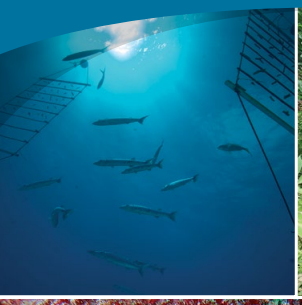
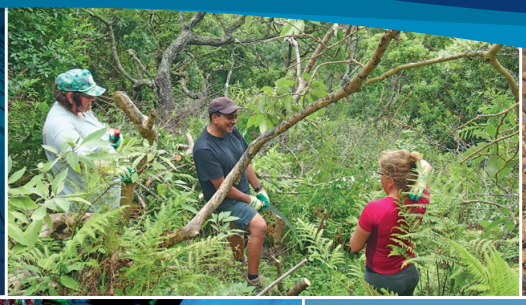
BEST

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

BEST Newsletter 04

11/2017







FOREWORD

EU Overseas: Potential and responsibility for protecting biodiversity

Dear readers,

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this 4th BEST Newsletter.

I still remember very well the Conference in La Reunion on Combatting climate change and biodiversity loss in the EU's Outermost Regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) in July 2008 organised under the French Presidency together with IUCN, which I attended back then as Director for Biodiversity - with a clear idea to find a way to support the amazing biodiversity in European overseas.

Thanks to the organisers, I had the occasion to discuss directly with representatives and biodiversity actors from almost all ORs and OCTs. I was astonished to learn that often the financial support needed for carrying out activities to protect biodiversity in ORs and OCTs was comparatively low and the channels through the EU funding instruments under the regional and development policies too heavy and hence inaccessible to those actors ready to carry out projects.

It was great to see all representatives agreeing on a need to address the problem, and use as inspiration experience from environmental policy and particularly biodiversity support (within Natura 2000) on the European continent which was translated into the Message from Reunion Island with a recommendation to set up a voluntary scheme for biodiversity action.

In 2009, together with the Member States, ORs and OCTs we developed a rough concept on how such a voluntary scheme might look like. Thanks to the BEST Preparatory Action, adopted by the European Parliament in 2010, the initiative has grown and gained momentum.

Looking at the work that has been carried out over the last 7 years makes me content and proud. It confirms the importance of unlocking the local potential for protecting biodiversity in the ORs and OCTs. I believe that now is the right time to capitalise on these positive results, and therefore I hope the initiative will be successfully transformed into a sustainable partnership that continues to provide support for biodiversity action in the EU's ORs and OCTs into the future.

Enjoy the reading!

Ladislav MIKO
Deputy Director General for Food Safety
DG Health and Food Safety (SANCO), European Commission

CONTENTS

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE REGIONS

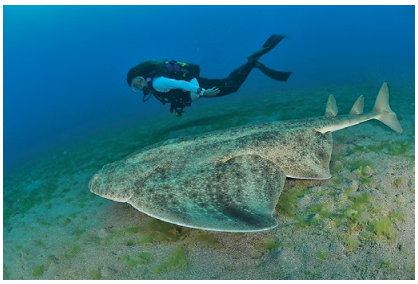
Macaronesia

The challenge of defining marine KBAs: insights from the Macaronesian archipelagos

The internationally recognised method to identify Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) – places that include vital habitats for species and therefore require enhanced protection – is simple at its core: pick a globally endangered species, map their distribution and protect the area. In reality, it's hardly ever that simple, particularly for marine areas.

KBAs are identified based on a rigorous set of guidelines and criteria, developed by specialized researchers and conservation practitioners to guarantee the scientific soundness of the process.

For marine species, identifying KBAs remains more difficult mostly due to the lack of information on (a) the species' conservation status and (b) distribution of known threatened species. To these we must add the challenge of a lack of knowledge in the classification of many species.



In Europe the critically endangered angel shark is only found in the Canary Islands © Carlos Suarez

Compared to other regions, numerous endemic species have already been identified in Macaronesia, but its marine biodiversity is still largely to be discovered. While fish species in the region have been thoroughly investigated, knowledge of marine invertebrates is fairly incomplete. There are no comprehensive studies for most of the major invertebrate groups, which include sea snails, shrimps, crabs and starfish. It is speculated that the number of endemic marine species in Macaronesia is in the hundreds, if not thousands.

Despite the limited information available on Macaronesian marine endemics, there are 50 known endangered species, most of which are not compatible with the current area-based method used in identifying KBAs since they are either pelagic or deep-sea dwellers. Consequently, only 13 marine species could be taken into account to define marine KBAs in Macaronesia: the monk seal, the lobster and 11 commercial fish species.

The conservation of the endangered Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) has been a success story. The large populations, which existed in Madeira and the Azores before European colonisation, were rescued from the brink of (local) extinction in the 1980's through the creation of a strict nature reserve around their last refuge: the Desertas Islands, Madeira. Since then, the population has rallied from 6-8 to presently 30-40 individuals.

For the remaining species, the picture is less rosy: there is no reliable distribution data for the lobster or for most of the threatened fish species, although they are increasingly targeted by research projects and included in voluntary diver surveys.

Taking all this into account, the Macaronesian BEST hub approached delineation of marine KBAs in a pragmatic way: A marine KBA was

considered, for which previously identified Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) already include records of at least one of the 13 target species. Outside these MPAs, smaller KBAs were also proposed when valid and consistent records existed confirming the presence of those species.

This approach of using existing information adds value to the current protected area network and highlights their importance for the conservation of marine Macaronesian biodiversity. However, new BEST conservation niches and project can also be identified if they help filling the knowledge gaps on the taxonomy and conservation status of marine species; knowledge, which in turn could feed into the process of reassessing MPAs, their geographic scope and management on the basis of a sound scientific approach complemented by concrete management recommendations.

Contact :
José Azevedo, BEST III hub coordinator for the Macaronesian region:
Jose.MN.Azevedo@azores.gov.pt

USEFUL LINKS
BEST ecosystem profile for Macaronesia
Macaronesian hub website

Polar & Sub-polar

The TAAF Reserve becomes one of the largest marine protected areas on the planet

The protection area for marine ecosystems and biodiversity in the French Southern Lands' National Nature Reserve in the Southern Indian Ocean recently significantly increased and now encompasses over 1.6 million km² or 15% of the entire French Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Announced during the 2016 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 22) in Marrakesh, an interdepartmental decree by Ségolène Royal in December 2016, ratified the extension of the reserve to include more than 672,000 km² - protecting marine habitats and species in over 40% of the over 1.6 million km² Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surrounding islands of the French Southern Lands: Crozet, Kerguelen, Saint Paul and Amsterdam.

