chagos Archipelago

One of CCT's most important roles is to explain how unique and precious the Chagos environment, and the wildlife that call it home, are – to help protect it. From the UK Government to journalists, other conservation charities to the Chagossian community, some of the most important briefings we delivered last year included CCT's previous HIHR Programme Manager (now Advisor), Dr Pete Carr's address to the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council in March (watch here).

And in June, CCT Trustee and Scientific Advisor Dr Bryan Wilson (University of Oxford) gave oral evidence on behalf of the Trust to the UK Parliament's House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee on the 'Implications of the transfer of sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago' (watch his comments here).

Together with Dr Carr, I participated in the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' workshop to create the new UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy – a framework to stop and reverse biodiversity loss across the Overseas Territories, including the Chagos Archipelago.

The 2025 CCT AGM and Speaker Event

We had our largest turnout ever for our March AGM and Speaker Event held at the Zoological Society of London on World Rewilding Day. Kicking off with an updated version of our 'Introduction to CCT' video by Jon Slayer, I introduced the speakers before chairing a Q&A session.

The talks were: Author of '*Birds of the Chagos*' Dr Carr on "Vache Marine – 10 years On"; Dr Mark Laidre (Dartmouth College, USA) on "Coconut crab conservation: Chagos and beyond"; Dr Mark Spalding (Scientific Advisor on the Chagos to the UK Government, The Nature Conservancy and Cambridge University) on "Terns and turtles, saltmarsh and sharks: barachois, a unique habitat in the Indian Ocean"; Abishek (Ashoka University) on "Shifting dynamics in the threat of illegal fishing to Chagos with a focus on the Indian fisheries context"; Dr Clare Embling (Plymouth University) on "Is the Chagos Archipelago one of the last tropical refuges for cetaceans?"; and Dr Jodey Peyton (UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum) on "Can invertebrates ever be as cool as sharks?".

Youth Ambassador scheme launched

After the success of CCT's Internship Scheme, launched in 2024 in partnership with Swansea University, we launched a Youth Ambassadorship scheme. Our first intern, Martina Reina Canitrot, graduated to become our first Youth Ambassador and has since started to make connections with other youth ambassadors across the Overseas Territories. Summer saw our second intern, Jenny Tait, join the CCT team.

We hope both roles will not only teach young marine biologists the skills needed to work in a conservation charity and encourage them to do so, but also increase our capacity and help us connect with younger members.

Annual Board Away Day

Because most of our meetings and staff work online, it is vital that CCT's staff and Trustees get together in person every year to bond and ensure we are on track strategically (which we are!). This year, we were hosted by Bangor University's School of Ocean Sciences in Menai Bridge, on Anglesey in Wales (where our Deputy Chair, Professor John Turner, is Head of School), and we enjoyed a tour of their laboratories and research ship.

Images
P4: (top left) Staff and Board members at the 2025 CCT Away Day. (top right) Screenshot from the last CCT online members' talk by Dr Colin Clubbe.

This page: (top left) Speakers at the 2025 CCT post-AGM event. (top right) Director Sarah Puntan-Galea and her dog Digby, enjoying a windy walk in the Welsh peaks.

CCT Statement: Virtual signing of the Chagos Sovereignty Treaty

Although we are not political and prefer to lobby behind closed doors rather than publically, we did issue a statement when a virtual signing of the Chagos Sovereignty Treaty took place in May, before it started its journey through the UK Parliament. We also continue to reiterate our concerns over the continued "full protection of the islands and the seas around them in the interests of preserving their unique and valuable ecosystems".

Looking forward to 2026

We will be launching our new website, planning more members' talks, a youth and Chagossian community event, expeditions to the Chagos in March and November, and our AGM-Speaker Event (which will be a HIHR programme special, featuring talks from those who were part of the November 2025 CCT expedition), will take place at the Linnean Society in London on 14 May.

The whole CCT team will continue to do all it can to conserve and educate the world about the precious and unique Chagos islands in 2026 that we, as a charity, exist to protect. So keep checking our website and following us on social media to stay up-to-date on our work – 2026 is going to be even busier, and more impactful.

Sarah Puntan-Galea

A First Sighting of the Sliteye Shark (*Loxodon macrorhinus*) in the Chagos Archipelago: Implications for Deepwater Seagrass Habitats and Fish Assemblages

By Charlotte Oulton, Dr Nicole Esteban, Dr Holly Stokes, Dr Kimberley Stokes, Marine Conservation Ecology Lab, Swansea University, UK

The Chagos Archipelago is home to one of the largest and most pristine marine protected areas in the world, and its isolation has helped protect diverse coral reef systems and pelagic ecosystems. However, much of its mesophotic habitat between 30 and 150 metres remains understudied. For nearly a decade, the Marine Conservation and Ecology Lab from Swansea University has been deploying Baited Remote Underwater Video (BRUV) systems across the Chagos Archipelago to understand the importance of these deepwater seagrass habitats for fish communities.

In 2012 and 2015, satellite tags were attached to 18 nesting green turtles in order to track their post-nesting migrations to foraging sites. Repeated movements of green turtles to diurnal locations were analysed, as these were likely feeding areas. In March 2016, eight of the daytime locations across the Great Chagos Bank were confirmed as seagrass habitat via SCUBA surveys, and an additional site was confirmed at Danger Island [2]. This approach leverages the fact that green turtles are known seagrass grazers in many regions, making their foraging locations effective indicators for *in-situ* surveys to confirm seagrass presence [3].

Since 2016, the team has visited sites during two expeditions and has received further assistance from British Indian Ocean Territory Environmental Officers and Senior Fisheries Patrol Officers on board the patrol vessel to survey 29 locations across the archipelago, including the Great Chagos Bank and Speaker's Bank, at depths ranging from 8 to 31 metres [2]. Survey sites were selected by satellite-tracking green turtles from their nesting beaches on Diego Garcia to their foraging grounds on the Great Chagos Bank [2].

To compare fish communities across different habitat types, in 2018, the team also surveyed control sites of sandy substrates and coral reefs along the northern edge of the Great Chagos Bank.

