

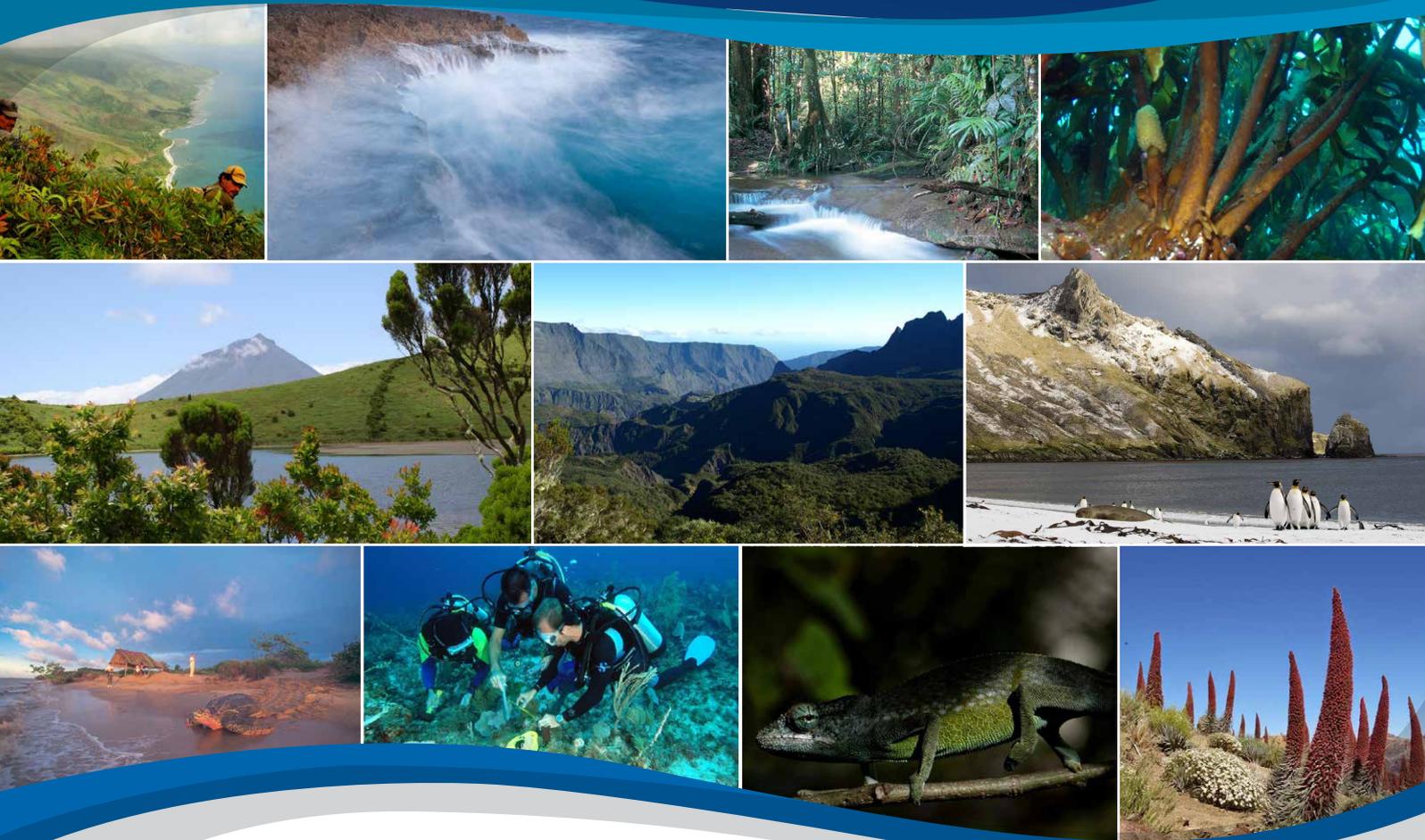
BEST

VOLUNTARY SCHEME FOR BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES IN TERRITORIES OF EUROPEAN OVERSEAS



BEST Newsletter 01

05/2015



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FOREWORD

The EU's BEST Initiative

A European initiative for supporting the preservation of critically important biodiversity



Dear Colleagues, dear Readers,

It is my pleasure to introduce the first newsletter of the European Union's (EU) BEST Initiative! Take a tour around the world, and discover aspects of Europe's incredible natural heritage you might not have been aware of, meet the people who are working hard at supporting its preservation in close collaboration with local authorities and stakeholders, and learn about efforts which are valuable examples of good practices for conservation and sustainable use.

To start your journey, here is some background on the **EU's BEST Initiative**¹ which is actually a tangible follow-up to the "Message from Reunion Island", the outcome document of the conference "The European Union and its Overseas Entities: Strategies to counter Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss" held in La Réunion in 2008. This message strongly advocated for a dedicated mechanism to support activities for biodiversity of the EU's Outermost Regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs). Thanks to the engagement and support of MEP (Member of the European Parliament) M. Maurice Ponga, the **BEST Preparatory Action** was launched providing seed money of a total 6 million € managed by the European Commission. From its beginning BEST has been showing how important dialogue between local stakeholders and the European institutions is and how collaboration can support creative solutions to better address the needs on the ground.

Having as an objective the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the ORs and OCTs, including ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation, the BEST Preparatory Action, in its first two years, allowed the funding of 16 projects through two open calls for proposals, BEST-2011 and BEST-2012. A first partnership with the French Development Aid Agency (AfD) provided an additional support of 800,000 € to fund two reserve list projects and the work towards a sustainable scheme. These **BEST projects** were implemented by a variety of grantees, including local NGOs, research institutes, regional and international organisations. They supported the designation and management of terrestrial and marine protected areas, the control of invasive alien species, partnerships to use ecosystem-based approaches for climate change adaptation and mitigation, the valuation of ecosystem services as well as knowledge, outreach and capacity building. Discover four BEST projects in this newsletter and see the progress they have made.