These islands and their surrounding waters are home to many unique species. In this region, cold sub-Antarctic and warmer subtropical currents mix, drawing nutrients from the sea floor to filter feeders and their predators, resulting in an incredible productivity level and important feeding grounds for marine mammals and birds. For example, about 82% of the global population of Macaroni penguins (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*) breeds within the French (Crozet and Kerguelen) and the UK Overseas Territories (South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands) marine area. A BEST project in the region identified the most important feeding areas for Macaroni penguins.

When created in 2006, the reserve encompassed around 7,700 km² of terrestrial area from the islands and 52% of the territorial waters - up to 12 nautical miles from the shore line (15,700 km²). The extension followed the recommendations from the French eco-regionalisation work (*Programme d'Eco-Régionalisation Français - PERF)* in the Antarctic and a change in the French law, allowing reserves to extend beyond the territorial waters, to their 200 nautical mile limit of the EEZ.

In addition, in over 120,000 km² of the extended protected area any industrial or commercial extractive activity, including fishing, is prohibited and marks one of the first strict marine fisheries reserves. TAAF (*Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises*) also created a model for the sustainable fishing industry: fishing practices and procedures are carefully monitored to reduce by-catch and to avoid any negative impacts to the deep ocean habitats. All other activities (logistical and scientific) are strictly regulated.

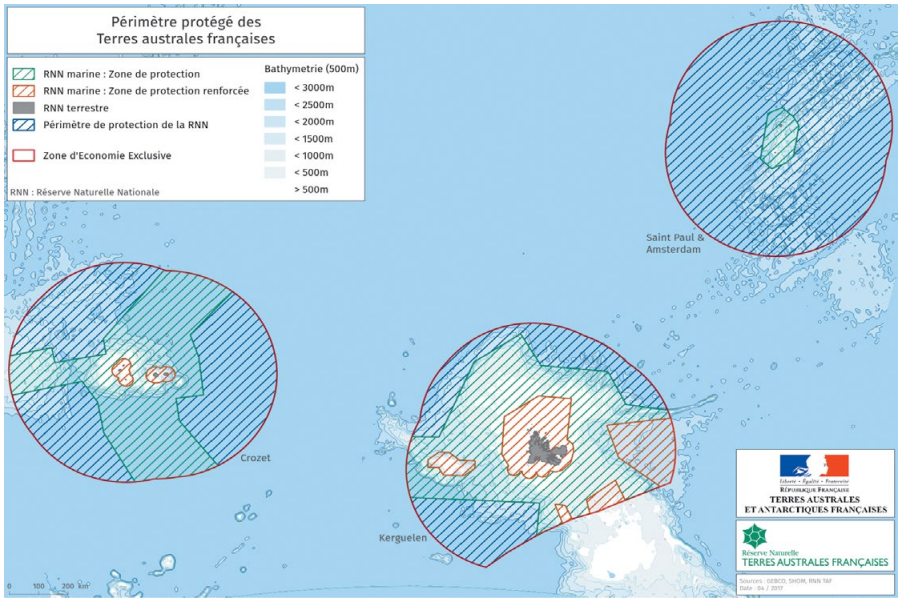
"Marion Dufresne" - French research boat in the waters of the reserve © Stéphanie Légeron

Some of the benefits of this reserve will include the protection of the largest population of king penguins, second largest global population of elephant seals, the endemic Amsterdam albatross and fragile benthic and pelagic ecosystems. These marine ecosystems, which contribute to the global carbon cycle, are mostly untouched and still to be explored.

Following various consultations, the prefect adopted an order end of March 2017, which extends the reserve's protection perimeter and applies management and environmental regulations to the outer limits of the EEZ of Crozet, Kerguelen, St Paul and Amsterdam in order to ensure protection of the entire trophic network. This extension makes it one of the world's largest marine protected areas.

The order also encourages the development of programs to improve knowledge on the marine environment, and positions France as a key player in the development and implementation of a concerted strategy for the establishment of a marine protected area network in the Antarctic international waters of CCAMLR (Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources).

Contact :
Anne-Gaëlle Verdier,
BEST III Polar and sub-polar hub coordinator:
anne-gaelle.verdier@taaf.re



Map of the protection scope of the TAAF reserve after extension © TAAF

USEFUL LINKS
TAAF website:
Website article on the extension of reserve by interdepartmental decree in December 2016 (in French)
Website article on the amended regulation of the extended reserve by prefectoral order in March 2017 (in French)

The EU Overseas ecosystem profiles – a participatory process and valuable tool for decision makers

In 2014, supported by the European Commission, 7 highly motivated regional hubs and one central coordination team set out on an ambitious task as part of the BEST Initiative: profiling the status of the biodiversity, habitats, ecosystems and their services in the 7 regions, in which the EU's 25 Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) and 9 Outermost Regions (ORs) reside.

Regional ecosystem profiles
© Design by Imre Sébestyén, jr. / Unit Graphics

Ecosystem profiles following a methodology established by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) have been valuable tools for policy makers for more than 15 years in guiding investment and conservation efforts in some regions. However, existing ecosystem profiles did not focus specifically on the European Overseas even though they are home to 4 of the 36 hotspots of global biodiversity: the Caribbean Islands, New Caledonia, French Polynesia and the Macaronesian archipelagos. Endowed with an exceptionally rich biodiversity and key actors for the implementation of international and regional conservation objectives, it was therefore essential to elaborate ecosystem profiles for the European overseas entities and the 7 regions they are located in to complement the existing profiles and support future conservation activities and decisions consistent with the needs and capacity of each territory and region.

Local stakeholder consultations in French Polynesia and the Caribbean © Jean Kapé & Romain Renoux

Outlining a detailed inventory, the EU Overseas ecosystems profiles put conservation issues in the socio-economic, legal and political context of each region. They also include an assessment of environmental pressures and threats, a review of existing activities, actors and investments promoting biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, and identify priority areas for action to serve as a basis for a regional investment strategy. A real challenge considering that these 7 overseas regions - the Amazon, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, Macaronesia, the Pacific, the Polar / Sub-polar region and the South Atlantic - cover a total area greater than the 6 European Member States, to which the ORs and OCTs are politically attached.

Following the assessment of species and habitats, local stakeholders and regional experts identified key biodiversity areas (KBAs) - critical habitats for species requiring enhanced protection - but also ecological corridors, connecting the KBAs. In total, more than 350 priority KBAs and 50 ecological corridors were identified in the 7 European overseas regions, covering a total area of nearly 3.5 million km2, of which the coastal and marine ecosystems represent more than 70%. To further support the efforts, using a participatory approach, the profiling process mobilized nearly 900 local and regional actors from more than 340 organizations in over 200 workshops and meetings, and - most remarkably - allowed all stakeholders in less than two years to agree on a set of thematic and geographical priorities for conservation in each of the 7 regions.

