

Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat

Newsletter 17, September 2024

Foreword



Male Montserrat oriole, Montserrat's national bird on red heliconia, Montserrat's national plant. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Welcome to the 17th issue of the newsletter about the current joint programme of work coordinated by Montserrat National Trust and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, in conjunction with the Government of Montserrat and others. The current phase of *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* reaches the end of its Darwin Plus funding (DPLUS155) around the time of publication of this issue – but we hope and plan that the project continues under the leadership of the *Adopters of Wildlife Homes* (who are celebrated in the first article below). They will be supported as far as possible by Montserrat National Trust and UKOTCF, and will have the benefit of working alongside the continuing Darwin-funded project DPLUS192, *Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development* (or *Biodiversity Toolkit*) which continues for another 18 months. Previous articles on this project appeared in *Newsletters 11-16* (November 2021 to June 2024).

Most of this issue is devoted to a series of articles on an intense period of activity from June to late August, consisting of several overlapping visits of a range of specialists working with local personnel, and involving both Darwin-supported projects, as well as others.

We are very grateful for the many kind and encouraging comments from people welcoming *Newsletters* so far. We hope that you enjoy this one too. Comments are always welcome.

Please feel free to show or forward these newsletters to others. If anyone sees these and would like to be added to the circulation list, please send your email address to m@pienkowski.org. Earlier issues can be accessed at: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/>. For more information on the project, the main contacts are:

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Above: Gray Ministreak *Ministrymon azia* – new species to Montserrat, attracted to LED light trap. Photo: Marc Botham

In this issue, we focus particularly on the invertebrates of Montserrat – so important for both ecosystem services and biodiversity. Articles on these include by Marc Botham (pages 6-9) on moths and butterflies, by Wolfgang Rabitsch (pages 10-11) on bugs, and by David Clements (pages 13-16) on moths and other invertebrates.



Above: a cracker butterfly, *Hamadryas* sp., recently found to be well-established at Garibaldi Hill. First found on Montserrat by Ajhermae White early in 2024. Photo: Ajhermae White (see the article by David Clements)



Right: *Tetyra pinguis* belongs to the Jewel bug family (*Scutelleridae*) and comes in different colour varieties. This reddish one is less often seen. Photo: Wolfgang Rabitsch

We celebrate and thank the *Adopters* of Wildlife Homes in Montserrat's *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project

Celebration

In the first week of an intense nine weeks of overlapping activities on all joint projects, a public event was held at Montserrat National Trust on the evening of Thursday 27th June to celebrate the commitment and work of the *Adopters*, in some cases over several years.

After Sarita Francis's prayer and welcome from MNT, Mike Pienkowski (UKOTCF) gave a very brief background to the project, mentioning also its support to the important educational work started (higher education evenings) and re-started (Monty's Messengers, the group for primary-school-age children, suspended since the 1990s because of volcanic activity).



Mrs Sarita Francis welcomes all. (All photos in this article, unless otherwise indicated: Dr Mike Pienkowski)

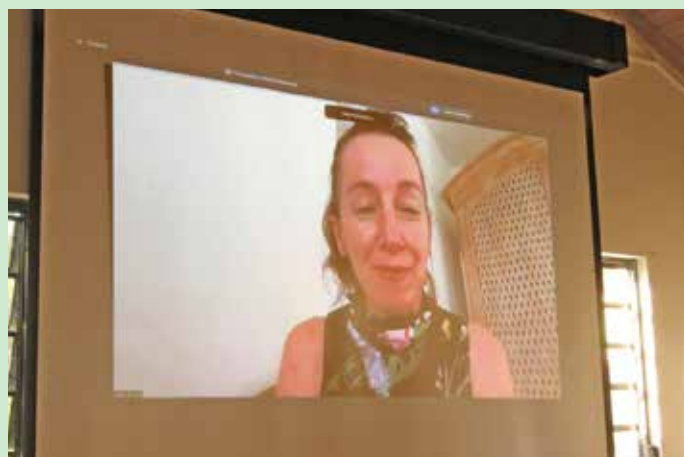
Then Chris Sealys (MNT Conservation Officer) spoke about the two *Wildlife Homes* (WH04 at Pipers and WH05 at EcoPlay) that the Trust team manage themselves. Carol Osborne (WH12 at Cassava Ghaut) and Tim Orton (WH01 at Garibaldi Hill) followed with short and clear messages, demonstrating the enthusiasm, enjoyment, challenges and successes involved with their *Wildlife Homes*.