The final phase of the BEST Preparatory Action is being implemented through the **BEST III Consortium**. It shall create the critical mass to achieve the transition towards a sustainable partnership which will allow swift and easy access to funding for the activities needed to achieve BEST objectives. The BEST III Consortium with its coordination team and 7 regional knowledge hubs – Amazonia, Caribbean, Indian Ocean, Macaronesia, Pacific, Polar/Subpolar and South Atlantic – is developing regional ecosystem profiles and BEST strategies aiming to inform investment plans, attract financing and trigger implementation. The participative process implies a review of the status of threatened species and ecosystems to help define Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and priorities for actions in consultation with local stakeholders and experts. Please visit the [dedicated website](#) as well and read on for updates from the hubs on their work and meet two of the BEST teams.

In 2014, the [Message from Guadeloupe](#) called for a sustainable partnership dedicated to biodiversity, building on the BEST Preparatory Action. A group should be convened utilising the support of the political leaders of the ORs and OCTs with the mandate to set up this voluntary partnership, including representatives of ORs, OCTs, Member States, the European Commission, European Parliament, European investment and development banks and civil society.

In the meantime from 2015 onwards the **BEST 2.0 Programme** (total budget 8 million €), which is part of the EU Biodiversity for Life (B4Life) flagship, will provide funding and capacity building for small-scale and medium-scale field actions in EU Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs). It aims at supporting the BEST Preparatory Action objectives as well as the priority areas of actions set out in the Overseas Association Decision (OAD), the local strategies and the regional ecosystem profiles.

To be continued! I wish you an enjoyable first journey and reading!

Karin Zaunberger,
Policy officer DG ENV Biodiversity Unit, European Commission

¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/best>

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE REGIONS

Pacific

French Polynesia: Kicking off BEST III with success!

The public meeting to launch the BEST III project in French Polynesia and the Pitcairn Islands was held in Papeete, on 27 January 2015. It attracted close to 60 participants, some having travelled to Tahiti from quite distant islands.

This first meeting's objective was to bring together all the stakeholders involved in local conservation, to present BEST and start the consultation process - the base of the BEST III process.



La Dépêche newspaper article on the meeting

The Minister of the environment, M. MAAMAATUAIAHUTAPU, officially opened the meeting with a speech welcoming the BEST III project. He invited attendees to participate in the development of the ecosystem profiles, stating 'The biodiversity of French Polynesia is the responsibility of all'.



Opening speech by the Minister of the Environment for French Polynesia © Jean KAPE

During the follow-up discussions, representatives of the local associations voiced their support for the BEST 2.0 grant programme. They emphasized their need for and the benefit they will get from the coaching opportunities offered by the programme, specifically to develop project proposals.



About 60 people attended, representing government, research institutions and civil society © Jean KAPE

The meeting reached a wide audience thanks to local media coverage on radio and TV, as well as articles in the press. Click on the links below to hear interviews of the coordinator of the BEST III project for French Polynesia and Pitcairn.

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USEFUL LINKS

Press conference on radio

Press article

TV recording (at about minute 20)

Web pages of the region

Pacific

Wallis and Futuna: the authorities welcome BEST III

The West Pacific hub team had the privilege of meeting with representatives of the Territorial Assembly of Wallis and Futuna and the Territorial Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development. They presented the BEST III project, discussed the first key biodiversity areas identified and explained the BEST 2.0 grant programme with the Senator, the King's Ministers, the Deputy, the Prefect and the Heads of services.

The preliminary results of the ecosystem profiles were received with great interest and all participants engaged in the discussions. These highly productive meetings helped

refine the identified key biodiversity areas, notably estuaries, coastal forests and sea turtles' nesting grounds. The authorities were very interested in the opportunities offered by the future funding mechanism of BEST to support biodiversity conservation projects and ecosystem services valuation.



Reunion of the Conseil Territorial de l'Environnement with representatives of Wallis and Futuna's parliament, the President of the Assemblée territoriale and the ministers of the King of Uvea. ©Aurélie Bocquet

These meetings are the beginning of the consultation process during which local stakeholders will define which concrete measures should be included in the regional environmental investment strategy. The BEST initiative strives to be anchored in the local context, ensuring that long-term conservation strategies meet the needs and that future financial support is targeted adequately.

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USEFUL LINKS
Region's webpages

Macaronesia

BEST partners' efforts help inform and update the global listing process

Defining what to conserve and why it is of major importance is key in the process of ecosystem profiling. Within the BEST III project, this is done through the identification of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) of global importance in the EU overseas regions, based in part on the conservation status of target species on IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species.

The IUCN's Red List is widely recognized as a fundamental tool for species conservation and management policies but it is an iterative process: listing status are regularly reviewed and updated thanks to the latest information provided. Updates are needed to reflect the most recent taxonomic changes and conservation status assessments resulting from state-of-the-art scientific research. These updates are important when gaps in the information available in the Red List are identified.

Thanks to the participative process of the ecosystem profile, two examples of gaps were brought to the attention of the BEST III Macaronesian hub team. The first one, an aquatic fern (*Marsilea azorica*) presumed endemic to the Azores in 1983 and listed as critically endangered in the Red List, is nowadays known to be a misidentification of an introduced Australian species. The second one is a perennial evergreen shrub endemic to the Azores (*Euphorbia stygiana*): listed as

critically endangered for being restricted to a population of 50-60 individuals on a particular island. However, this assessment in fact refers to one of its subspecies, while another subspecies has a population of 30,000-40,000 specimens and is widespread throughout the archipelago, a situation known by local botanists for some time but not reflected yet in the listing status. With these gaps identified through the consultation process, the Macaronesian hub is now in touch with the IUCN Red List team to provide all the current information for the next update.

The BEST regional hubs are definitely ideally placed to facilitate the communication between the Red List team and local researchers, and efforts are underway to facilitate Red List updates. Such facilitation process supports biodiversity conservation in



Marsilea azorica (Conservatoire botanique national de Brest, France). © Jeffdelong



Euphorbia stygiana (Botanical specimen in the Botanischer Garten, Frankfurt am Main) © Daderot

Europe's overseas territories and shows the value of the BEST teams' work with the local biodiversity experts. Thanks to the review of species listing status done for the BEST regional strategies, the knowledge of EU overseas biodiversity experts, notably their expertise with endemic species, is contributing to the global listing process.