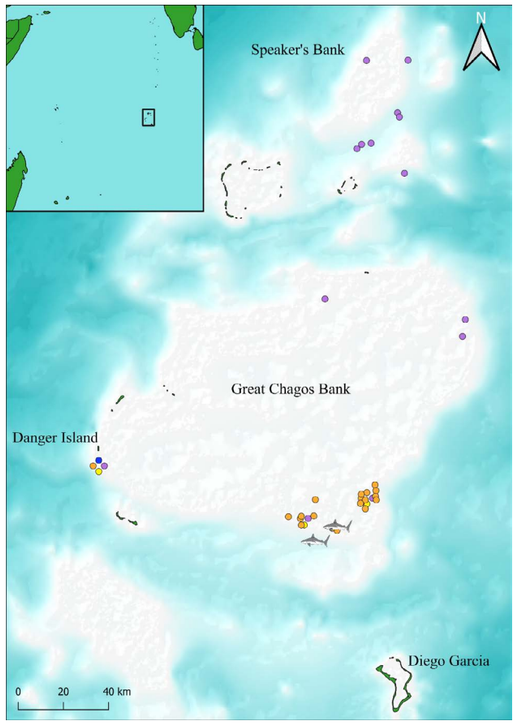


Image 1 (opening spread): The first sighting of the sliteye shark in the Chagos Archipelago was recorded at a depth of 23 metres in the southern Great Chagos Bank on 14 December 2024. The second sighting was recorded on 30 December 2024. It occurred 11.4km from the first site at a depth of 29.2 metres. © Charlotte Oulton

Image 2 (above): The most commonly observed shark species, the grey reef shark (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*). Footage was captured along the western edge of the Great Chagos Bank in 2016). © Charlotte Oulton

Image 3 (left): Deepwater seagrass surveys have been conducted across 29 sites in the Chagos Archipelago with a focus on the Great Chagos Bank, the largest coral atoll structure in the world. Data from BRUV footage will contribute to an evaluation of spatial and temporal trends in fish assemblages on seagrass meadows around the atoll. The first observations of sliteye sharks were at locations along the southern section of the atoll rim (indicated by shark symbol). Survey year is shown by coloured symbols: 2016 (yellow), 2018 (purple), 2019 (blue), 2024 (orange).

These surveys have consistently revealed a shark community dominated by grey reef sharks (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*) that are regularly observed, with occasional sightings of whitetip reef sharks (*Triaenodon obesus*). That was, until December 2024.

Recent observations of sliteye sharks in the Chagos Archipelago

The first two sightings of sliteye sharks in the Chagos Archipelago were recorded during a BRUV survey in December 2024 within deepwater seagrass meadows on the Great Chagos Bank (image 3). Video footage taken during each survey shows the sharks circling the bait box and then swimming off-screen (images 1 and 2, locations observed: S 6.717° E 72.197°; S 6.678° E 72.102°). The video footage clearly shows the distinctive morphological features that enabled identification by multiple fish scientists working in the region. This finding extends the known distribution of sliteye sharks into the central Indian Ocean, and the confirmed sightings mark a novel record for the Chagos Archipelago.

Biology of the sliteye shark

The sliteye shark is a small, tropical demersal shark belonging to the family *Carcharhinidae*. Typically found at depths of between 2 and 120 metres on continental and insular shelves [4], this species has been recorded in the Maldives, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and along the eastern African coast [5], but never in the Chagos Archipelago.

Reaching a maximum length of about one metre, with females generally larger than males, the sliteye shark is distinguished by its large, oval eyes and slender body. The name 'sliteye' refers to its pronounced, slit-like pupils, which are thought to enhance low-light vision in deeper environments.

Sliteye sharks are ovoviviparous, giving birth to live young after internal egg development, with litters containing two to four pups. Despite the high number of pups, the population is decreasing, with a predicted decline of 25% over the next 15 years (representing three generation lengths). Key threats include fisheries bycatch and targeted fishing for consumption. The downward trend in population led to the 2021 International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List assessment of Near Threatened [4]. As both predator and prey, sliteye sharks play an essential ecological role, feeding primarily on crustaceans, cephalopods, and small bony fishes (particularly anchovies) [6] close to the seabed, while potentially being preyed upon by larger shark species, such as tiger sharks (*Galeocerdo cuvier*), bull sharks (*Carcharhinus leucas*), and marine mammals.

Mapping seagrass and habitat suitability modelling

Alongside the current evaluation of spatial and temporal trends in fish community composition on the Great Chagos Bank, the team's study is producing the first comprehensive spatial map of seagrass coverage across the Chagos Archipelago. They are utilising data from multiple sources, including green turtle foraging locations identified through satellite tracking, observations from drop-down cameras, and historical literature. Habitat suitability modelling that incorporates bathymetry, light availability, currents, and records of seagrass presence will be used to predict the likely extent of seagrass growth across the archipelago. To date, surveys have revealed extensive, healthy seagrass meadows between 8 and 31 metres deep, composed entirely of the species *Thalassodendron ciliatum*, which commonly occurs as a monospecific seagrass meadow on rocky substrate [7].

Looking forward

The discovery of sliteye sharks in the Chagos Archipelago after nearly a decade of consistent monitoring highlights both the value of long-term research and the ecological richness of deepwater seagrass ecosystems. These habitats, which remain largely unexplored compared with shallow seagrass meadows, may support far more diverse fish assemblages than previously understood. These findings demonstrate how little is known about the reefs, seagrass, and mesophotic habitats of the Chagos Archipelago, even within a globally significant Marine Protected Area that has been protected for over a decade. As we continues our surveys and complete habitat suitability modelling, we anticipate further discoveries that will enhance understanding of these remarkable deepwater ecosystems. The sliteye shark sighting serves as a powerful reminder that even in the most remote and protected corners of our ocean, there are still species waiting to be discovered and understood.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the British Indian Ocean Territory Administration (BIOTA) for assistance and permission to carry out research in the Chagos Archipelago, and thank Simon Browning, Marion Bourasseau and Caroline Gittins for coordinating BRUV deployments from 2018-2025. Particular thanks to Dr Mark Spalding, Dr Charles Anderson, Dr Claire Collins and Dr David Curnick for confirming species identification.

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Building Local Capacity for Mobulid Monitoring in a Remote Marine Protected Area

By Dr Joanna Harris, Chagos Manta Ray Project Lead, The Manta Trust, and Research Fellow, University of Plymouth, UK

Research in the Chagos Archipelago has substantially advanced understanding of reef manta ray (*Mobula alfredi*) ecology, identifying Egmont Atoll as a key aggregation site that supports one of the most resident populations documented in the Indian Ocean. These findings led to the designation of Egmont Atoll as an Important Shark and Ray Area (ISRA), recognising its significance for the conservation of reef manta rays.

Reef manta rays are just one species of the mobulid family, which includes three species of manta ray and seven species of devil rays. Devil rays are typically more elusive than manta rays and tend to be associated with offshore habitats, making them more challenging to study.

Like all mobulid species, devil rays are fished for their cartilaginous gill plates and meat (Palacios et al. 2025). These target fisheries, combined with slow growth and low reproductive rates of mobulids, have led to substantial population declines, particularly in the Indian Ocean (eg Fernando and Stewart 2021). As a result, all mobulid species are currently listed as Vulnerable to Critically Endangered on the IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species (IUCN 2025).

The Chagos Archipelago's vast no-take Marine Protected Area (MPA) provides a crucial refuge for mobulid species, protecting them from commercial fisheries and most other anthropogenic threats they face elsewhere. These characteristics potentially make the region's mobulid populations strongholds for the species' survival (Harris et al. 2024). However, illegal fishing remains a persistent issue (Harris and Stevens 2024).