Adopter Mrs Carol Osborne

Mike then briefly mentioned the plaques that would be provided to *Adopters* to display if they wished, and also spoke of ideas for keeping the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project going beyond the end of grant funding.

Jodey Peyton (standing in for project leader Catherine Wensink,



Ms Jodey Peyton, isolating at her accommodation in Montserrat having tested positive for Covid, joined the event by Zoom.

who could not attend due to a family bereavement) then spoke about the Biodiversity Toolkit project.

Norman Cassell (WH13 at Hibiscus Dive) then made a helpful intervention to say that *Adopters* should keep *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* going as a section of MNT, building on the group that they had, before going on to give his enthusiastic, informative and humorous presentation.



Mr Norman Cassell and part of the audience.

In questions, Veta Nicholas (WH10 at Lawyers Mountain) raised the problem of the steep slopes (steeper than she had requested) at her *Wildlife Home*, and Norman spoke about sharing expertise, through the continuing project – and further ideas were put forward to Veta later in informal discussion.



Ms Veta Nicholas outlines some challenges at her *Wildlife Home*, where the cliff above her house was cut far more steeply than she had requested.



Above: Mr Norman Cassell talks at his display of plants on the opportunities for securing income from encouraging native and culturally important vegetation.

Below: Ms Jo-Diaz Tye speaks at the display on the traditional medicinal plants book.



Norman continued his presentation from his impressive vegetation display at the back of the hall and then Jo-Diaz Tye,



Above: Some young people join members of the project team and colleagues on Pipers Trail. Below: Some of the new steps on the lower part of the site, making ascent out of the valley practicable.



the request of Sarita, gave an impromptu lecture on the medicinal plants display, also at the back of the hall, before participants moved outside for refreshments.

The meeting was attended by several *Adopters*, some prospective *Adopters*, several MNT Council and staff members, project personnel from other organisations, and others. In addition, the meeting was live-streamed and available for replay, so that participation was even higher.

That week also, some of the team visited WH04 at Friths, to walk along the Pipers Trail through the site from the lowest point, seeing some of the plant signs that have now been erected as they walked up the new trail that had been constructed, putting steps and side-ropes up the steep slope. From the top of the lower trail, we walked along the quiet roads to the lower part of the upper plot. At the bottom of the upper plot, the first small distance of the track had been widened so that it can eventually take school-buses to a safe parking place. An area had been levelled to provide car-park and a building with an area behind that, to provide a camp-site, with wash-rooms and showers. Work on surfacing the track and parking area and the building was due to start shortly. The siting of this area near the edge of the plot prevents the loss of a much larger area of land had the site been further into the plot. This will provide a great facility for educational and fun engagement of young people, including participation in study and conservation.



Above: one of the new signs on the trail. Below: collecting insects and recording wildlife during the trail walk, and some of the wildlife.



Continuity

To build on the enthusiasm of *Adopters* (and potentially additional ones) to continue the work beyond the grant end, a core team met, including Norman Cassell (*Adopter*), Tim Orton (*Adopter*), Elvis Gerald (Department of Agriculture; *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project officer), Chris Sealys (MNT conservation officer), Mike Pienkowski (UKOTCF; *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* joint project leader) and Jodey Peyton (UKOTCF; *Biodiversity Toolkit* project). Apologies had been received from Catherine Wensink (UKOTCF; *Biodiversity Toolkit* project leader; absent because of family bereavement).