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USEFUL LINKS
From European Priority Species to Invasive Weed
Systematic revision of *Platanthera* in the Azorean archipelago
Adapting the IUCN Red List criteria for invertebrates
The underrepresentation and misrepresentation of invertebrates in the IUCN Red List
Systematics and Biodiversity
Region's webpage
Macaronesia hub website

Caribbean

Did you know that the Caribbean has nearly half of the 34 overseas entities of the European Union?

The Wider Caribbean includes 37 independent states and territories, including 15 territories and regions of the European Overseas: Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Martin, St. Barthelemy attached to France, Saba, St Eustatius, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Curacao and Aruba are attached to the Netherlands, while Montserrat, Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos and the Cayman Islands are attached to Britain.



Aruban Burrowing Owl, *Athene cucularia*
© Christian Köning SHAPE Photography

It is therefore across multiple borders, in several languages and with a variety of cultures and administrative systems that the Caribbean hub team of the BEST III Consortium is working. From a biodiversity perspective, the task seems daunting as well. Like the other regions where European Overseas entities are located, the Caribbean hosts an extraordinary biodiversity with a high rate of endemic species due to their insularity. Some figures speak for themselves: 11,000 native species of seed



St Barthelemy islets © Amandine Vaslet

plants (of which 72% are endemic), 520 species of native reptiles (95% are endemic), 564 species of birds, 25 genera of corals, 633 species of molluscs and 30 species of marine mammals (CEPF, 2010)! This chain of islands is also a unique ecological corridor for migratory species such as humpback whales.

Like its counterparts in other regions the team of the BEST III Caribbean hub is developing an ecosystem profile identifying all key areas for biodiversity in the region's EU overseas entities. Based on a broad consultation process with local stakeholders, threatened species and ecosystems will be identified and mapped, and a specific strategy of investments for the overseas territories and regions suggested.

The work of BEST III will help guide the investments needed to put in place concrete actions preserving biodiversity at the local and regional level in this Caribbean part of Europe. This work is all the more important now with the recognition that the economy of these

islands (tourism, agriculture, and fisheries) relies heavily on the health of the ecosystems. For example, it is estimated that 90% of the tourism industry on Anguilla depends on healthy ecosystems and 70% of Bonaire's private sector on well-preserved coral reefs.

Habitat degradation, invasive alien species, pollution generated by human activities and climate change impacts, all greatly threaten this natural heritage. According to the 2010 analysis, the Caribbean is undeniably one of the global biodiversity hotspots, harbouring a large number of species at risk of extinction; in fact, more than 700.

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USEFUL LINKS
Region's webpages
Caribbean hub webpages



Poster BEST III Caribbean region

The 'Amazonian jungle'-Yes, it is a European ecosystem!

The majority of continental Europeans are hardly aware that the Amazon forest is part of their natural heritage and only have rather superficial knowledge of this ecosystem. Yet this primary forest, the largest on Earth and its biggest reservoir of terrestrial biodiversity, fascinates the world.

The team of the BEST III Amazonia regional hub (French Guiana) promotes research work on this ecosystem that is still largely preserved. For example, between 2006 and 2012, the National Forestry Office and its partners conducted a [research programme](#) to define forest habitats on a scale that would better take into consideration the biodiversity. Indeed, despite its homogeneous appearance, this forest actually hosts a variety of habitats that are difficult to assess over such a vast area.



© Roger Leguen / WWF-Canon

To represent this variability, 26 sites were selected across the country and the geomorphological and climatic conditions of the study areas were precisely described in terms of flora (trees and palms canopy, undergrowth flora), fauna (hunted large mammals and birds) and soil. The developed database includes an inventory of about 110,000 trees, mapping of 9,361 undergrowth plants, 408 soil samplings and 30 surveys of large animals (including 22 non-hunted sites).

The results permitted to define the profiles of 13 types of landscapes useful for predicting species diversity. The forests of the high plateau seem more likely to harbour deer and peccaries, while tall forests on higher ridges favor the presence of spider monkeys.

Such data help define the types and scale of habitats important for species. They offer a sound scientific base for the discussions with the local stakeholders on the areas that should be protected to preserve the biodiversity of the European Amazon. This approach also helps overcome the limitations of an evaluation based only on Red List species when data on these species is missing or hard to collect.

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USEFUL LINKS
Amazonia region webpages

Do you know the 'panda dolphin'?

A need for more research about a unique species: the Commerson's dolphin.

The Commerson's dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus commersonii*), commonly known as panda or skunk dolphin, is one of the most unique species in the world in terms of distribution. While the majority of the population is found in the austral waters of South America and the Falkland Islands, another population was identified in the 1950s around the Kerguelen Islands (French Southern Territories - Southern Indian Ocean).



The Commerson's dolphin © Paul Tixier



Distribution map for the Commerson's dolphin

This geographical separation of more than 7,000 km is accompanied by a marked genetic divergence, leading scientists to recognize them as two distinct subspecies (in 2007), one endemic to the waters around the Kerguelen Islands. The species lives in shallow, coastal waters (fjord type of habitat) which increases the risk of incidental capture in fishing nets - as seen in Argentina for example - and has very low population numbers, making it particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change on the availability of its prey. While the species is currently listed as data deficient (DD) on the Global IUCN Red List, the subspecies endemic to the Kerguelen Islands was recently ranked as endangered (EN) on the Regional Red List of French Southern and Antarctic Lands (TAAF).

The dolphin is now protected from the risks of accidental capture by a net fishing ban in the coastal waters of Kerguelen, promoting healthy fish stocks at the same time. The protection measures to prevent the decline of this dolphin and other species deserve attention in the ecosystem profile for the sub-region Antarctic/sub-Antarctic developed through the BEST III Consortium.