Until recently, reef manta rays were the only mobulid species officially documented in the Chagos Archipelago. However, this changed in 2023 when I had a chance encounter with a sicklefin devil ray (*Mobula tarapacana*) approximately 16km off the coast of Egmont Atoll. That single sighting prompted an extensive review of photographs taken by researchers over the past three decades, which uncovered two additional species, the bentfin (*Mobula thurstoni*) and spinetail (*Mobula mobular*) devil rays. These records officially extended the known geographic range of these three species (Harris et al, 2024). However, they also raised concerns about whether illegal fishers operating in the Chagos Archipelago MPA were targeting these species.

Currently, the MPA is patrolled by an enforcement vessel that intercepts and broadly documents

Image previous spread: Dr Joanna Harris deploying acoustic tags onto reef manta rays at Egmont Atoll as part of a long-term study into their movement ecology. © Annie Murray (Manta Trust)

Image left: Reef manta rays feeding at Egmont Atoll © Simon Hilbourne (Manta Trust)

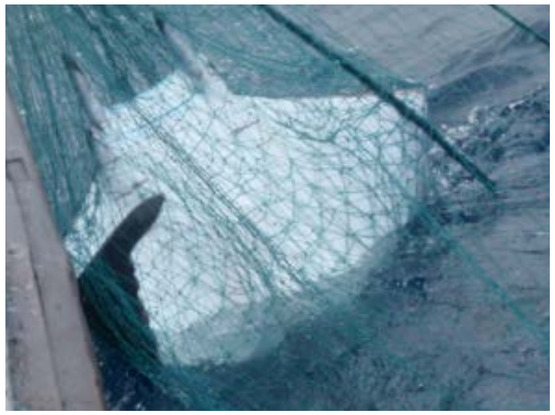
Image below: Nine of the twenty Mobulid Ambassadors appointed following completion of the training workshops – Diego Garcia, Chagos Archipelago © Leila Scheltema (Manta Trust)

Image right: Spinetail devil ray (Mobula mobular) photographed being illegally fished in the Chagos Archipelago, October 2014 (Harris and Stevens, 2024) © Marine Resources Assessment Group (MRAG)

illegal fishing vessel catches. The primary objective of enforcement is to collect evidence necessary for prosecution, which does not require species identification. Therefore, I extended my assessment by reviewing photographs taken by enforcement authorities of catches in which rays were noted in the written records. Only photographs from nine illegal fishing vessels were available for review. Of these, seven vessels were found to contain 79 unidentified mobulids, totalling approximately 20 tonnes (Harris and Stevens 2024). Given the challenges of detecting illegal activity across such a vast and remote area, and the frequent lack of species-level reporting, this figure likely represents only a fraction of the true scale of exploitation. If catches of this magnitude are commonplace, they are likely having a detrimental effect on local mobulid populations.

The gap in fisheries data existed because mobulid identification is a specialist skill held by only a few experts worldwide. However, limited catch recording is a significant barrier to effective management, as developing conservation management strategies requires an understanding of how heavily mobulids are targeted, which relies on accurate catch data recording.

To address this issue, the Manta Trust's Chagos Manta Ray Project (www.mantatrust/chagos), with support from the Darwin Plus Local scheme, designed a new approach in collaboration with US and UK military personnel, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Marine Resources Assessment Group, and Senior Fisheries Protection Officers: the Mobulid Ambassador Scheme. This scheme trained enforcement and monitoring personnel and volunteers on Diego Garcia – the archipelago's only inhabited island and a UK-US military base – to identify mobulid species in illegal fishing catches and to collect live-sighting data.



The scheme launched with community outreach events attended by more than 260 people, raising awareness of mobulid conservation and opportunities to get involved. Forty-four participants went on to complete specialist training workshops covering species identification, gill plate recognition, and standardised data-collection methods. From this group, 20 individuals, including enforcement officers, long-term contractors from the Philippines and India, and temporary residents from the UK and US military, the FCDO, and Royal Overseas Police, were appointed as Mobulid Ambassadors.

These Ambassadors now actively report both catch and live sighting data, directly supporting enforcement operations and research. Their efforts have led to the documentation of more than 140 verified live sightings, strengthening coordination between local personnel and management authorities. The structure of the scheme also ensures continuity in monitoring and awareness, even as personnel rotate through the island. In this way, the Ambassadors serve as a lasting link between science, enforcement, and the local community.

The Mobulid Ambassadors are supported remotely by the Chagos Manta Ray Project, and their contributions are now feeding into MPA management planning and helping to inform regional and global conservation strategies for these Critically Endangered rays.

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The Journey to Becoming a Marine Biologist

By Martina Reina Canitrot, Youth Ambassador, Chagos Conservation Trust

Moments before seagrass planting © The Fieldwork Company

Chagos Conservation Trust's (CCT) first-ever intern (and now CCT's first-ever Youth Ambassador), Martina Reina Canitrot, reflects on lessons learnt from her placement year and summer internships, which she can take into her future marine biology career.

When I decided to take a placement year during my Marine Biology degree, as well as giving me experience in practical research and running a conservation trust, I hoped it would help me find an area I wanted to dedicate the rest of my career to. Instead, it left me with more questions than when I started, but it also opened more doors than I could ever have imagined.

During my placement year, half my week was spent at the Marine Ecology and Conservation Lab (MarCEL) at Swansea University, which started with an overview from my supervisor, Dr Nicole Esteban (CCT Trustee and Chagos turtle researcher), and a handover from the previous MarCEL intern. Without fully knowing what to expect, I soon found myself on a windy beach setting out a seine net to assist with Masters student Sasha Shute's fieldwork in assessing finfish assemblages across South Wales. Immediately, this proved I had chosen the right degree.

I enjoyed developing my skills in seine and fyke netting, fish identification and most importantly, how to wade through knee-deep mud without getting stuck. Scribing with cold hands and navigating saltmarsh creeks under the glow of our head torches were part of the experience and shaped friendships I will never forget. I was amazed by the amount of biodiversity present in these local coastal waters, and how vital such habitats are for juvenile fish.