These important outcomes of the BEST EU overseas ecosystem profiles were possible thanks to a good level of participation and involvement in the profiling process: in the 15 Caribbean ORs / OCTs high political representatives chaired the workshops, such as the Minister of Environment of the Government of Montserrat, the Governors of Saba and St Maarten, and the Senator of St Martin. The prioritization of necessary actions and investments was discussed and approved during 23 local and regional workshops that involved more than 250 actors from 140 organizations.

In French Guiana, the Ministry of Environment considers its KBAs as priorities for future activities and the Regional Council will integrate the KBA results into the evaluation of the National Park Charter (*personal communication, WWF Guyana*). The BEST ecosystem profiles are not only useful for future strategic directions but can also inspire local decision-makers. The results of the Caribbean ecosystem profile have already been used to define the biodiversity strategy of the Netherlands Antilles. They also guide OCT local actors in the design of projects to be financed by the BEST 2.0 programme, demonstrating the usefulness of such assessments to better guide financial support.

To better guide future investments complementary regional investment strategies were elaborated in a similar participatory approach. These strategies provide insights into the ecosystem profile results by specifying investment niches and projects in need of funding. This is useful and valuable information to motivate sustaining a grant scheme as successfully demonstrated with the financing of projects by the BEST preparatory action, the BEST 2.0 programme and now also the BEST RUP project.

Contact :
Carole Martinez,
BEST III consortium coordinator:
Carole.Martinez@iucn.org
Sylvie Rockel,
BEST III project officer:
Sylvie.Rockel@iucn.org

USEFUL LINKS
Regional ecosystem profiles on the BEST website

Promoting the EU Overseas as *Hope Spots*

Given their significance in terms of marine biodiversity and sheer maritime area, there is great potential for the EU Overseas to be promoted internationally as *Hope Spots* - a designation given by Mission Blue – an initiative of marine biologist and ocean explorer Sylvia Earle – that recognises special marine sites critical to ocean health.

Fish swarm, Ascension Island ©Dan Laffoley

The project aims to recognise, empower and support individuals and communities interested in protecting the ocean as they strive to gain legal protection. At present there are 85 designated *Hope Spots*, which were nominated by members of the public, from school children to scientists and regional administrations. The criteria for being a *Hope Spot* are sufficiently wide ranging to allow for a flexible interpretation of 'special' and to take into account the characteristics of the sites themselves.

Currently five *Hope Spots* can be found in EU Overseas waters: the **Sargasso Sea**, **Ascension Island**, George Town Harbour in the **Cayman Islands**, the **Chagos Archipelago** and **Wallis and Futuna**. There is great potential for this number to increase as several sites are currently nominated, including the Canary Islands and the Puerto Rico Trench (including the British Virgin Islands) and French Polynesia.

There are many reasons why these sites were chosen. For example, the unique ecosystem of the Sargasso Sea in the North Atlantic - the only sea without land boundaries - depends on extensive mats of Sargassum, a free-floating brown seaweed that can reproduce without the need to attach to the sea floor. These mats provide structural habitat to hundreds of marine species in need of shelter, nurseries, spawning and feeding areas, including shrimp, turtles and the endemic Sargassum fish, also known as anglerfish or frog fish *(Histrio histrio)*.

In the Pacific, the waters surrounding the three main islands and many islets of Wallis and Futuna are also noted for its species richness. Though geologically young, these islands with their fringing reefs and extensive lagoons contain an incredible variety of marine life with over 135 coral species and 650 fish species and are also recognized as a *biodiversity hotspot* (according to the criteria by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund - CEPF).

The *Hope Spots* initiative has brought these important sites to the international spotlight through their many communication channels, council networks and many partners. Support is tailored to the individual needs of each *Hope Spot* manager or 'Champion'. It usually involves dedicated communications support from Mission Blue, the initiative's foundation and the expertise of a council of marine experts with global experience from around the world. With the many difficulties local communities face in getting their marine sites protection of national and international recognition, this initiative acts as a back door into legal protection.

To nominate your own *Hope Spot* click here and follow the guidelines to fill in the nomination form.

Contact :
Raphaelle Flint,
Hope Spot project coordinator at IUCN:
raphaelle.flint@iucn.org

USEFUL LINK
Mission Blue- Hope Spots website

PISUNA project highlighted at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)

Integrating indigenous knowledge and environmental observations into decision-making for the management of natural resources, the PISUNA project - funded by the BEST Initiative – is a concrete illustration of the Government of Greenland's efforts to implement Article 8(j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) requiring Parties to *"respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities...and promote their wider application"*.

A statement by Greenland at the 16th session of the UNPFII, which took place in New York from 24 April to 5 May 2017, highlighted the locally-led process piloted by PISUNA and the benefits that have been realised, such as "cross-fertilizing scientific and indigenous knowledge to increase capacity for resource management, supporting sound adaptive management and achieving data collection over a wide area and on a continual basis".

Fish catch monitoring by local fishermen
© Michael Køie Poulsen

PISUNA established Local Resource Councils at the community level, comprising hunters, fishers and other individuals with an interest in the environment, to decide what to monitor, based on the relevance for their community. Monitoring by the PISUNA pilot communities primarily focused on terrestrial and marine mammals, fish, and birds, but also included abiotic factors such as sea ice cover. Every three months the observations and interpretations of each attribute were collated and discussed by the Local Resource Council, including the trend of a particular resource compared to the previous year (e.g. increasing/no change/decreasing) and the recommended management actions on the basis of the observations. Suggested management actions included modifications to hunting and fishing seasons for certain species, changes to quotas and amendments to local laws and bylaws such as imposing restrictions on fishing methods and allowable equipment. This information was submitted to the local authority to take action or to pass on to the central government, depending on the appropriate decision-making level. The observations made by the local communities are stored in a web-based application – PISUNA-net – where they are publicly available and can be searched.

Indigenous knowledge systems have developed over centuries; however, in many places this knowledge is slowly being eroded and lost. Despite the increasing recognition of its value, in practice it remains a challenge to successfully incorporate it into decision-making processes. PISUNA shows how high-level objectives can be translated into tangible actions on-the-ground and demonstrates the value of the BEST Initiative's approach of collaborating with local communities.