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USEFUL LINKS
Polar/subpolar region webpages

The Biodiversity Strategy of Mayotte:

Making a point in protecting and promoting ecological wealth

The French territory of Mayotte in the Southwest Indian Ocean – the newest Outermost Region of the European Union (since 1 January 2014) - is rich in natural resources, both terrestrial and marine. Despite its important ecological value, conservation frameworks and actions are still lacking, and the island's biodiversity is threatened by rapid development and many socio-economic challenges.

Since 2012, the French Committee of IUCN conducted participatory [diagnostic work on environmental issues](#) and strategic planning efforts that resulted in a [Biodiversity Strategy for the Sustainable Development of](#)



Zosterops mayottensis – Mayotte White-eye (endemic) © Johannes Chambon

Mayotte. This paper aims to better reconcile conservation and development and has been validated by a wide range of local stakeholders. It identifies such needs as the inclusion of biodiversity protection in the key sectors of agriculture, fisheries and tourism, as well as the improvement of tools like the designation or management of protected areas. Moreover, it outlines a plan for operational actions.

The implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy is proving difficult, notably because of the very limited financial resources that stakeholders working on environmental

issues in Mayotte must share. Furthermore, other environmental challenges are perceived as more pressing (waste management, sanitation, energy ...), and biodiversity conservation is not prioritized, despite the fact that this valuable resource of the island could be promoted for the benefit of all.

The work of the BEST III Consortium will help to develop a targeted investments strategy to guide national and European financial support towards Mayotte's sustainable development and to facilitate a better implementation of the conservation actions identified as priorities for the region.

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USEFUL LINKS

Indian Ocean region webpages

MEET BEST TEAMS AND PARTNERS

The team of the South Atlantic regional hub

The South Atlantic hub is in charge of coordinating the BEST III project for four territories: Ascension Island, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and the Falkland Islands. A challenge for the team is the remoteness of the South Atlantic territories where access is not always straightforward. Entry to Ascension Island is only possible either by UK RAF military flights or by boat from Cape Town, South Africa. Access to St Helena is currently only possible by boat, which must be boarded either from Cape Town or from Ascension Island. Even more difficult is getting to Tristan da Cunha: also accessible by boat only and with a single vessel from Cape Town, the MV Edinburgh, guaranteeing that you will be able to land on the island. However, as of this date, there are no berths available on this vessel for visitors until 2016. All spaces will be occupied by Tristan da Cunha residents who are being transported on and off the island, mostly for medical reasons.



©Deborah Davidson



©Maria Taylor



©David Blockley

Dr Paul Brickle (far left: sorting samples after a dive in Ascension Island) is the hub coordinator and the director of the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI) based in the Falkland Islands with many years of experience working across the South Atlantic all the way from the tropics of Ascension Island to the polar climes of South Georgia. He has a keen interest in the reproductive biology, age, growth, population dynamics and the population structure of marine species inhabiting the southern Patagonian Shelf. Due to his experience, he is also an expert for the southern part of the Polar and Sub-polar hub.

Dr Megan Tierney, hub expert, (being checked out by some rockhopper penguins whilst checking them for tracking tags) is highly experienced at working in the Southern Ocean and specialises in marine higher predators. She previously worked for Australian Antarctic Division looking at minimising the impact of environmental change and resource exploitation on the Southern Ocean ecosystem. In 2010 she joined the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) – the biodiversity assessment and policy support arm of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) - looking at development of biodiversity and ecosystem services indicators that have been used to assess global biodiversity loss.

Maria Taylor (pictured while being introduced to some female elephant seals) is an ecologist focusing on the development of the ecosystem profile for BEST III in the South Atlantic hub. She previously worked on Ascension Island within the government conservation department involved with a variety of organisms, including seabirds, land crabs and green turtles.

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USEFUL LINKS

South Atlantic region webpages

The team had already some good news to report on as in July 2014, Ascension Island announced six new legislated nature reserves, one bird sanctuary and an upgrade in the legal level of protection of the National Park, meaning 20% of the island's terrestrial area is now protected. They protect the three most important green turtle nesting beaches, four important seabird breeding areas and the whole of Green Mountain which contains all of Ascension's remaining endemic plant species.



South Atlantic

The Ascension Island Government Conservation Team



Local volunteer, Jacqui Ellick, returns a stranded turtle to the sea © Ascension Island Government Conservation Department

The UK Overseas Territory of Ascension Island is located almost halfway between South America and Africa. Created around one million years ago from an underwater volcano along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, it is a place of contrasts: from the barren volcanic landscape largely devoid of plant life around the coast, to the lush man-made cloud forest of Green Mountain. Ascension is geologically young and this, together with its isolation, results in its comparatively species-poor biodiversity. However, the degree of endemism is high, with at least 55 endemic species of plants, fish and invertebrates - terrestrial and marine. Ascension Island also supports the largest green turtle and seabird nesting colonies in the tropical South Atlantic.



Botanists from the Conservation Department carry out a plant census © Ascension Island Government Conservation Department

Biodiversity conservation efforts on Ascension Island were formally initiated in 2001 when the Foreign and Commonwealth Office funded a Seabird Restoration Project that was managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). That same year, Ascension Island Government (AIG) and the United Kingdom Government also signed an Environment Charter for Ascension with

the aim of conserving its natural heritage. The AIG Conservation Team has since established its identity on Ascension and has made steady progress in conserving and promoting the Island's unique biodiversity, notably by controlling the spread of alien invasive species. With project funding, visiting researchers, interns and volunteers, the Conservation Department fluctuates from 8 to 20 people.

Ascension Island Government is in the final stages of a Darwin Initiative-funded project to develop the Island's first Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), a 'road map' for advancing biodiversity conservation and environmental management. The plan is a 'living document' managed through a database which allows actions to be continuously updated, added to and reported against as progress is made and priorities shift. While the final touches are being put to the database, the profiles for priority species and habitats and their associated targets can be viewed online: www.ascension-island.gov.ac/government/conservation/projects/bap. AIG Conservation Department recently introduced an environment Research Permitting Scheme to ensure that research carried out by the Department and visiting researchers is conducted within a coordinated framework that prevents duplication, minimises environmental impact, and ensures that the knowledge generated is captured for the benefit of the Island, its people and its wildlife.