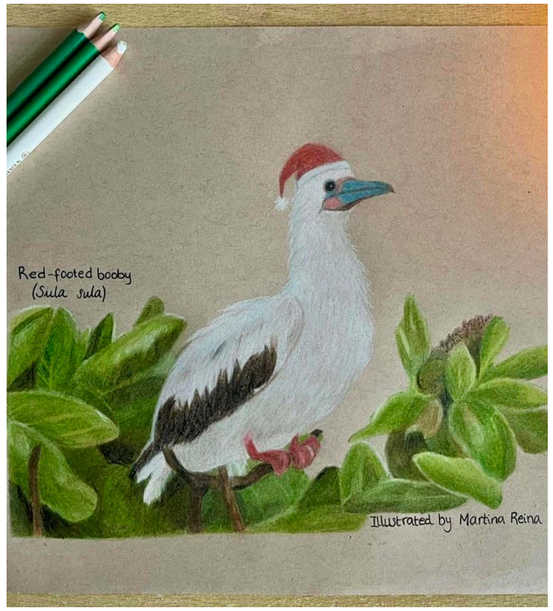
Like most research, not every day is spent out in the field, and before I knew it, I was back at my desk working regular hours and helping in a range of projects. I assisted in analysing second-by-second green turtle video footage to further understand their habitats and behaviours, explored the effectiveness of photo-identification algorithms in recognising individual sea turtles from facial scutes, and helped investigate the effect of irrigation on sand temperatures in the lab.

At the same time, I was also the CCT's intern. Learning about the unique biodiversity of the Chagos islands at such a critical time was an incredible opportunity. Plus, working within a small team gave me a real insight into how much dedication and collaboration it takes to run a conservation charity. One of my favourite parts of this role was being able to combine science with creativity through social media outreach and illustrating the Trust's 2025 festive e-card, featuring the iconic red-footed booby.

Helping to plan and run online events, as well as supporting the in-person AGM and Speaker event in London, pushed me out of my comfort zone and showed me just how much research is happening around these small islands, places I

Zostera marina © The Fieldwork Company

Measuring sand water and salinity content © Fred Baggs



CCT's Christmas card design © Martina Reina Canitrot

Planting seagrass shoots © The Fieldwork Company

Finfish sampling © Sasha Shute

knew almost nothing about a year ago. I realised effective conservation relies as much on people and communication as it does on research. I now remain connected to the Trust as their first-ever Youth Ambassador, helping to link experienced researchers with early-career scientists.

The year had opened my eyes to just how broad marine biology really is, and I wanted to experience more of it for myself by interning abroad over my summer holidays. I started searching for projects that intrigued me, and reaching out to people in different fields and countries. For months my inbox stayed quiet, and when replies did come, many explained they did not currently need the extra help. Still, I kept trying, and suddenly two incredible opportunities appeared.

I spent six weeks in the Netherlands and Denmark working with The Fieldwork Company on seagrass restoration. Long days preparing and planting *Zostera marina* were followed by evenings at the campsite having dinner with the team. It was here I realised fieldwork teaches you far more than scientific techniques – it teaches you patience, determination, adaptability and how to enjoy yourself even when you are cold and tired. I went from layering up in three wetsuits (complete with hood, gloves and boots) to standing on Zeelandia Beach under the Caribbean sun, feeling the heat burn my hands and feet as I dug through sand.

After working with PhD student Fred Baggs in the lab at Swansea University, I had the opportunity to join him on a field expedition to Sint Eustatius. There, I helped conduct fieldwork testing irrigation regimes for sea turtle nests while also collecting data for my undergraduate thesis. Our time in the Caribbean brought its own challenges and surprises, from arriving just before a hurricane hit, to discovering a sea turtle nested where we set up a trial.

Over the past year, I have discovered a career in marine biology can take many paths, each experience shaping your journey. It is important to say yes to opportunities that excite you, even if they seem daunting at first, to work hard for the things you want and stay open to new experiences. For me, I am still exploring where I belong in the field as I finish my undergraduate degree and prepare to take the next steps in my career.

Searching for Giants around the Chagos Archipelago

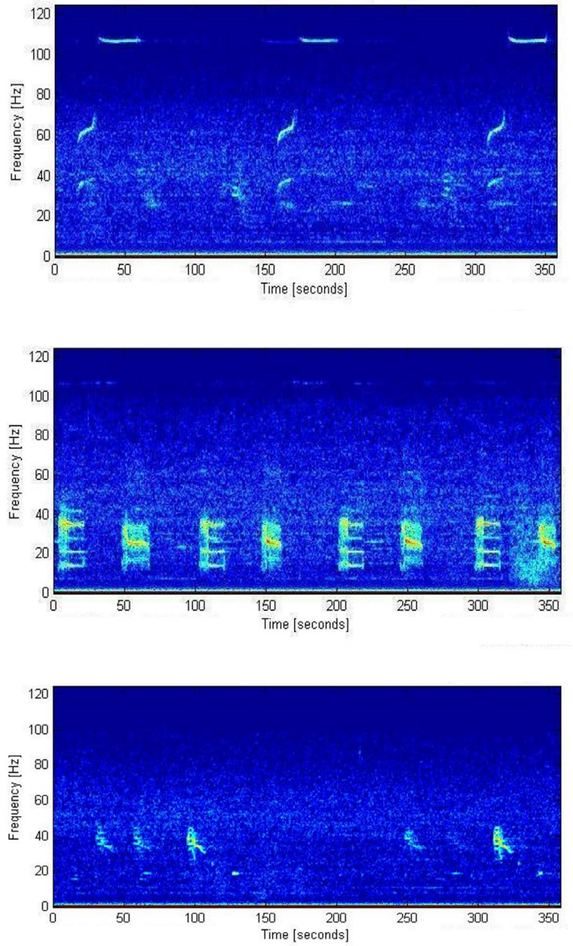
By Dr Danielle Harris, Senior Research Fellow, University of St Andrews, UK

Given their size, studying whales might seem straightforward. They are often spotted from shore and ships and can even be seen on satellite images taken from space (eg, Cubaynes and Fretwell 2022). However, despite the largest species – the blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*) – reaching around 30 metres in length and weighing the equivalent of approximately 30 elephants, these animals are notoriously difficult to monitor.

Whales are large animals, but the oceans are larger, covering around 70% of the Earth's surface. Many whale species are also migratory, travelling thousands of kilometres during their seasonal travels between feeding and breeding grounds. They may travel alone or in small groups (eg, blue whales, Kirumbara et al. 2022) and have typical dives times from minutes to over an hour, as seen in sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*; Watwood et al. 2006) and beaked whales (*Ziphiidae spp.,* Quick et al. 2020). Therefore, although a whale may be easy to see once you are close to it, finding them in the first place is a real challenge, particularly in remote areas such as the Chagos Archipelago.

Blue whale (*B. m. indica*) tail fluke © Asha de Vos

Figure 1 (right): Examples of spectrograms (a visual representation of sound) of three types of blue whale song found in the Indian Ocean. Top – bottom: (a) Sri Lankan song (b) Madagascan song and (c) suspected Chagos song. Data courtesy of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organisation.



As a result, many basic questions ("How many are there?", "Where do they travel?") about several whale species remain unanswered or have uncertain answers. Even as recently as 2003, new species of large whales were being confirmed. The Omura's whale (*B. omurai*) was previously assumed to be another species (the Bryde's whale, *B. edeni*) before morphological and genetics studies of a stranded animal and whaling specimens suggested a separate species. However, it wasn't until a 2013 field expedition near Madagascar found a population of Omura's whales that there was sufficient evidence to document and describe the species (Cerchio et al. 2019). Therefore, studying whales still offers the potential for many exciting discoveries, despite the challenges.