PISUNA project factsheet
Statement by Greenland
PISUNA-net

MEET BEST TEAMS, EXPERTS AND PARTNERS

BEST secretariat team

Carole Martinez
Coordinator for BEST III, BEST 2.0 & BEST RUP
A lawyer specialized in environmental law and an expert member on the World Commission on Protected Areas, Carole has worked for more than 20 years in nature conservation, focusing on European overseas biodiversity since her doctoral research. She has planned and managed numerous projects and initiatives aiming at supporting local actors as well as regional cooperation in various functions at national and international level. As a member of the expert network on World Heritage, she has contributed to the editing and evaluation of UNESCO applications, as well as the management of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List. As head of the IUCN European Overseas and Regional Seas Program, she applies her knowledge to the analysis of national, European and international policies and contributes to IUCN's actions to promote the oceans at the highest level.

She is passionate about traveling and discovering the richness of the natural and cultural heritages of the world. A fan of hiking and sailing, she also likes scuba diving and paragliding when she is not recharging her energy in her native Provence.

Contact: carole.martinez@iucn.org

Sylvie Rockel
BEST III project officer
Sylvie has a background in bioprocessing engineering. She has more than 7 years of experience in interdisciplinary research and scientific project management abroad. After a PhD in bioengineering she pursued a certificate in management of development projects, followed intensive training and volunteered in marine conservation, rain forest restoration and rural migration challenges in developing countries. Her conservation volunteering took her to Australia, Malaysia, India and the Philippines, where she organized coastal clean-ups and provided environmental training to local dive centres as part of the Reef World Foundation.

Before joining the BEST III Consortium as the central team project officer in June 2014, she contributed to an IUCN report evaluating the status of Caribbean coral reefs. She is also co-author of an IUCN publication on the coastal and marine protected area (MPA) conservation efforts in the EU Overseas.

When she is not revising regional ecosystem profiles or investment strategies, you may find her cycling across Europe, hiking or rock climbing, gardening, cooking and baking vegan treats or passionately engaged in local sustainability projects.

Contact: sylvie.rockels@iucn.org

Daniel Mitchell
BEST 2.0 programm officer
Daniel, the programme officer for the BEST 2.0 Secretariat within IUCN's EU Overseas Programme since June 2015, is a biologist and environmental scientist with more than 7 years of experience of management of environmental projects, in particular related to EU funding instruments.

In his previous role as part of the external monitoring team for the EU's LIFE programme between 2012 and 2015 he gained an in-depth knowledge of EU grant management and was responsible for monitoring a range of environment and nature conservation projects implemented by beneficiary organisations including small NGOs, international NGOs and governmental bodies. He co-authored several publications related to EU environmental legislation including on the Water Framework Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

Daniel is passionate about nature and enjoys travelling, playing football and scuba diving (when he gets the chance). He is a British native and loves spending time outdoors with his wife and young son.

Contact: daniel.mitchell@iucn.org

Valia Queran
BEST RUP project officer
Valia has a degree in European affairs and was previously in charge of managing a *LEADER* programme supporting pilot projects in rural areas, which included working with local authorities for the administration of European funds and implementation of territorial policies. Highly interested in local development dynamics and environmental issues, Valia joined the BEST secretariat based in Brussels in March 2017 and is in charge of the daily management of the BEST RUP activities, which provides grant funding for local projects for biodiversity conservation in the French Outermost Regions. In particular, she organizes and manages the BEST RUP call for proposals, which will launch in fall 2017.

When possible, she enjoys relaxing in Brittany - her native region and walking on the coastal paths.

Contact: valia.queran@iucn.org

Anna Rosenberg
Financial and legal expert
Coming from a diverse multinational background specializing in NGO financial project implementation, Anna has over 10 years of experience in financial management, oversight and reporting in the field of EC funding. Before taking on the role as financial and legal expert for the BEST coordination team, she successfully managed numerous large LIFE+ and other EC grants and contracts. She has been in charge of Finances for IUCN Europe and partnered closely with internal stakeholders as well as WWF, SNV and the EU institutions, bringing to life numerous initiatives.

Anna has been supporting the BEST Initiative from its conception with her expertise in financial agreements, sub-contracting, EC service contracts and grant management, and is the backbone of legal and financial matters in all past and current BEST projects.

What Anna enjoys even more than balance sheets and grant agreements is reading, immersing in history and playing *What? Where? When?* (*Russian: Что? Где? Когда?*)– an intellectual game well-known in Russian-speaking countries.

Contact: anna.rosenberg@iucn.org

USEFUL LINKS
EU Overseas and BEST pages on the IUCN website
BEST website, BEST 2.0 and BEST RUP portals

Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance

The Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA) is a regional network of protected areas, which assists and supports conservation management organisations on all six Dutch Caribbean islands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Sint Eustatius, Saba, and Sint Maarten) with communication, representation and fundraising as well as institutional capacity building and providing a data exchange platform. As a non-profit organization protecting the natural environment and promoting sustainable management of natural resources DCNA also implements projects on the ground and is really excited to launch *"Best of Bats!"* - a project funded by the BEST 2.0 grant facility. Read more about the project in the next section Actions on the Ground.


DCNA board © DCNA

Kalli De Meyer,
Executive Director: director@DCNAnature.org

USEFUL LINKS
Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance

BEST of Bats

Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten are home to at least 11 bat species (of over 1,000 worldwide), of which 3 are endemic to these Dutch Caribbean Islands, but the rapid economic development over the past decades has seriously impacted suitable natural bat habitats and bat populations on the islands. Bats are important pollinators but often have a negative public image. Moreover, there is a lack of information and knowledge on bat biology and ecology, distribution, and local status.

Funded by the BEST 2.0 grant facility, "Best of Bats!" is an ambitious project that proposes to work on the three islands simultaneously and aims to do this by having the DCNA Secretariat handle project management, administration and reporting in order to give colleagues on the islands freedom to focus on field work.

The project *Best of Bats!* aims to improve the conservation status of bats on Aruba, Curaçao and St. Maarten. This will be done in two ways a) by raising public awareness amongst local communities about the importance of bats and b) providing the bats additional roosting and nesting sites by installing bat boxes in urban areas.

Aruba bat species © Krapt

Since funding approval in March 2017, the DCNA Secretariat has been busy setting the project in motion: drafting procedures and contracts and setting up the (financial) administration; contacting a local company to come up with a logo and graphic design for the project; collecting photographs of bats, scientific literature and working on bat fact sheets- generally collecting and collating as much relevant information as possible as this exciting project gets underway.

St Maarten's Park Manager and DCNA vice chair, Tadzio Bervoets explains, *"Bats are very important for the survival of many of our islands' flora and fauna and therefore for the whole ecosystem. Local bats are awesome and very interesting creatures and I hope the project's success will put bat conservation high on the agenda of other Caribbean islands."*

As coordinator of the project, the DCNA Secretariat works with three local project leaders in Aruba, Curaçao and St Maarten, who will be responsible for the implementation of the project on their own islands.