In 2014, AIG established a Fisheries Department to help ensure the sustainable and professional management of its

maritime zone. AIG has currently suspended the sale of commercial fishing licenses whilst they review the management options, working with island residents and overseas parties. A two year Darwin Initiative funded Ascension Island Marine Sustainability Project is underway to gather vital baseline data on species abundance and distribution, as well as research into the life history of key species. Habitat mapping, oceanographic research and fish tracking studies will help inform future management decisions, including the placement of protected areas as necessary.



Ascension Island Government Conservation Team 2015 © Ascension Island Government Conservation Department

For more details about our on-going projects please visit our website.

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USEFUL LINKS

<http://www.ascension-island.gov.ac/government/conservation/>
<http://www.south-atlantic-research.org/>

The team of the Macaronesian regional hub

The Macaronesian hub is responsible for coordinating the ecosystem profile for three European Outermost Regions in the northwest Atlantic: the archipelagoes of the Azores, Madeira (Portugal) and the Canaries (Spain). When the European colonizers arrived in the 15th century, the Portuguese islands were uninhabited but a native population of Berber origin occupied the Canary Islands. Today, with a population of about 2 million people, the Canary Islands are the most populated European overseas entity. They share with Madeira a population density of about 300 persons/km², whereas the Azores is about three times less densely populated. The region's economy is strongly specialized in the service sector, where tourism has a prominent role, particularly in the Canary Islands (more than 12 million visitors a year) and Madeira (nearly one million visitors in 2012). In the Azores, fisheries and agriculture remain relevant, the latter with great predominance of livestock and dairy production.

Because the Macaronesian archipelagoes were never attached to any continent, they display particularly high levels of endemic terrestrial animal and plant species. Their complex and long geological history enabled a mix of colonization and speciation events which led to the present blend of biological elements affiliated with those from the North Atlantic, the Mediterranean and Africa.



José Azevedo (working here in the context of a BEST-funded project) is the hub coordinator. He is a professor of Ichthyology and Marine Mammal Biology at the University of the Azores. Fishes were his first professional passion and he is proud to have described the only known endemic marine fish of the Azores, *Symphodus caeruleus*. Lately, he supervises PhD thesis on the ecology of cetaceans and keeps afloat the citizen-science [MONICET project](#), to collect and analyze observation data from whale-watching companies. Furthermore, he coordinates the [NetBiome-CSA](#) project, dedicated to strengthen research partnerships and cooperation for smart and sustainable management of tropical and subtropical biodiversity in Europe's Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories, a good synergy with BEST III.



Francisco Wallenstein Macedo (standing behind an endemic Azorean heath) graduated in Economics from the University of Lisbon in 1994 and in Biology from the University of the Azores in 2002. He earned his PhD in Marine Biology from the Heriot-Watt University in 2011. With 10 years' experience in scientific research on coastal ecosystems of the Azores, in 2012 he took a project officer position at the Regional Government of the Azores, first in the Fisheries Department and currently in the Science & Technology Department.



Luisa Madruga graduated in Economics with a Master's degree in Environmental Management and Policy, both from the New University of Lisbon. Luisa works as a scientific researcher and consultant on ecological economics for public institutions and private companies. Before joining the Macaronesian hub in June 2014, she worked for two years as project officer on green economy and TEEB (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity) for the UNEP-ROLAC (the regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Environment Programme) Brazil office. The breathtaking landscapes of Flores Island help Luisa cope with the hard work required from the ecosystem profile expert.

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USEFUL LINKS

Macaronesian Hub
Macaronesian geo portal



ACTIONS ON THE GROUND: UPDATES ON BEST PROJECTS

Project Coca Loca

Connectivity of loggerhead turtle populations in the Western Indian Ocean: implementation of local and regional management measures - COCA LOCA

COCA LOCA is a conservation project funded by the French Agency for Development (AFD) that aims to improve knowledge about the movements and population structure of loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) in the Western Indian Ocean. The objective is to identify migration corridors and connectivity that may exist between the turtles in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of Reunion Island and their main nesting sites in the region (South Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar and Oman).



A loggerhead turtle with a satellite tag comes to the surface to breathe © M. DALLEAU



Long line fisherman ready to go: the long line fishermen in Reunion Island engage in sea turtles conservation © M. DALLEAU

The knowledge gained will support the development of effective management and conservation measures both on a local scale, through the National Action Plan for Marine Turtles in the Indian Ocean, and at a regional scale, through the Regional Action Plan IOSEA (Indian Ocean - South East Asia).

In the area of Reunion Island, loggerhead turtles occur mostly offshore, where they feed on fish and jellyfish, and are unfortunately sometimes accidentally caught by longline fishermen. The COCA LOCA project has equipped fishing vessels with "rescue kits" that allow the safe release of turtles caught by the hooks. When the operation is too tricky, fishermen bring the turtles ashore, where the rescue centre for marine turtles - Kélonia - helps free the turtles. More than 22 rescued turtles were then

equipped with satellite tracking tags before being released in the ocean. The information collected to date indicates that most head towards Oman, a major nesting site of the species.

Thanks to the project's support, this collaboration between Kélonia and fishermen not only contributes to the study of the loggerhead turtles, but also protects them by limiting the impact of fishing and brings a new level of awareness among key stakeholders like the fishermen. Some fishermen end up participating in the release of the rescued turtles after having been invited to name them.

Now long-line fishermen of Reunion Island are no longer part of the threats to loggerhead turtles but solutions for their protection!

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USEFUL LINKS
www.kelonia.org
Project fact sheet

Mang: preserving coastal wetlands all together

Since 2014 a programme of actions is underway to strengthen the knowledge base, management and preservation of the coastal wetlands of the European Overseas entities, the Mang programme.