Help from technology

Fortunately, new technologies are helping scientists monitor these animals. Traditionally, whale surveys have been conducted from ships or aeroplanes, with teams of observers keeping look-out and following specific protocols when whales are sighted. These may include marking the position of sightings, which can be useful for estimating whale population sizes (Buckland et al. 2001) and/or taking photographs of the whales for identification.

However, ship- and aerial-based surveys can be hampered by poor weather, and observers can only work during daylight hours. Additionally, whales only spend a fraction of their time at the surface, meaning many might be missed while underwater. Therefore, other technologies can potentially offer more effective monitoring options, though each has their strengths and weaknesses.

One increasingly popular monitoring technique is acoustic monitoring, in which underwater recorders (hydrophones) capture the sounds of whales and other marine animals.

Hydrophones can be attached to several types of platforms: a fixed mooring on the seafloor, a tow behind a ship, an underwater glider (a type of unmanned underwater vehicle) or even a suction-cup tag attached directly to the animals. A main benefit of using acoustic monitoring is that recordings can be made round-the-clock, including during hours of darkness and poor weather.

Automated computer algorithms (increasingly using AI) can search large datasets of recordings for whale calls, often being able to differentiate between species or populations of the same species. In some specific cases it is possible to recognise families, eg killer whales (*Orcinus orca*), or even individuals, eg bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) have individual signature' whistles (Ford and Fisher 1986; Janik and Sayigh 2013). Furthermore, depending on the type and number of hydrophones used, the recordings can also be used to estimate the direction, range or even coordinates of calling animals.

Using these techniques, whales can be tracked (as long as they keep calling) and sometimes depth can also be estimated so that diving behaviour can be studied. Acoustic monitoring only detects animals that are producing sounds, so it is also crucial to understand why whales make sounds, so that we can interpret the recordings appropriately.

Whales make a variety of sounds. Some sounds are linked to foraging, such as the echolocation clicks produced by toothed whales, while other sounds are linked to reproduction. For example, some baleen whales produce both calls and song – song defined as "sequences of notes occurring in a regular sequence and patterned in time" (Clark 1990). Baleen whale song is believed to be produced mainly by males in the breeding season (eg, Croll et al. 2002). Therefore, whales may be present in an area during the non-breeding season, but we might not hear them.

Another important aspect of acoustic monitoring is working out how far the hydrophones are listening. Sound travels exceptionally quickly through water (around 1500 metres per second) and can be detected across vast distances. Several studies have shown that whale calls can travel hundreds of kilometres (eg, Harris et al. 2025). However, high levels of ocean noise from natural sources (such as weather, earthquakes, icebergs etc.) or human activity (such as shipping and seismic surveys) can reduce the underwater recorders' effective listening range. Therefore, it is important to consider these effects. For example, to understand whale migratory paths, or estimate how many whales are in an area, we must know if the whales recorded by a hydrophone were only a few kilometres away, or at a distance of over 100 kilometres.

Whales around the Chagos Archipelago

Whales can be separated into two groups: baleen whales (mysticetes) and toothed whales (odontocetes). Baleen whales feed on small schooling fish and krill, using their hair-like baleen and tongue to strain food from mouthfuls of seawater taken in during feeding. Toothed whales, on the other hand, typically feed on larger prey such as fish and squid. Dolphins – including large dolphin species such as pilot whales (*Globicephala spp.*) and killer whales – and porpoises are also odontocetes, but are not the focus of this article.

Through an ongoing project funded by the Bertarelli Foundation, whale sightings around the Chagos Archipelago since 2002 are being collated. Some observations are incidental, though many have come from dedicated wildlife observers who have been stationed onboard a patrol vessel since 2022. Species sighted include humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae),* Bryde's whales, sperm whales, Longman's beaked whales (*Indopacetus pacificus*), goose-beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*) as well as unidentified baleen and beaked whales. Previous records from the central Indian Ocean have also noted blue whales, and other beaked and baleen whale species are known to occur across the wider Indian Ocean (de Boer et al. 2003).

The remote nature of the Chagos Archipelago means that technologies such as acoustic monitoring

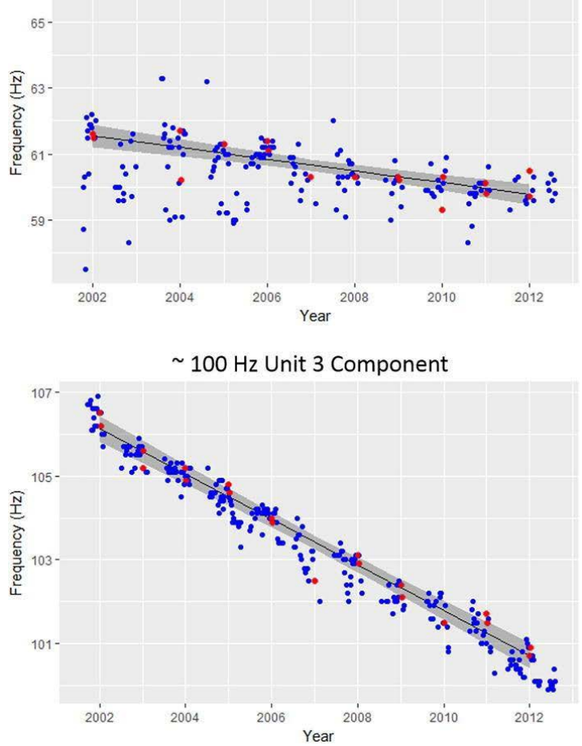


Figure 2 (left): Graph showing the decline of part of the Sri Lankan blue whale song between 2002 and 2012. Blue dots show weekly frequency measurements, with a regression line (black line, 95% confidence intervals shown in grey) fitted through a subset of the data (red dots). Published in: Jennifer L. Miksis-Olds; Sharon L. Nieukirk; Danielle V. Harris; *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* **144,** 3618-3626 (2018). DOI: 10.1121/1.5084269. Copyright © 2018 Acoustical Society of America

are vital for helping scientists learn more about the whale species present in these waters. As discussed in a previous edition of the newsletter (Chagos News #62, January 2025), the same Bertarelli Foundation-funded project has supported the deployment of hydrophones for up to six months at seven locations around the archipelago. These deployments have detected dolphins (Sampath et al. 2025) and humpback whales.

In addition to these shorter-term hydrophone deployments, long-term recordings in the Indian Ocean have been made by hydrophones deployed as part of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organisation's International Monitoring System (CTBTO IMS; www.ctbto.org). The main purpose of these hydrophones is to detect nuclear explosions, but the data, spanning decades, are made available to scientists for other research projects. As the hydrophones are designed to detect low frequency (low pitched) sounds, they also detect the calls of baleen whales.