Contact :
Kalli De Meyer, Executive Director:
director@DCNAnature.org

USEFUL LINKS
Project factsheet on BEST 2.0 portal
Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance

New insights into Potential Impacts of Climate Change on the Flora of the Falkland Islands

Our recently completed BEST funded project (TEFRA: Terrestrial Ecosystems of the Falklands - a Climate Change Risk Assessment) has delivered new insights into the potential impacts of climate change on the plants and habitats of the Falkland Islands. Undertaken in a highly participatory way, this project provided the Falkland Islands Government with clear evidence of climate change and suggested actions to incorporate into future planning scenarios. In this way there is hope that the plants of the Falkland Islands will continue to thrive in the face of the predicted changes in climate and are able to continue providing the ecosystem services that the islands currently enjoy, such as providing food, fuel and water.

Climate change predictions for the Falkland Islands indicate an up to 2.2°C increase in the annual mean temperature by 2100 but no change in the mean annual rainfall. The mean annual temperature of the Falkland Islands has increased already by 0.5°C over the last century; the 2.2°C predicted increase would be dramatic. With mean annual rainfall remaining stable, it is predicted that under a warmer climate the rainfall pattern will be affected, resulting in more extreme weather events and a likelihood of more intense rainfall episodes with longer drought periods.

The native flora of the Falkland Islands comprises 180 vascular plant species, including 14 endemic species. Falklands Conservation and the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew have been collaborating for many years to document and conserve this important and unique plant diversity. Building up a good understanding of the distribution of Falkland plants we compiled a comprehensive database of high spatial resolution plant records, which formed the basis of the modelling work conducted under the TEFRA project.

Modelling results showed that upland species and species with a south-western distribution are particularly vulnerable to the predicted temperature increases. Three globally threatened Falkland endemics, *Nassauvia falklandica*, *Nastanthus falklandicus* and *Plantago moorei*; and two nationally threatened plant species, *Acaena antarctica* and *Blechnum cordatum* are predicted to lose their favourable climate and could be extirpated. Our results emphasise the importance of implementing suitable adaptation strategies to offset climate change impacts, particularly by improved site management. Recommendations made to the Falkland Islands Government are now incorporated into current policy decisions.

Surveying the endangered coastal endemic plant Nastanthus falklandicus © Rebecca Upson

As an insurance policy, seeds of all the Falklands endemic species and of all nationally threatened species have been collected and are stored in Kew's Millennium Seed Bank. Seed collecting continues for other plants with the aim to bank the whole native flora.

Contact:
Colin Clubbe, Head of Conservation Science, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UK: c.clubbe@kew.org

USEFUL LINKS
Project factsheet on BEST website
Peer-reviewed scientific publication: *Potential impacts of climate change on native plant distributions in the Falkland Islands*. PLoS ONE 11(11) (open access)
Workshop Report to the Falkland Islands Government on *Climate Change Risk Assessment for Plants and Soils of the Falkland Islands and the Services they Provide*
Royal Botanic Gardens Kew Falklands Conservation
Falkland Islands Government
UK Falkland Islands Trust

Protection and restoration of Saint Helena's unique Gumwood tree

The Saint Helena Gumwood (*Commidendrum robustum*) – national tree and endemic plant of the island – is listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. Peak Dale represents the last wild remnant of the species. The forest provides a habitat for a number of Saint Helena's other endemic species of fauna and flora, but its persistence is threatened by the near complete absence of any successful natural regeneration. The causes of its fragmentation are numerous: attacks by rabbits and rats, trampling of seedlings and soil erosion caused by feral livestock, and smothering by non-native plant species. Active restoration is needed to improve seedling recruitment and so ensure the continued existence of the irreplaceable Gumwood forest which constitutes part of the islands unique natural heritage.

The BEST project - Restoration of Peak Dale's St Helena Gumwood Forest – is implementing concrete actions to protect the remaining habitat of Gumwood trees at Peak Dale. The Bradley method is being used to clear invasive plant species from the area – sensible clearance at undisturbed natural areas first and adequate use of the services that invasive plants can deliver to the native habitats e.g. shelter and litter. For minimal soil disturbance invasive trees are killed in situ using Basal barking with a mixture of oil-soluble herbicide and diesel. The project has mainly targeted Wild Mango (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), which is very resilient. In addition, chipping waste material has been produced from invasive wood with the help of the St Helena National Trust, and will be used as mulch.

Three different areas within the site have been fenced to prevent damage from rabbits and the entire area of Peak Dale has been stock fenced to eliminate the threat from livestock. Native plants will be planted in due course. Thanks to the support of a local nursery, the project has selected diverse native plants to be produced to increase native biodiversity, improve gene pool and ensure better natural recruitment within the areas.

Rat baiting is being undertaken every 3 months and monitored every 1-2 weeks to ensure a sufficient quantity of bait and prevent unnecessary stock loss. It has been observed that there is always a large take over the first 2 times the bait gets changed which then slows down.

Volunteer days commonly known as GG's (Gumwood Guardians) are held on the third Sunday of each month at Peak Dale. Volunteers are involved in manual invasive clearance, rat baiting and fencing. Volunteers

Volunteers at work © Jill Key

have had the opportunity to learn about habitat restoration and the challenge that native ecosystems on St Helena are facing. The project has also published articles in the local newspaper on the importance of controlling alien species such as Myna birds (*Acridotheres tristis*), Wild Mango and White weed (*Astropeupatorium inulifolium*) on the island. So far, 59 volunteers have participated.

Peak Dale is an ecologically important site for the islands that needs to be protected. With the support of BEST the project aims to restore it to its former glory.

Contact :
Martina Peters, Peak Dale Project Manager:
martina.peters@trust.org.uk

USEFUL LINKS
Project factsheet on BEST 2.0 portal
SNCG Peak Dale Restoration Facebook page

Successful season for two species of globally threatened birds in French Polynesia

Two species of nearly extinct birds in the European Overseas Country and Territory (OCT) of French Polynesia have increased in number after a BEST funded project reduced threats and encouraged breeding success.

Both critically endangered, the Tahiti monarch *(Pomarea nigra)* locally known as the Ōmāma'o and the Fatu Hiva Monarch *(Pomarea whitneyi)* number only 23 and three known breeding pairs in management areas. Threats to these species include alien invasive species like black rats, little fire ants, invasive birds and plants and feral cats. Occurring only on the islands of Tahiti, the Ōmāma'o is among the 30th most threatened bird species globally and the Fatu Hiva Monarch (from the island of Fatu Hiva) is so rare now that one of the BEST project goals was simply to prevent its extinction in the project's first 28 months.