It aims to establish an operational "toolbox" with simple and standardized methods and protocols developed in consultation with wetland managers by the end of 2016. This will enable them to conduct ecological diagnosis, define management and preservation



Participants in the Mang workshop organized in December 2014 in Guadeloupe © Jessica Crillon, Impact Mer

objectives and develop a tracking process for their sites.

Since November, the environmental consultants' office 'Impact Mer' is conducting hydrological and ecological inventories at the pilot sites Mayotte, French Guiana, Saint Barthelemy, Guadeloupe and Martinique. To date, the first inventories and analyses are finished, and the second series of field surveys are underway. In total, three to four prospecting series will be conducted during the year to obtain data taking into account the wet and dry seasons. A reflection on standardized protocols and simplified management plans for these coastal wetlands of EU Overseas entities has been initiated since the beginning of April this year.

Alongside these inventories and brainstorming work, a training workshop was organized in Guadeloupe last December to familiarize managers with the functioning and issues faced by these wetlands. This workshop was a great success with 17 trainees in the Caribbean. Participants particularly appreciated the field trips which helped them understand how

various types of coastal wetlands function. A similar session for the Indian Ocean managers will be held in June 2015. This workshop is already fully booked!

To follow the progress of Mang, a project supported by AFD, check the website: [PROGRAMME MANG](#)



Red mangroves in Guadeloupe © Marie Windstein

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USEFUL LINKS
Mang website
Project fact sheet

Building capacity to rehabilitate Caribbean island biodiversity

The BEST project *Conserving Species and Sites of International Importance by the Eradication of Invasive Alien Species in the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories* enhances management of invasive species in the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories by addressing the issue of introduced rats impacting upon Caribbean wildlife. Introduced invasive species impact biodiversity, notably on islands where the wildlife has adapted to the lack of mammalian predators. Rats were introduced to the Caribbean islands with devastating results – many native species were driven to extinction or extirpated, or marginally survived on small rat-free islands.

Removing rats from islands is an effective way of allowing native biodiversity to re-colonise and flourish. Planning exercises have been undertaken to determine whether eradication



The Tobago Islands, BVI © Grant Harper

is feasible for the Prickly Pear Cays in Anguilla and the Tobago Islands in the British Virgin Islands (BVI). Early indications suggest that both territories are suitable for the removal of rats and are remote enough to minimise the possibility of re-invasion. The benefits of such eradication efforts to local biodiversity will be huge – as already seen with the rapid increase in both bird and reptile populations on Dog Island, Anguilla, which has been declared officially rat-free in 2014.

Part of this project involved adopting a best-practice methodology. A course on eradication methods was held in Anguilla hosted by the Anguilla National Trust (ANT),

allowing sharing of ideas between territories and organisations.

It is expected that the plans developed under this project will be used to implement activities to restore four internationally important islands for biodiversity.

To be thanked are all project partners and collaborators involved: RSPB, Animal and Plant Health Agency, ANT, BVI National Parks Trust, Jost van Dyke Preservation Society, National Trust for the Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos National Trust, Montserrat Government's Department of Environment and the European Commission.

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USEFUL LINKS
Project fact sheet

TEFRA:

Terrestrial Ecosystems of the Falklands – a Climate Change Risk Assessment

In May 2014, TEFRA project partners ran the first climate change workshop in the Falkland Islands. After presenting the latest research findings of the project, they worked with the invited participants to identify the potential impacts of climate change to the islands and which ones are of the highest priority locally.

The discussions engaged a very wide range of the Falkland Islands community, and included representatives from the Departments of Environmental Planning, Natural Resources and Public Works; Falklands Conservation; the farming community; local naturalists and ecological consultants; Members of the Legislative Assembly; Falkland Land Holdings; Falklands Wool; South Atlantic Research Institute; and members of the public.

Using a participatory process, the following potential impacts of climate change on both native and introduced plants and the key ecosystem services provided by the grasslands and soils of the Falklands were identified:

- Increased soil moisture deficits and drying
- Increased soil erosion
- Changes in invasive plants
- Range shifts—species losing or gaining

'climate niche'

- Agricultural intensification
- Habitat disturbance by extreme events (e.g. increased storminess, increased fire risk)

These assessments take into account the likely impacts on keystone as well as vulnerable species and habitats, and also the level of perceived urgency.

The impacts of climate change on agriculture - which depends on the ecosystem services provided by the plants and soils of the Falkland Islands - were assessed in more detail and the following issues were prioritized to be addressed:

- Increased soil erosion and run-offs risks due to more frequent high intensity rainfall events
- Increased water use by animals in dry periods
- Changes in water resources resulting in reduced availability for direct abstraction due to diminished recharge, leading to more frequent low flows and licence restrictions
- The need to increase national food security
- The responses of native grass species in pasture to predicted climate change effects

These priorities take into account likely economic, environmental and social impacts as well as the level of perceived urgency.

It is therefore clear that soil conservation is a major cross-cutting theme recognised as a

priority concern for both agriculture and the biodiversity on which it depends.

A review of the results of this prioritisation exercise in light of the available evidence base was used to produce draft risk assessments which were the subject of recent consultations in the Falkland Islands in March 2015. The climate change risk assessments for the Government of the Falkland Islands are now being finalized to be delivered as a major output of the TEFRA project.