Mr Norman Cassell speaking at the public event

Mike noted the enthusiasm, evident both in the event the previous day and the *Adopters*' meeting in March, amongst *Adopters* to keep the project going beyond the end of the grant period in September. He noted that there are several elements which could contribute to this, including (but not limited to):

- The community of *Adopters*.
- UKOTCF has had a long-term relationship (some 30 years) with MNT and that will not stop.
- The *Biodiversity Toolkit* project (DPLUS192) had been designed to build on aspects of *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*.
- Notable also is the existence now (after years of lobbying by UKOTCF and others) of the Darwin Local grants, limited to applications by territory bodies and individuals.

All agreed that it is important to continue this initiative to support native species and biodiversity generally, by removing invasives and planting and encouraging native species. In building on this, it is important to capture systematically information on what worked and what didn't, while maintaining the shared passion for biodiversity.



Mr Tim Orton speaking at the event

Norman stressed that the project and follow-on has to be about sustainability, carrying things on and having identifiable success factors. Even just recognising individual experiences and the importance of sharing these experiences in detail is vital. He underlined also the importance of noting the value the group of experts generated by the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project, and the value in *Adopters* visiting each others' sites.

Tim said that *Monty's Messengers* would be an important outlet for the information as he reported people behaving as if there was no consideration for nature, by e.g. just chopping down a tree that was in the way of another tree someone was trying to get to; education is a key for the future. Norman agreed, noting that, post-volcano, the housing situation had changed; motivations and priorities were different. In those 25 years, less connected to the land and farming, many in the the younger generation had lost the sustainable background. For example, young children from the secondary school were looking, during a radio programme, for ideas on how to raise money. Norman had called in and suggested getting some seeds from the Department of Agriculture and growing string beans, but they had told him they don't know how to grow vegetables. After the eruptions at this time, the schools were being used as shelters and then when they reopened they initially didn't offer agriculture subjects at the secondary school.

Tim spoke about soil-fertility in exclusion zones; when these open, how will soil be made fertile for the farmers? Jodey confirmed that the farmers on the island are also keen to get young people involved with farming, cropping, managing community plots, etc.

Norman reiterated that there was volcanic fallout from a social standpoint as well as physical one that has changed the culture on Montserrat and the awareness about the environment. So, the bioblitzes with the young people are critical to start reshaping the minds and reconnecting people with nature. This information and awareness are otherwise being lost. For example, one of the resource persons for the 30 medicinal plants booklet had recently died. It is so important to capture this information while they are still with us – the documentation is critical.

MP said how pleased he was that *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* had been able to help MNT set up three levels of environmental education. *Monty's Messengers* (for primary-school age) and now *Monty's Ambassadors* (newly implemented for high-school age) are really useful for promoting the importance of the environment. Also the Higher Education evenings provide an opportunity to show other possible careers.

Norman remarked about former project officer Ajhermae White currently doing her Masters degree, and how helpful it is to have people like Chris here to learn from. Jodey noted that we are also learning a huge amount from Norman and his colleagues!

Mike then mentioned about knowledge-sharing opportunities and that there were entomologists and botanists here now in the current team. Also, within a few weeks, David Clement (entomologist) and Leigh Morris (horticulturalist and CEO of Manx Wildlife Trust) would also be here again. David has been working on material collected on his previous visit and from that collected in our earlier project by Professor Mike Ivie and colleagues. Both would be very happy to have people with them during their visits. Mike had asked both to visit as many *Adopters/Wildlife Homes* as possible (see pages 13-16).

Norman said that he would like to learn how to do surveys as he would have liked to have seen survey differences in his land before and after the volcano and his work. Tim confirmed the value of training from the project. Tim brought the land in 2010,



Mr Chris Sealys speaking at the event

after the volcano, and there were no pollinators, but now they are quite common.

Tim said that a key lesson he learnt is not to cut back *Acacia* at the very beginning. He feels this cost him 3-4 years of progress. This is because forest trees grow as saplings in cover and cannot develop well in open sunlight. Tim also shared that ring-barking of shading invasives worked very well. Ring-barking is good as it means the plants can continue to stand for a few years, which means that the new plants underneath can grow whilst the large tree slowly dies. Tim was asked which species he ring-barks, and answered neem and tamarind. Neem is strange as they look fine but after 2 years they die within a few weeks. Tamarind shows noticeable signs of decline immediately. Norman said Neem suckers if cut but ring barking works well. Chris noted that care is needed with ring-barking if falling branches could fall on people in areas of public access. Jodey commented that these were just the sort of things to put in a booklet.