Through a combination of habitat restoration, invasive species control, increased public engagement and awareness raising, both species have increased in numbers. For the Ōmāma'o, the record-setting number of 18 juveniles that have survived so far (there are normally 12/year) have increased the global population. While for the Fatu Hiva Monarch, all three fertile pairs known in 2016 produced young- totalling five fledglings which have survived until now, with at least 5 juveniles colonizing the management area in the last few months (this had never been recorded before).

Local students were taken to see the Tahiti Monarchs as part of the community awareness programme © Thomas Ghestemme/SOP Manu

Much of the success can be attributed to the control of the black rat (*Rattus rattus)* and the increased effort to manage the feral cat population by the *Société d'Ornithologie de Polynésie* (SOP). These two alien species are the greatest threats due to predation of nestlings and adults.

Community education programmes have also played a critical role. After these programmes, the locals now see these species as an island mascot to be protected. SOP has also been able to sterilise cats free for the increasingly willing locals and rat numbers can also be controlled with local help. SOP also works with landowners whose land is home to monarchs through sustainable development projects. Some of these projects include bee keeping, habitat restoration and environmental education of over 345 school children who help with native tree planting. Such is the success of these social projects that many locals are now dedicated to the preservation of these species.

This article refers to a project highlighted in a previous newsletter edition 03, page 12.

Contact :
Thomas GHESTEMME,
Project coordinator / SOP Manu:
tghestemme@manu.pf

USEFUL LINKS
Project fact sheet on BEST 2.0 portal
Manu-SOP website & Facebook page for latest news
Press release (in French)

RESCQ: Restoring Ecosystem Services and Coral reef Quality

The Dutch islands in the Caribbean are well known for their rich coral reefs. On all Caribbean islands coral cover has decreased greatly during the last 3 decades due to coastal development, pollution, bleaching and other mostly human-related causes. Restoration of small reef areas with two fast growing coral species offers opportunities to involve local communities, build capacity, and generate awareness, besides the obvious positive effects on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The RESCQ project will establish coral nurseries on Bonaire, Saba, St. Eustatius, St. Maarten and the Turks and Caicos islands, and restore one small coral reef area on each island. The coordination of the project is in the hands of Wageningen Marine Research, but local NGOs are strongly involved in the work.

At the start of the project all team members together developed a new nursery structure - called a coral ladder - using mostly natural materials (e.g. bamboo or wood) that is held on the sea floor with concrete or an anchor in the sand and kept upright with buoys (see picture). Apart from their greenness, the ladders have the additional advantage of being very easy to transport to the nursery because they can be rolled up into a small package. Little pieces of coral that are taken from healthy colonies in the field or colonies that have been broken off by external forces are hung on the ladders. Within a nursery up to 10 coral ladders will be installed, however, having become very passionate about their nurseries, some NGOs are already planning on increasing beyond the planned number.

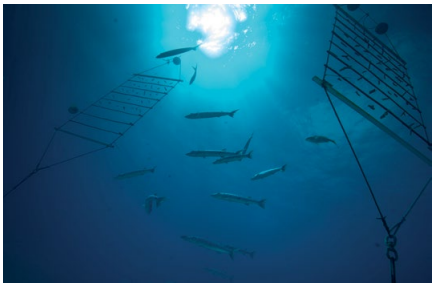
The NGOs, being short-staffed, have only limited capacity to spend on the nurseries. Wageningen Marine Research, an institute of the University of Wageningen in the Netherlands, is helping the islands by involving many students in the project. The students help with building the nurseries, filling and maintenance of the ladders, and are involved in collecting scientific data. Furthermore, they are also involved in outreach activities.

One might argue that breaking off small pieces of coral to populate nurseries is not a sustainable practice. Monitoring of the 'mother' colonies however has proven that these wounds quickly regenerate. Often the lesions that result from the breakage are invisible after three weeks and the polyps have been completely restored.

Within the ladders the coral fragments grow very fast, often at a higher rate than in the field. This is due to the fact that the colonies are a few meters away from the bottom and predators cannot reach them. Thus there is little damage and colonies do not lose energy on the regeneration of tissue damage or other energy demanding processes apart from growing. The colonies may also get more fresh water in the ladders. An additional advantage is that staghorn fragments in the nursery develop more side branches and the growth of each tip is around 10-12cm per year.

Ultimately the aim is to have continuously 800-1000 fragments per nursery. Each year 400-500 can then be transplanted back to the reef, while the remaining half will be split in two equal fragments that will then grow into out-plant size in 9-12 months.

At the moment all islands have 1 or 2 nurseries with multiple ladders. The number of fragments in the ladder is still increasing and the first fragments are now reaching



Barracudas checking out the installed the coral ladders in St Maarten.

outplant size. By the end of the year outplant locations need to be selected and the first corals can be taken from the nursery to the transplant site. However, there is still a lot of work to do. Outreach activities need to be increased, and sponsors need to be attracted so that the nurseries remain in operation after the project finishes. Given the fact that the project continues for two more years, the islands are confident that they will succeed.

A small part of the project is dedicated to monitoring and research. The monitoring is carried out mostly by students who follow the growth and regeneration of the fragments and mother colonies. The research involves taking very small samples to investigate genetic variation between different colonies and islands and gene expression to test the health of the different colonies. Ultimately this should lead to a selection of traits to optimize the restoration process.

Contact :
Erik Meesters, coral reef ecologist:
Erik.Meesters@wur.nl

USEFUL LINKS
Project factsheet on BEST 2.0 portal
www.rescq.eu
Wageningen University
http://www.sabapark.org/

BIOT Educational Project now online with video

The BEST 2.0 project "BIOT Environmental Interpretation and Education" funded through a small grant in 2015 released comprehensive communication material of their work (finished early summer 2017) on promoting sustainable use of the British Indian Ocean Territory's environment using a citizen science approach.

A film, leaflet and information boards produced by the BEST 2.0 BIOT project can be accessed through the British Indian Ocean Territory Administration (BIOTA) website via the following link.

Information board

BEST RUP: a new project for conservation of biodiversity in the French Outermost Regions

A new BEST project was launched in January 2017, managed by the European Commission and implemented by IUCN in partnership with the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) and WWF. The objective of this new BEST RUP (RUP – French for Région Ultrapériphique, Outermost Region) project is to promote the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of ecosystem services in the six French Outermost Regions (ORs): Guadeloupe, Martinique, Saint Martin, French Guiana, Mayotte and Réunion. Initiated by the European Parliament in 2015 and financed by the European Commission, it addresses the urgent need to mobilise resources preserving the unique and particularly threatened biodiversity of these territories by supporting actions tailored to their specific needs.

To meet these objectives, a Consortium will be implementing the project in three components over the next three years.