There are IMS hydrophone stations in the southern Indian Ocean near the sub-Antarctic Crozet Islands and Cape Leeuwin, off the Australian Coast. Another station is located near Diego Garcia in the Chagos Archipelago. This station consists of two sites, situated to the north and south of Diego Garcia, separated by about 200km. At each site, three hydrophones are deployed in a triangle, separated by approximately 2.5km. Data are continuously recorded and cabled back to shore, where they are transmitted via satellite back to the CTBTO in Austria. The triads of hydrophones make it possible to estimate the direction, and sometimes range, of detected whale calls.

The two sites at Diego Garcia have provided fascinating insights into baleen whales in the Indian Ocean. Several species have been recorded on the hydrophones, including blue whales and fin whales (*B. physalus*).

Blue whales are a particularly interesting species to monitor using hydrophones in the central Indian Ocean. First, they produce a variety of song types (Fig. 1a-c). Species can show geographic differences in their song, which may be acoustic indicators of different populations within a species, or even a subspecies (eg, McDonald et al. 2006). To date, six blue whale song types are now thought to be produced in the Indian Ocean, with two only being attributed to blue whales in the last five years (Cerchio et al. 2020, Leroy et al. 2021).

Second, long term recordings, such as those collected near Diego Garcia, are revealing that whale song is changing over time (Fig. 2). It has been known for many years that the song of a humpback whale changes year to year (eg, Schulze et al. 2022). However, it has been surprising to observe the frequency (pitch) of blue and fin whales also changing over time. Most of the time a decline is observed, but some parts of songs have been seen to increase in frequency as well (Pinto and Chandrayadula 2021).

This continued change makes it challenging to develop computer algorithms for automatically detecting calls, because the object being searched for is changing over time. There are many hypotheses for why these frequency changes are occurring, such as changing ocean conditions driving the shifts, or that variation in song is a cultural effect similar to that seen in humpback whales (Leroy et al. 2018, Miksis-Olds et al. 2018). However, the true cause is still unknown.

In addition, there are detected signals that appear to be very "whale-like" but have never been recorded in the presence of visually observed animals, which is essential for definitively linking suspected calls to specific species. Two examples are the suspected Omura's whale calls and the "Chagos blue whale song". The Chagos song was first described as a variation of the Madagascan blue whale song (McDonald et al. 2006). But when the call was investigated further, it was suggested to be a separate blue whale call (Sousa and Harris 2015). Further analysis across a range of locations and years confirmed that this was likely to be a distinct song type, belonging to a blue whale population with migration patterns different from other known blue whales in the Indian Ocean (Leroy et al. 2021).

The suspected Omura's whale song was also initially suggested to be a potential blue whale call (Sousa and Harris 2015) due to its temporal and frequency characteristics. Cerchio et al. (2019) compared this call type with other calls from Omura's whales and concluded that it was likely produced by the Omura's whale. These findings indicate that scientific discoveries are still evolving in the Indian Ocean, driven by these recordings from the Chagos Archipelago.

So what's next for learning about whales around the Chagos Archipelago? Sightings and acoustic data will continue to be collected by the Wildlife Observers until the conclusion of the Bertarelli Foundation project in 2026. Meanwhile, the CTBTO IMS continues to gather more information about the seasonal patterns of the detected whale sounds, and on changes in the frequency of the song types. Additional projects funded by the US Navy's Office of Naval Research and the Living Marine Resources Program, and the Richard

Surfacing blue whale (*B. m. indica*) © Asha de Vos

Lounsbery Foundation, are using the directional data from the IMS site at Diego Garcia to map where singing blue and fin whales are likely to be located and to estimate population sizes.

Given the diversity of species and song types recorded by the CTBTO IMS and the size of the dataset, there are likely to be many new discoveries about these ocean giants in the coming years.

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Rewilding Peros Banhos in the Chagos Archipelago

By Pete Haverson, *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs* Programme Manager, Chagos Conservation Trust

Kew Gardens' botanists Grace Flanagan (left) and Clare Drinkell (right) enter digital data © Dr Peter Leatt

In September 2025, Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) was awarded nearly £1 million in funding for their *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs* programme from the UK Government's Biodiversity Challenge Fund under the Darwin Plus and Local scheme. The Darwin Plus award was given to complete Phase I of the programme: the rewilding of four islands in the northeast of Peros Banhos – Île Manoel, Moresby Island, Île de pass and Île YeYe. If the invasive species eradication is a success, this will create the longest chain of predator-free islands in the region, covering 145 hectares.

This was not an easy task. The vegetation on these islands consists of an area of mangroves (Moresby) with areas of dense vegetation, including mixed broadleaf, coconut palm, pisonia woodland, pemphis scrub, and scaevola. This diverse tree vegetation provides ideal habitat for invasive black rats (*Rattus Rattus*, also known as 'ship rats'). Phase I of the nature restoration project is dedicated to the removal of these rats, which impact many aspects of the islands' ecological balance, praying upon crabs, insects, nesting sea birds, fruits and seeds. Tropical islands without rats, and a healthy sea bird population, create a healthy ecosystem through the release of nutrients from guano (poo) into the environment, which also contributes to coral reef health.

The first month-long, 12-person expedition to complete this work is now safely back on land, having successfully used drones to aerially distribute poisoned bait, dropping it into the tree canopy for the rats to consume. The programme funding supports not only invasive species eradication, but also the collection of ecological data over a three-year period to monitor the islands' recovery. This is just the initial phase in the overall goal of rewilding, further large-scale vegetation management across all four islands will be needed to reestablish the necessary habitat for nesting sea birds.

Why use drones?