Main Action points

1. The community of *Adopters* to be maintained.
2. UKOTCF will continue to engage remotely and, when practicable, on-island.
3. The possibility of applying for particular small grants under Darwin Local was noted.
4. Mike would circulate the draft simple spread-sheet to gather information on successful and unsuccessful treatments; the *Adopters* were asked to try this out and comment back to Mike and Jodey, so that this could be amended.
5. Similarly, Elvis would try the form and comment, and also invite other *Adopters* to either try the form or else write some notes on their experiences and send them in.
6. Mike and Jodey would try to collate all that came in and make it available, both by database and possibly a booklet.
7. UKOTCF to include in the final grant report the setting up of this continuity group.
8. The group would try to set up a programme of visits to each other's sites.
9. The group noted the importance of passing information through *Monty's Messengers*, *Monty's Ambassadors*, Higher Education evenings, bioblitzes etc.
10. Jodey would explore the situation of a UK university which had not made available the results of their study on the uses of ash.
11. Mike would link the group up with revisiting Leigh Morris and David Clements.
12. All *Adopters* to be advised to collect their plants etc by

September when project-funding ended.

13. Tim to try out the cutter for leaves and palm-fronds when it arrives, and MNT to set up a logging system for *Adopters* to borrow it.
14. There was also a discussion about funding trail maintenance but that should be taken forward by MNT outside this project.
15. Jodey and Catherine would discuss the *Biodiversity Toolkit* with Norman and others interested.
16. Mike thanked all for participating and Norman for agreeing to chair the group, and Norman, on behalf of the local team, thanked Mike, Elvis, Chris and their colleagues for sharing their knowledge.
17. The group could meet online, as well as physically in future.

Dissemination

In addition to the public meetings, an overview of the project was the subject of a 40-minute radio broadcast (with streamed video also) on national radio ZJB on their *MNT Heritage* programme, hosted by Mrs Delmaude Ryan, with Dr Mike Pienkowski, Mrs Carol Osborne (as an *Adopter*), Ms Ajhermae White and Mr Elvis Gerald (as the original Field Project Officers), Mr Chris Sealys (MNT senior conservation officer) and Mr Sandrae Thomas (MNT youth officer).

This overviewed the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project and its origins, with some of the different roles explained. Mike outlined the origins of the project, which builds on part of a previous project looking to conserve native species by tackling invasives. He said there had originally been an exploration of the possibility of removing some invasives across the island but the constraints in respect of the restricted area made that impracticable at present. That project then developed what are now called *Adopters* and *Wildlife Homes* to create small virtual islands within the land area of Montserrat. Within these, invasives could be eliminated or managed, allowing native plants and animals to survive and thrive. He said that a main theme among the outcomes is mutual learning, both as regards of *Adopters* but also the assistance to MNT in re-starting *Monty's Messengers* and initiating the higher education events.

UKOTCF's Ann Pienkowski had also set out to film and edit to produce one or more videos on each of the first round of *Wildlife Homes* and their *Adopters*. This has now been achieved with a total of 28 videos available at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/adoptahomeforwildlife/> (scroll down to below "Project Updates"). Videos from the pilot project and the interval before the start of the current project can be seen at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/sos-montserrat/> and <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/videos/>.



A small section of the selection of videos at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/adoptahomeforwildlife/>

Lepidoptera surveys 22nd June to 6th July 2024

By Marc Botham

I was lucky enough to visit Montserrat this year as part of the Defra Darwin Plus 192 project *Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development*. During the trip I focused recording on Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) although I did record other taxa on a fairly *ad hoc* basis using the citizen science recording tool, iNaturalist. For butterflies I would spend 1-3 hours on most days of my visit trying to identify what species I saw and trying to get photographs to help both with identification and for the butterfly guide being developed as part of the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project. Due to the high activity of the butterflies in the heat at this time of year, getting photographs proved very difficult. For moths, I ran a LepiLED light with a net trap on all but the last night of my stay on the veranda of the accommodation at Woodlands. On two nights I trapped in the forest at the start of the Cassava Trail with a fellow ecologist who was also visiting the island at the same time, Wolfgang Rabitsch. The following is a brief summary of the observations I made on butterflies and moths during my short stay.