A first "inventory" component will facilitate the distribution of species lists and habitats found in these ORs. The Museum will carry out the data collection using existing references and complimented by an analysis to identify gaps and priorities with conservation policies in mind.

The second component, "MAES" (Mapping and Assessment of the Ecosystem and their Services) will examine the application of ecosystem mapping and assessment methodologies through a pilot project in French Guiana. This activity will make optimal use of the ecosystem profile established for the Amazonian region in the framework of the BEST III project, which identified key biodiversity areas (KBAs) and key areas for ecosystem services through a scientific and participatory process.

The third component, "call for project proposals", based on a process similar to the BEST 2.0 program, supports projects to conserve biodiversity in the French ORs by granting "small swift grants". With a maximum budget of € 50,000, these are designed to facilitate financial access for small projects of up to 12 months.

First results of the work carried out in the framework of the "inventory" and "MAES"

Local fishing women, Marine Park Mayotte
© Agnes Poiret

components will be presented at the BEST conference to be held at the end of November 2017 in Brussels, Belgium. The call for project proposals, launched in September 2017, received more than 50 concept notes. Successful projects will soon be available on the BEST RUP portal upon selection of the projects to be funded.

Contact :
Carole Martinez, BEST RUP project coordinator:
Carole.Martinez@iucn.org
Valia Queran, BEST RUP project officer:
Valia.QUERAN@iucn.org

USEFUL LINKS
BEST RUP portal
BEST RUP project on the IUCN website

BEST 2.0: More than €4.3 million invested in 45 new BEST projects in 2016 and 2017

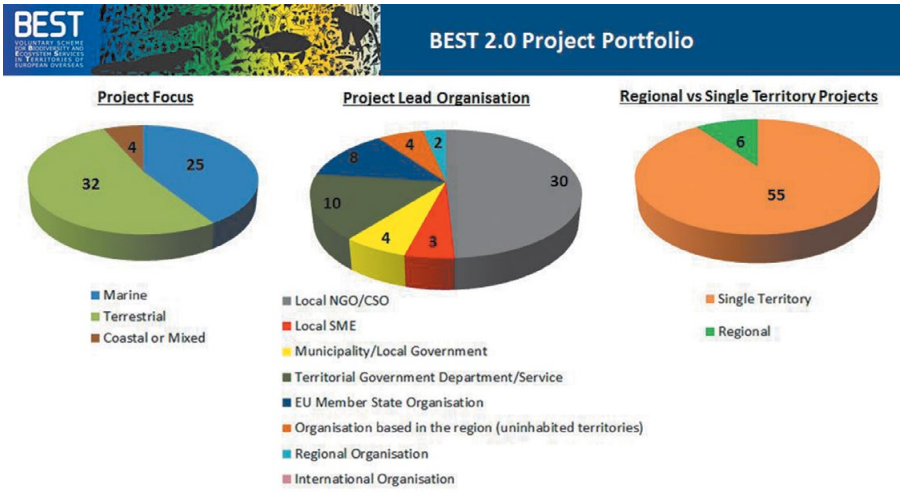
The considerable needs for biodiversity financing, as well as the enthusiasm and readiness of European Union (EU) Overseas Countries and Territories' (OCT) actors was again demonstrated by their response to the BEST 2.0 calls for proposals in 2016 and 2017.

More than 50 eligible proposals were submitted in 2016 for the medium grant (MG, € 100,000 – € 400,000) call targeting the Indian Ocean, Polar/Subpolar and South Atlantic regions and the small grant (SG, € 50,000 – € 100,000) call targeting the Caribbean and Pacific regions. The total amount of requested grants far exceeded the available funding.

Four medium projects and 24 small projects were selected by the European Commission for the award of a grant, with all five regions benefiting from at least one new project. The final call in 2017, open for submissions from all regions, received 44 eligible proposals, of which 17 were selected for a small grant (up to € 100,000). Projects address a range of issues including the control of invasive alien species; management of marine ecosystems; sustainable use of water resources; restoration of coral reefs and terrestrial ecosystems and; conservation of endangered fauna and flora.

The grants provided through the BEST 2.0 Programme are empowering local organisations in the 25 EU OCTs to address pressing issues regarding the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of ecosystem services, including ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and mitigation. The grants also enable them to pilot novel approaches and to build new partnerships.

The success of the 2016 and 2017 calls for proposals raises the total amount invested in the OCTs to almost €8 million in a portfolio of 61 projects - 12 medium projects and 49



BEST 2.0 Portfolio Figures

Projects funded from the 2016 and 2017 calls for proposals

small projects. The projects target terrestrial, marine and coastal environments and involve a diversity of actors, with non-governmental and civil society organisations leading 30 of the 61 projects. Six of the projects include activities across two or more OCT, thus strengthening regional cooperation.

A detailed factsheet for each of the 44 projects funded by BEST 2.0 until 2016 can be already found on the dedicated online portal and the 17 factsheets of projects selected in 2017 will follow shortly.

Contact :
Carole Martinez, BEST RUP project coordinator:
Carole.Martinez@iucn.org
Daniel Mitchell, BEST 2.0 programme officer:
Daniel.Mitchell@iucn.org

USEFUL LINKS
BEST 2.0 Programme Portal

The BEST Future – Conference in Brussels, 28 November 2017

To mark the end of the BEST Preparatory Action, the European Commission is organizing a full-day conference on 28 November 2017 in Brussels with technical and high-level sessions to showcase the milestones and achievements of the BEST Initiative over the past 7 years. The conference is looking back at three stages of BEST Preparatory Action and two grant mechanisms, which allowed 9 calls for project proposals since 2011 and successful funding of almost 80 on-the-ground projects in the regions with € 12.1 million, with more projects to receive funding soon. The conference is also an opportunity to highlight remaining investment needs, projects ready-to-be funded as well as existing capacity in the regions, which were outlined in the 7 regional investment strategies developed by and for regional actors, European and regional stakeholders and decision makers. Based on the findings

of the regional ecosystem profiles, which identified over 400 identified key biodiversity areas and ecological corridors and thematic conservation priorities in the 7 regions, the results of the investment strategies should provide an overview and call for action to establish a sustainable financing mechanism for the BEST future of the EU Overseas.