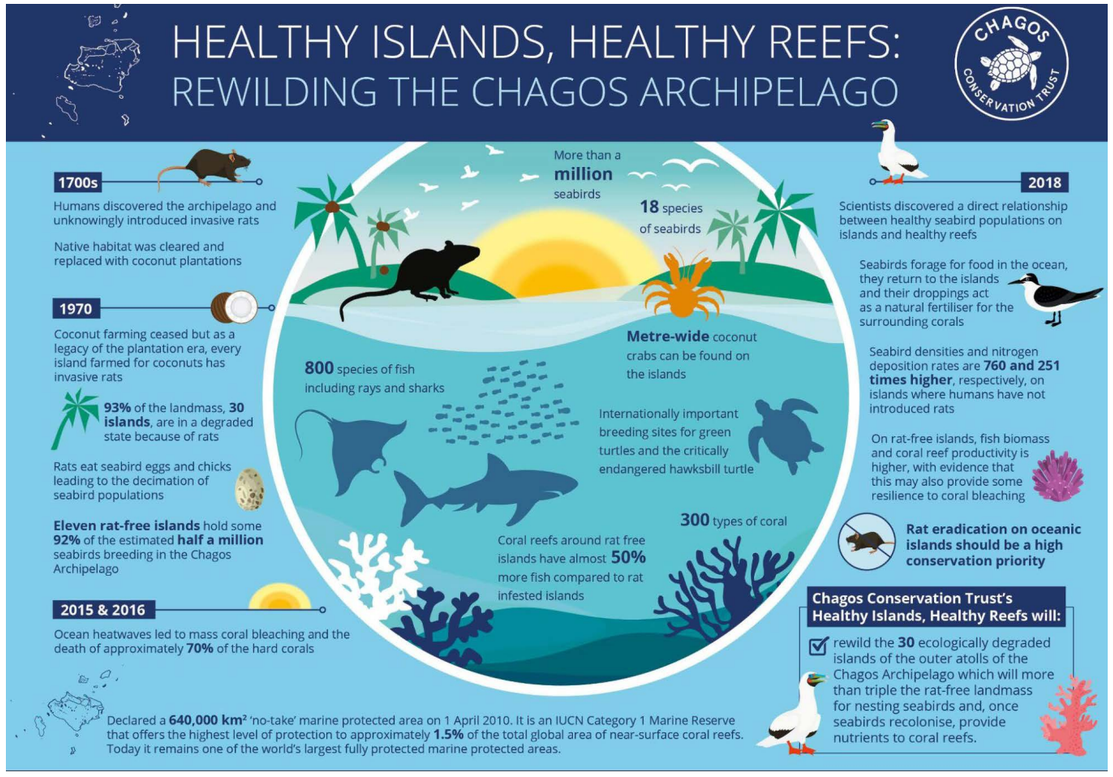
Rat eradication initiatives represent the most common projects targeting invasive species worldwide. Numerous globally significant eradication projects have been undertaken in recent years, with continuous advancements in methods and technology supporting these efforts.

The most common method of eradication is the ground-based deployment of poison bait. Bait is evenly distributed across an area using a grid system, and is delivered either via strategic bait points using bait stations, or through blanket hand broadcast. Both methods often require extensive vegetation cutting to make a grid system that can be accessed on foot. One example of a ground-based bait deployment was the attempted eradication on Eagle Island in 2006.

However, this eradication methodology is labour intensive and unsuitable for difficult and mountainous terrains.

More recently, large-scale operations covering many thousands of hectares or areas of difficult terrain have relied on helicopters to distribute bait using a slung spreading system. But helicopters

The team © Captain Donald Macdonald



Background to CCT's *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs* programme

CCT's *Healthy Island, Healthy Reefs* programme started five years ago, with the aim of rewilding degraded islands to boost the survival of their seabird populations whose guano (poo) will help support coral reef and fish stock health. See the infographic above and read about the programme here.

Before funding for this three-year project made this expedition possible, there was a three-year research and development stage which involved:

Building a team of experts that, under the leadership of previous *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs* Programme Manager Dr Pete Carr, prepared the implementation phase on how to eradicate rats from 30 islands and enable the restoration of native habitat. This included a Vegetation Management and Rat Eradication Plan.

Researching the knowledge gaps identified during the feasibility study.

Investigating new technologies (like drones and environmental DNA) that will help monitor biodiversity recovery and ensure rats do not recolonise the islands.

Read about this work in previous issues of Chagos News here, here and here.

Team members (left to right): Grace Flanagan, Rachel Jones, Adam Sharp and Claire Drinkell, pausing for a brief break © Dr Peter Leatt

are very expensive and present different and logistical complexities, such as finding suitable ships with helipads, experienced pilots and the difficulties of working in remote locations without adequate support.

It is only through the development of drone technology that smaller-scale aerial eradication projects have become operationally and financially viable. Drones capable of precisely and evenly spreading fertiliser across farm land were initially developed by the agriculture industry. With only minor adjustments, this system has been adapted for poison bait application.

Working with a New Zealand based company, Provision, the Rewilding Peros Banhos project will use two T100 heavy-lift drones. These drones can lift up to 100kg, known as the payload, and when fitted out with a bait spreader, can precisely and evenly distribute a set amount of bait per hectare. Bait is specially formulated for aerial broadcast (Pestoff 20R™, Orillion NZ). Previous feasibility studies and bait trials carried out on the islands have shown that only rats are directly affected by this bait, making it safe to use on the islands inhabited by crabs, insects and birds.

Ecology monitoring

As part of the Darwin Plus funding requirements, a set of indicators is needed to justify and measure the project's success. To collect these data, scientists with specialist expertise in birds, crabs, insects, plants and, of course, the rats themselves, are required.

The primary indicator for this project over the three-year period is bird census data, which will reveal nesting success in the presence and absence of rats. But the numbers and diversity of crabs and insects will also be measured over time. Furthermore, plants which are impacted by rats through predation on seeds and fruits, will also be carefully monitored.

Finally, rat tail samples are needed from each island for DNA analysis. This will enable CCT to determine the initial origin of the rats and will also be used to check against any rats found (hopefully not) when the island is surveyed in years two and three. These data will be added to a global rat DNA database. If any rats are found on the islands in the future, the DNA can be compared against the database to determine whether it matches the original rat population – indicating the eradication had failed; if different, it proves reintroduction and the likely source.

The November 2025 CCT expedition

The science team that made up the recently returned CCT expedition arrived in Malé in early November 2025 to board the British Indian Ocean Territories' Administration patrol vessel, *Grampian Endurance*, to conduct the eradication. The team were: Rachel Jones (Zoological Society of London), Dr Grant Harper, a rat eradication expert, botanists Clare Drinkwell and Grace Flannigan (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew), ornithologist Nia Stephens, entomologist Dr Adam Sharp, drone operatives Khan Adam, Alastair Petch, and Andy Bourne (Provision), the expedition doctor Peter Leatt, and myself as the project lead. Also accompanying the team was Chris Robson, who was carrying out his two-month rotation as a marine observer for Plymouth University.

Due to a rather indirect route to Malé and delay in leaving New Zealand, the shipping container carrying the rat bait and drones had not yet reached the Maldives by the time the expedition team arrived. However, the delay was not wasted time, as the team began baseline data collection and mapping of Île de Passe, Moresby Island, Île Manoel and Île YeYe. This initial mapping allowed the ship's captain, Donald McDonald, and drone team leader, Khan Adam, time to work out strategic positioning of the ship to minimise drone flight time and offer a stable launch and landing platform for the operation. This proved critical for optimising drone deployment.

The science team also accessed each island by small boat to carry out bird surveys, crab transects, plant surveys and specimen collection, as well as setting insect monitoring systems and camera traps for crab activity. They were extremely fortunate to have the Senior Fisheries Protection Officer Marion Bourasseau on the ship during the expedition, whose boat-handling skills and knowledge of accessing the islands safely were invaluable to the success of the project.