Climate change workshop team; from left to right: Dr Colin Clubbe (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew), Dr David Doxford (Falklands Conservation), Professor Jim McAdam (UK Falkland Islands Trust), Nick Rendell (Falkland Islands Government) and Dr Rebecca Upson (Royal Botanic Garden, Kew) © Stacy Bragger

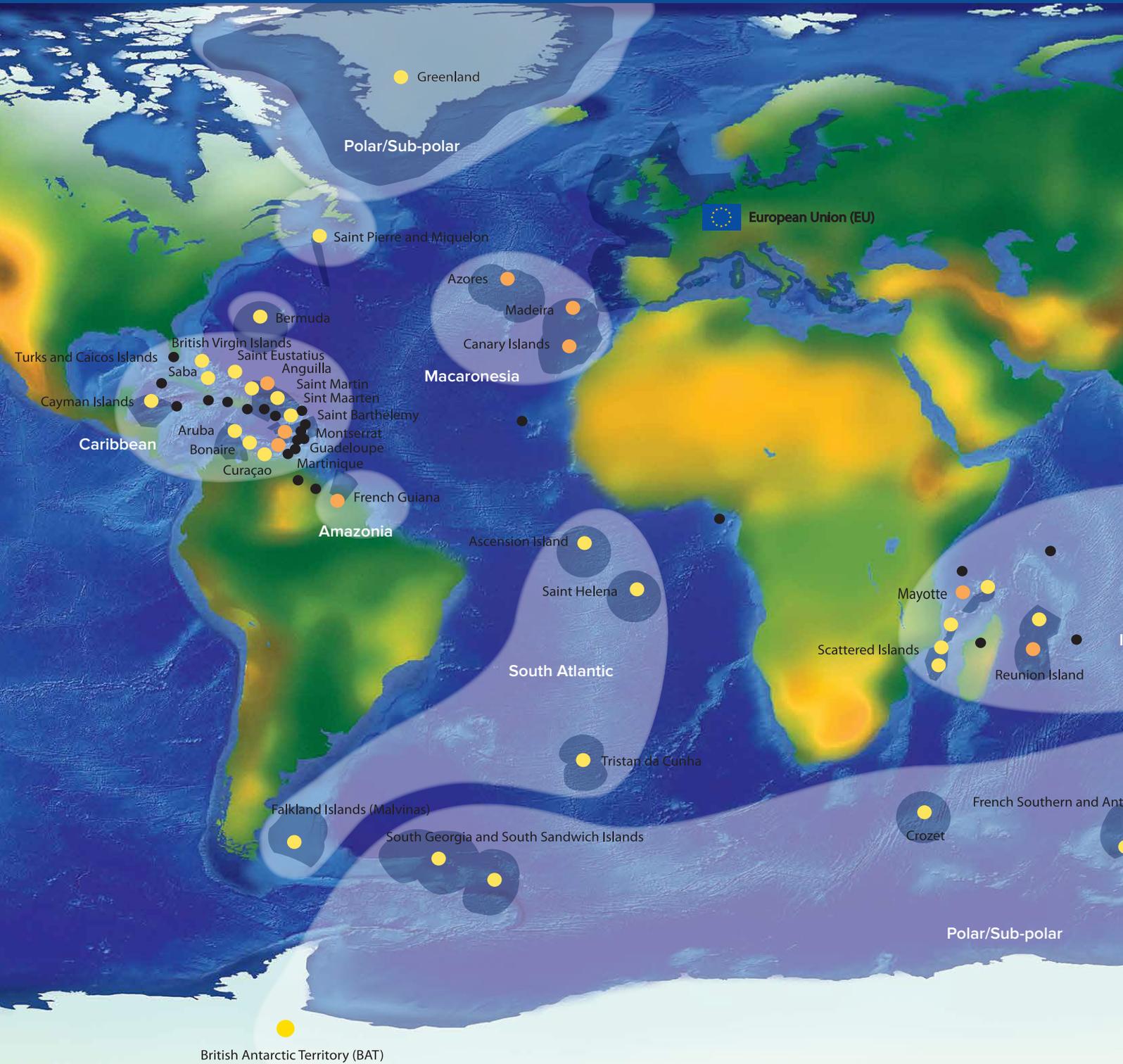
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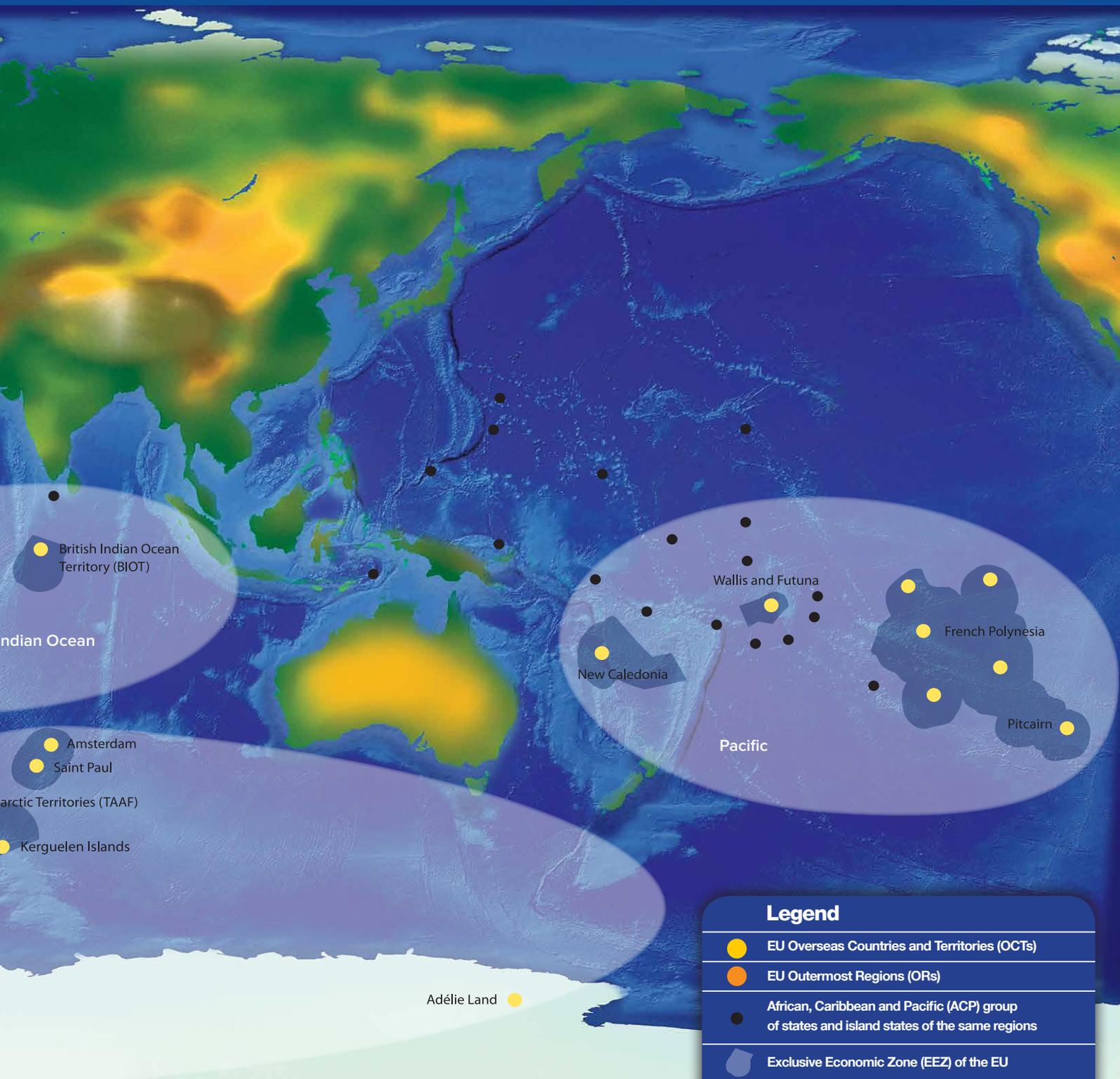
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USEFUL LINKS
Project fact sheet