BEST III CONSORTIUM CHART

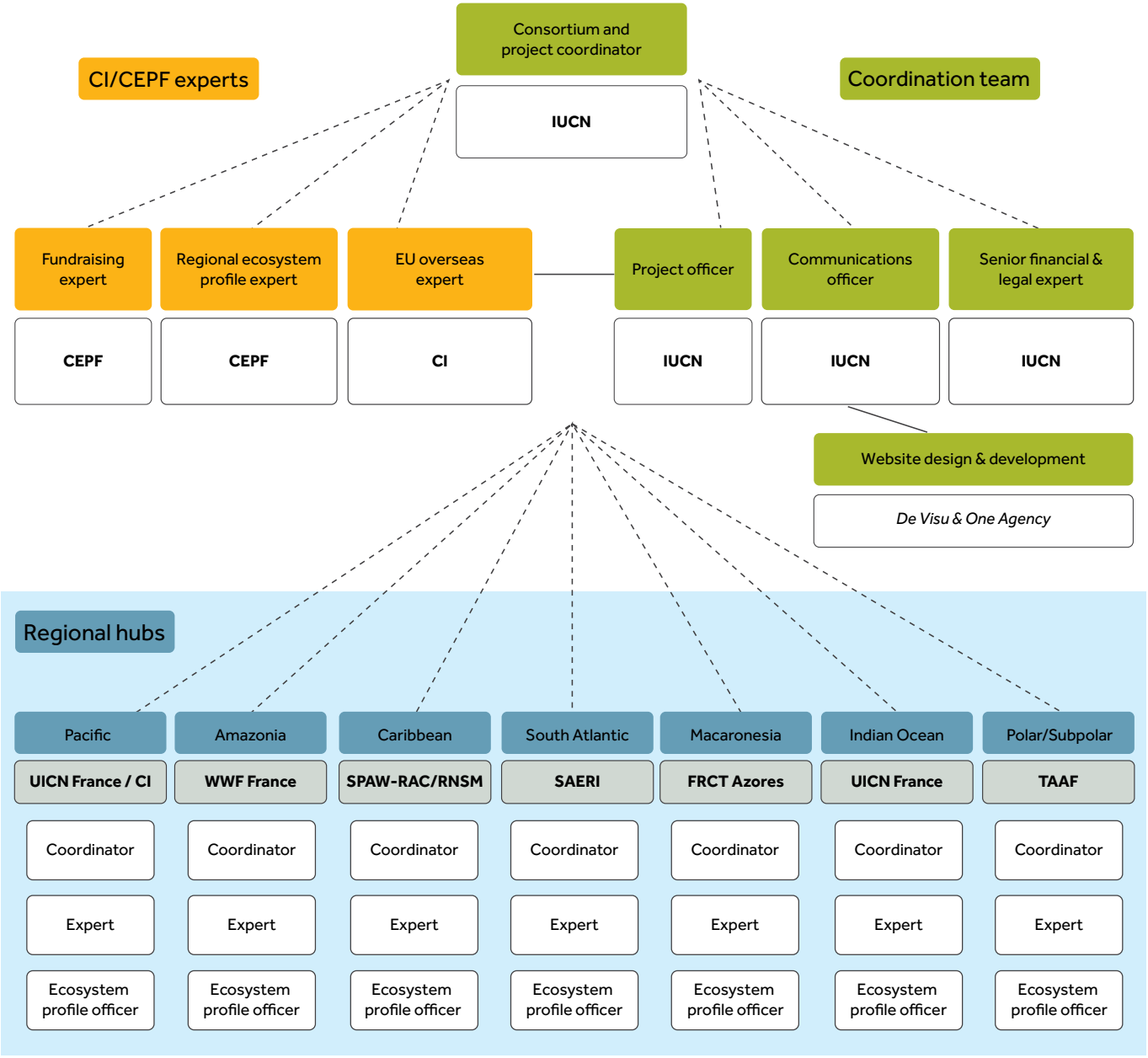


Figure 1. Organizational structure of BEST III Consortium working team

Abbreviations

IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
CI	Conservation International
CEPF	Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
UICN France	French IUCN Committee
WWF France	World Wildlife Fund French office
RNSM	Réserve Naturelle de Saint-Martin
SAERI	South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute
SGSSI	South Georgia and the 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	Territory of the French Southern and Antarctic Lands

THE BEST III CONSORTIUM - CONTACTS

Coordination team

Carole Martinez	BEST III Consortium and project coordinator	carole.martinez@iucn.org
Sylvie Rockel	BEST III Consortium project officer	sylvie.rockel@iucn.org
Anna Rosenberg	BEST III Consortium senior financial and legal expert	anna.rosenberg@iucn.org

Advisory experts

Olivier Langrand	BEST III Consortium and fundraising expert	olangrand@conservation.org
Pierre Carret	BEST III Consortium ecosystem profile expert	pcarret@cepf.net

Technical support team

DeVisu	BEST III website graphic designer	www.devisu.com/en
One Agency	BEST III website developer	www.one-agency.be/en

BEST III REGIONAL HUBS:

Amazonian hub

Laurent Kelle	BEST III Amazonian hub coordinator	llkelle@wwf.fr

Caribbean hub

Lucie Labboux	BEST III Caribbean hub focal point	lucie.labbouz.carspaw@guadeloupe-parcnational.fr

Indian Ocean hub

Anne Caillaud	BEST III Indian Ocean hub coordinator	anne.caillaud@uicn.fr
Jérôme Spaggiari	BEST III Indian Ocean hub expert	jerome.spaggiari@uicn.fr

Macaronesian hub

José MN Azevedo	BEST III Macaronesian hub coordinator	Jose.MN.Azevedo@azores.gov.pt
Emanuel Mendonça	BEST III Macaronesian hub expert	AM.Mendonca@azores.gov.pt

Pacific hub

Anne Caillaud	BEST III Indian Ocean hub coordinator	anne.caillaud@uicn.fr
Jean Kape	BEST III East Pacific sub-regional hub coordinator	kape@mail.pf
François Tron	BEST III West-Pacific sub-regional hub focal point	ftron@conservation.org

Polar and sub-polar hub

Anne-Gaëlle Verdier	BEST III Polar and sub-polar hub coordinator	anne-gaelle.verdier@taaf.re
Cédric Marteau	BEST III Polar and sub-polar hub expert	cedric.marteau@taaf.fr
Paul Brickle	BEST III Polar and sub-polar hub expert	pbrickle@env.institute.ac.fk
Claire-Sophie Azam	BEST III Polar and sub-polar hub ecosystem profile officer	claire-sophie.azam@taaf.fr

South Atlantic hub

Paul Brickle	BEST III South Atlantic hub coordinator	pbrickle@env.institute.ac.fk
Tara Pelembe	BEST III South Atlantic hub expert	TPelembe@env.institute.ac.fk

For more info:

BEST website:
http://ec.europa.eu/best/
Homepage
Current projects
Funding announcements
Regions
News and events

BEST 2.0 Programme portal
Projet BEST RUP

Message from Guadeloupe

BEST newsletter (in French and in English)

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