Once the container with equipment arrived in Malé, the team returned to pick it up, before finally departing on 19 November 2025 for the long-anticipated eradication work. The whole project team, including the ship's crew, worked together to support the drone operators in flying and loading the drones. Like a Formula 1 pit crew, the team performed orchestrated landing onto the ship, battery change, bait loading and relaunch. Without the support and assistance of the captain and whole crew, this would not have been possible.

The distance of the ship from the island determined the drone payload, set against flight time and battery life. This was constantly monitored until a sweet spot of around 70kg was adopted. The drones, fitted with LIDAR (light detection and range) sensors, were able to automatically avoid objects such as birds or trees. This prevented bird strikes on several occasions, which is critical when flying in areas with a high number of sea birds, which CCT are trying to conserve!

Over a period of three days, all four islands were successfully treated with the first round of baiting. The drones flew on set flight patterns, dropping bait above the canopy, where it was either caught in the tops of the coconut palms or fell to the island floor. The eradication plan is based on proven application techniques involving two bait drops with an interval between applications. The first application used 35kg/hectare, followed by a six-day break and a second application of 25Kg/hectare. The second application allowed for any rats that did not eat bait from the initial drop to access a fresh supply. Some areas of the islands also required bait application by hand using bait bolas. Bolas are wax bait blocks tied with string, which can be suspended from trees above areas of high crab activity or areas of water such as the mangroves on Moresby.

What's next?

The first expedition of the two *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs* Darwin Local funded projects (looking at invasive species on the largest Chagos island of Diego Garcia) will take place in March 2026. The science team for the Darwin Plus project will return to the islands to monitor and compare indicators against baseline data established during the eradication expedition, around November 2026. All being well, it should confirm the successful removal of rats, and the islands will begin to show signs of recovery. But the rat's removal is only one step in the regeneration of island ecology, and is the foundation for the next phase – vegetation management and rewilding Peros Banhos.

Acknowledgements

The Chagos Conservation Trust would like to thank the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' Biodiversity Challenge Funds and its Darwin Initiative, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's British Indian Ocean Territory Administration, plus project partners, including the Zoological Society of London, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Provision, Biodiversity Restoration Specialists (BRS), and Orion.

Diving in Danger Island, Great Chagos Bank © Jon Slayer

My Reflections on Three Years in the British Indian Ocean Territory

By George Balcombe, (former) Senior Environment Officer, BIOT Administration

I doubt anyone reading this article needs convincing of how important the environment of the Chagos Archipelago is. We often frame that importance as a justification for our conservation efforts – but perhaps that importance speaks for itself. Arriving armed with some background knowledge and an in-built appreciation of the natural world, it is unsurprising that I was struck by the territory's beauty and complexity when I started my role as the BIOT Administration's Senior Environment Officer three years ago.

During my time in the role, I am yet to meet a single person who has not been moved by the natural beauty of the Chagos Archipelago. The fact that the islands evoke such an emotional response is a reason to be hopeful for the environment's future. Most people will never visit these islands, so the work by groups like the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT), to champion the conservation cause, is essential – but the power of nature in the Chagos to argue its own case should not be underestimated.

The illusion of isolation

The Chagos Archipelago often feels like the definition of remoteness: thousands of miles from major population centres, surrounded by open ocean. But that isolation is, in many ways, an illusion. Every tide brings reminders of the wider world: plastic debris washes up on beaches, carried across oceans by currents. Illegal fishing vessels travel hundreds of miles from India and Sri Lanka, drawn by the richness of these waters. And current issues like climate change reach even here, influencing coral bleaching and shifting ecosystems.

The Marine Protected Area is vast – one of the largest in the world – and we should be rightly proud of that, but the forces acting on the territory are larger still. Protecting this place is not just about what happens inside its boundaries, it's about recognising that these islands and waters are connected to global systems, and their future depends on choices made far beyond these shores.

Meeting challenges with collaboration

Working in the Chagos Archipelago has been a privilege, but it has often been challenging. The remoteness that makes these islands special also makes working here complex. Logistics can be difficult, and balancing environmental priorities with operational needs requires constant negotiation.

If there is one lesson I have taken from this experience, it is that collaboration is everything. Protecting somewhere like this is not something any one organisation can do alone; it takes the BIOT Administration, scientists, NGOs, funders, and military contingents all pulling in the same direction. The recent CCT-led initiative to eradicate rats from the islands in northern Peros Banhos (see expedition article pp.25–29) is a fantastic example of what is possible when that happens.

Alongside the wildlife and the place itself, one of the things I have valued most about this job is working alongside people from completely different walks of life, all united by the fact that they care deeply about this place – the Chagos Archipelago.

Doing a lot with a little

One of the realities of working here is the sheer scale of the task. Our core environment team has never been more than three people – sometimes fewer. Working with scientists has been a highlight of the job, but day-to-day we fulfil responsibilities familiar to civilian governments everywhere: everything from reviewing planning applications and reading water quality reports, to setting policy for the enforcement of fisheries legislation. In many cases, the BIOT Environment Team calls on the support of the wider Administration, including the BIOT Police and Customs and Immigration Officers, and of course the Senior Fisheries Protection Officer and crew of the British Patrol Vessel. Even so, it is a big job for a small team and a single patrol vessel.

Those constraints demand tough choices. Where the BIOT Administration has been strongest is in focusing on the things only it can do – such as governance and enforcement – and allocating resources where they will have the greatest impact. Every decision, from patrol schedules to funding priorities, has to be made with that principle in mind. That forms the foundation that enables our partners, like the CCT and the Zoological Society of London, to do the things that only they can do and deliver the wider conservation and research work that helps inform the Administration's approach.

As I step away from this role, I feel proud of what has been achieved over the past three years. I have been endlessly impressed by the tireless work that goes into understanding and protecting this territory's environment. Amid the rush to tie up loose ends and prepare for my successor, I managed to spend a few quiet moments during my last week on Diego Garcia visiting some favourite spots. Watching hundreds of seabirds wheeling overhead, seeing dolphins playing on bow waves in the lagoon, and marvelling at the sheer abundance and diversity of life on the reefs reminded me of the bigger picture – and why so many people are willing to work so hard for this place.

The Chagos islands have a way of leaving their mark. I have learnt a lot over the past three years, and while much of it seems hyper-specific to a remote archipelago in the Indian Ocean, the lessons are far broader. The archipelago may be unique, but the success of science and conservation here offers insights that matter the world over. I am grateful to have played a small part in that success – and even more grateful to those, like CCT and its membership, who will continue to promote the cause in the years ahead.

The Chagos Archipelago is a rare haven of beautiful reefs, diverse wildlife and clean waters, located in the midst of the Indian Ocean. The Chagos Conservation Trust is the only UK-based charity dedicated to protecting and conserving it.

For more information, visit **chagos-trust.org**

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