BEST initiative scope

European Union Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories





BEST III CONSORTIUM WORKING TEAM

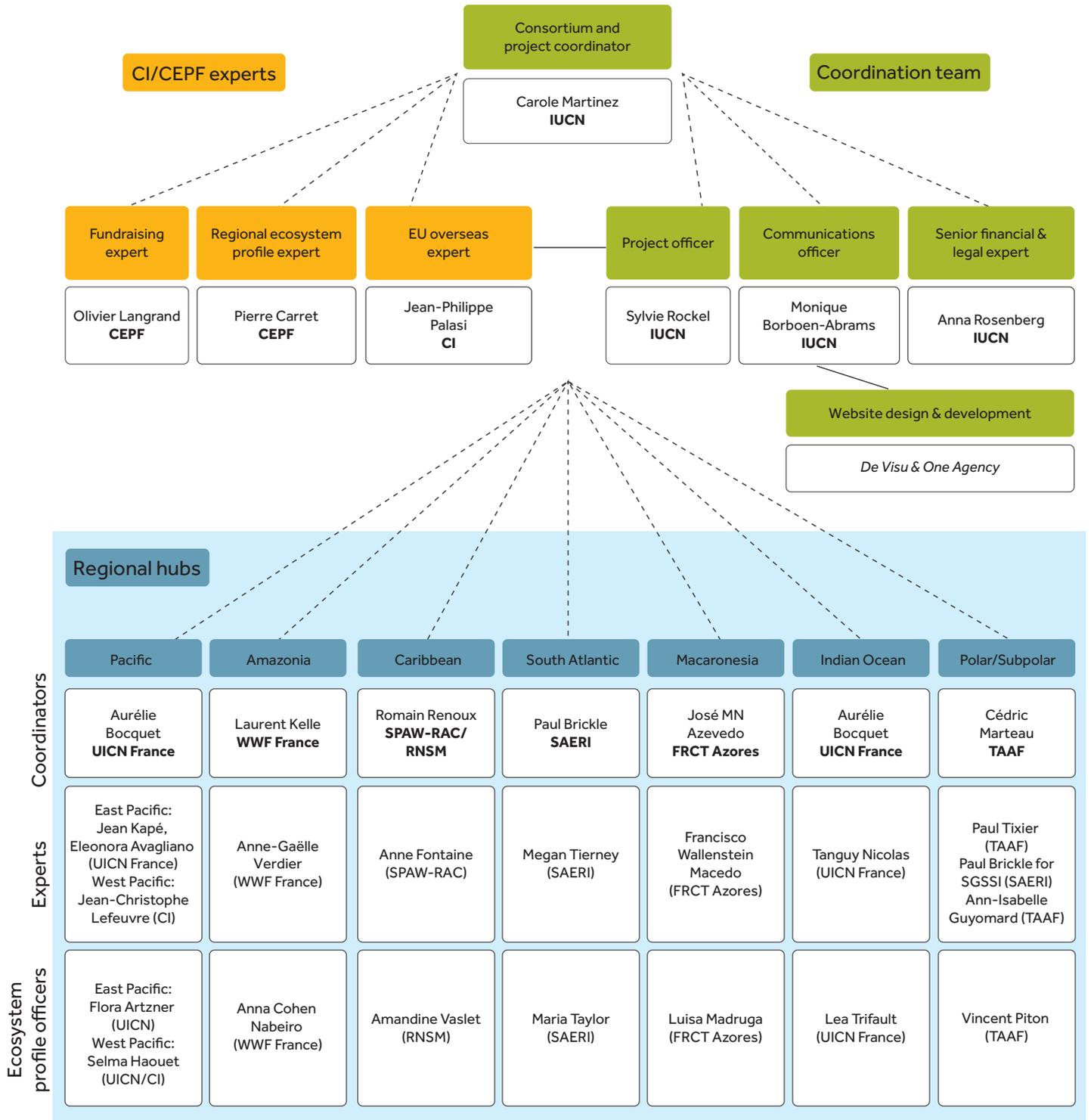


Figure 1. Organizational structure of the BEST III Consortium working team (April 2015)

Abbreviations

IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
CI	Conservation International
CEPF	Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
IUCN France	French IUCN Committee
WWF France	World Wildlife Fund French office
RNSM	Réserve naturelle de Saint-Martin
SAERI	South Atlantic Environment Research Institute
SGSSI	South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands
SPAW RAC	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Regional Activity Center
FRCT	Fundo Regional para a Ciência e Tecnologia
TAAF	French Antarctic and Sub Antarctic Territories



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