Butterflies

In total, I saw at least twenty-five species out of around 50 species present on Montserrat, although some of these are awaiting confirmation of identification, and this total is likely to change. This includes at least one species that has not yet been recorded on Montserrat Gray Ministreak *Ministrymon azia*. Due to the weather, I unfortunately spent very little time in the forest. Locations where I did manage to visit for butterflies included: Jack Boy Hill (road verges leading to observation point), The Cot Trail (including verges around National Trust), Old Towne (road down to Old Road Bay alongside Belham River), Cassava Trail (limited to first 100m of trail) and Lawyers Mountain (first 100m of the Fogarty Trail). Generally, most observations were made around the accommodation in Woodlands, especially for moths.

I benefitted greatly from the flowering of the Noni at this time



Garden habitat at Woodlands accommodation. Below: Gray Ministreak *Ministrymon azia* – Woodlands June 2024 – new species to Montserrat, attracted to LED light trap. (All photos in this article: Marc Botham)



of year, which was very attractive to many butterflies (and many other insects) and we had one in the garden of our accommodation in Woodlands. I could sit and watch this and record easily several



A selection of some of the butterflies observed feeding on Noni

species in a few minutes. I found also that, when I was out in forest at night, there were lots of butterflies roosting and easy to see with a headtorch. These included large numbers of Straight-line Sulphur *Rhabdodryas trite* and the only Ruddy Dagger-wings *Marpesia petreus* I saw (three within a foot [30 cm] of each other). This could provide an alternative method for recording butterflies although, like all methods, it is probably limited to a sub-set of species with many species perhaps unlikely to be detected using this method.

The following provides more detailed information on my butterfly observations:



Ruddy Daggerwing – observed roosting in forest at night (left) and during daylight the following morning (right).

Hesperiidae: I regularly encountered probably two or possibly more species of Long-tailed Skipper, both of which were common, occasionally the Violet-banded Skipper *Nyctelius nyctelius*, many of a golden skipper I am not sure of identity of, as they looked more like Fiery Broken-dash *Polites ophites* than Southern Broken-dash (and someone on iNaturalist has identified one as genus *Choranthus* which also looks incredibly similar), a single Fiery Skipper *Hylephila phyleus* and either one of/both of Manuel's or Hammock Skipper *Polygonus* sp (difficult to tell apart and there may also be other similar species). Looking at some of Dan Janzen's work on tropical skippers, it seems many of these species are incredibly difficult or impossible to tell apart from external morphological features and there are lots of cryptic species that require genitalia determination or DNA analysis. Long-tailed Skippers *Urbanus* sp were common across the island; most of which are likely to have been *Urbanus dorantes* but, like the *Polygonus* genus, species of the *Urbanus* genus are numerous and difficult to distinguish from one another. The species of golden skipper I observed frequently, which I am currently considering to be Fiery Broken-dash, was also common across the island in open habitats, but the other species were much less commonly encountered. The commonest

never seemed to stay still and would just disappear into the forest. Most of my observations were of single individuals, with only one occasion when I saw more than one together. I saw no more than ten individuals during my two weeks, but I spent little time in the habitats this species was most frequently seen. Southern Red Rim *Biblis hyperia* seemed to be quite common in some areas. On the Cot Trail for example, I saw five or six in the first 100m. I saw a few around Jack Boy Hill, as well as in other places too. I saw only one fleeting pass-by of Ruddy Dagger-wing during my butterfly surveys but managed to find three individuals roosting, all within 30 cm of one another, at the start of Cassava Trail while I was setting up moth traps there. Either because I disturbed them, or because they were genuinely attracted to the nearby light source like quite a few butterfly species during my trip, one of these was attracted to the LepiLED light we ran in the forest.

I observed Gulf Fritillary *Dione vanillae* relatively frequently but always as singletons and always on the move – with the exception of two. One was in the garden at Woodlands; this spent long periods of time nectaring on planted composites. The other individual I found had recently emerged and therefore actually provided me an opportunity for photographs. Although I cannot be 100% sure, but am fairly confident, I saw one Julia Dryad *Dryas julia* at Woodlands, but this was the only one. The reason I can't be 100% is because it was over 50m away and I didn't have my binoculars on me, but this is fairly easily distinguishable species and unlikely to be confused with other species other than perhaps Gulf Fritillary. White Peacock *Anartia jatrophae* seemed fairly common and widespread in open flowery habitats. Tropical Buckeye *Junonia lavinia* was the first butterfly I encountered on arrival, at the airport. I saw these in several locations but never in huge numbers and always



Tropical Chequered Skipper, female left and male right – a common species in open flowery habitats

skipper species I encountered was Tropical Chequered Skipper *Burnsius oileus*. I saw this species in all open habitats where it was especially fond of Tridax Daisy (generally an excellent nectar plant for butterflies).

Nymphalidae: Zebra Long-wing *Heliconius charithonia* – I saw this species in most places I went around forest-edges and in the forest, but never got close enough to photograph one. They



Gulf Fritillary *Dione vanillae* – this individual was found recently emerged in track-side vegetation at Woodlands

in fairly dry, grassy/scrubby habitats.

Pieridae: Great Southern White *Ascia monuste* was fairly numerous at the Noni, but the greatest numbers were along road verges where there were tall reed-like grasses growing; here there would be literally dozens and dozens forming small clouds of butterflies disturbed as we drove past. Tropical White *Appias drusilla* was seen less frequently but small numbers visited Noni and this was another species easily found roosting in the forest. Banded Yellow *Eruema elathea* – I saw quite a few of these and probably under-recorded them, as I noted only those with an obvious band and often relied on catching them first. Seen with confidence on The Cot Trail, and near the reserve, but I am fairly sure I saw this species in other areas too, especially individuals without strong banding. In these case, individuals had clearly yellowish forewings and white hindwings – which I had presumed always to be Pale Yellow *Pyrisitia venusta*. Little Yellow *Eurema lisa* and Pale Yellow I encountered in most open habitats and found roosting in the forest edge. I found these hard at first to separate without catching – and, to my knowledge, from those caught, I never encountered Dina Yellow *Pyrisitia dina* which is supposed to be widespread too. This may be a consequence of not spending so much time in forested habitat and/or a seasonal appearance of this species. Cloudless Sulphur *Phoebis sennae* seemed to be fairly common everywhere I surveyed. I had to catch these to see what they were – which was difficult as this is a very active and strong-flying species rarely settling long enough to see properly. Straight-lined Sulphur, as mentioned above, took me a while to find and then suddenly seemed to be found fairly frequently in most places including



Great Southern White – common, and abundant in some places, throughout Montserrat

good numbers in the forest, again suggesting some seasonality.

Lycaneidae: Angerona Hairstreak *Electrostrymon angerona* seemed to be abundant in all habitats and came to light frequently. It was incredibly numerous on the Noni, often with several per flower and many sitting on nearby leaves, and I found many roosting in the forest when trapping there. Hanno Blue *Hemiargus hanno*, along with Angerona Hairstreak, was the commonest butterfly I saw. This species seemed to be relatively abundant in all open habitats and often in good numbers where it would often be seen nectaring at Tridax Daisy *Tridax procumbens* in particular. This was the only ‘blue’ I recorded. Cramer’s Scrub Hairstreaks *Strymon bubastus* were seen on the verge outside the National Trust (pictured in next column) where there were three individuals nectaring on *Sida* spp; a female appeared to

be testing the plant for oviposition although I did not observe any eggs actually being laid and could not find any on further inspection. This species was also observed near the observatory at Jack Boy Hill nectaring on Tridax Daisy. At the same site, a single Caribbean Scrub Hairstreak *Strymon acis* was observed nectaring on Yellow Balsam *Croton flavens*. Finally, as noted above, a Gray Ministreak, not recorded before on Montserrat, was attracted to the LED light I was running at Woodlands



Cramer's Scrub Hairstreak *Strymon bubastus* seen on the road verges outside the National Trust

residence.

Moths

There are around 173 species of moth on Montserrat. I became familiar quickly with two moths: *Eulepidotis addens* and *E.modestula*. This was because, by day, they were disturbed from



Eulepidotis species (*modestula* above and *addens* below) were abundant, often disturbed in large numbers by day, especially in forest habitat, and frequent in large numbers around the light traps.



vegetation easily almost everywhere I went. This was especially so in the forest where they were often in very large numbers. They also came in large numbers to light at Woodlands, with dozens and dozens on surrounding furniture, ceiling, vegetation etc, although very few actually entered the trap. Similarly, when trapping in the forest with a light over a sheet, I observed only a handful of these two species on the sheet despite seeing large numbers during the day. They were easily seen and disturbed from vegetation walking around with a head-torch, numbers far outweighing those in and around the light traps.

Another species seen regularly by day was the Black Witch *Ascalapha odorata*. I encountered this moth on most occasions that I managed to survey in more forested habitats. However, rather frustratingly, I could never get near enough for a photograph or to catch it, until individuals finally appeared to light traps at the end of the trip. I found remains of one in Angelos supermarket in Cudjoehead and had one fly by the trap at Woodlands. Until the very last night, I had not trapped one to light at all. Individuals seen by day included at The Cot, Lawyers Mountain and Cassava Trail. On the last night of trapping, a total of three came to lights, one in the forest at the start of the



Black Witch moth: regularly seen on forest trails by day and finally captured at light on the final night of surveys.

Casava Trail (to LepiLED) and two at Woodlands accommodation (to a 125W MV light source).

Moth traps were generally busy, but notably most busy after approximately 11pm, with much reduced activity before that except when it rained – which greatly increased nocturnal insect activity. As is well known, clear night skies and high levels of moonlight have a large negative impact on moth-trap catches through a combination of cooler temperatures and less effectiveness of an artificial light source under higher levels of natural background light. Each night for thirteen nights between 22nd June and 5th July 2024, a light trap was run at the Woodlands accommodation. It was placed on the upper veranda, under cover from rain. Whilst this inevitably impeded the full extent to which the light could be seen and therefore limit its attractive radius, it did rain most nights and therefore this was necessary to prevent damage to the equipment. On most nights a single LepiLED light, with a net-trap hung 1m above floor level, was left out overnight. On two nights, when Wolfgang Rabitsch and I ran light traps in the forest at the start of the Cassava Trail, a 20W Compact Fluorescent actinic light with

a small net-trap was used instead. On the final night of trapping at Woodlands, a 125W MV light was used, again with a small net-trap with a white sheet placed behind; this was run only until 1am because of an emergence of the winged stage of an ant species which resulted in thousands of ants being attracted to the light source. To document the moths I spent between two and three hours each morning photographing moths, trying to get photos of all the different species.

In addition to the trapping at the accommodation, two LepiLED lights were operated at the start of the Cassava Trail on two nights – one hung from a tree with a net-trap, the other hung over a white sheet. These traps were run until between midnight and 1am.

Photographs were taken of the moths, and other insects, on the night. These photographs, of which I have over three thousand, will all be uploaded on to iNaturalist and identified to the highest level possible using a combination of a provisional list kindly provided to me by a leading expert on Caribbean moths, Matthew Barnes, a provisional guide put together by Matthew, David Clements, Ajhermae White and Vicky Wilkins, based on material collected by David as part of the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project, and various websites documenting moths of North, Central and South America and the Caribbean Islands.

At this point it is difficult to estimate how many species were recorded but I expect it to be well over a hundred, and more likely between 150 and 200, although many are unlikely to be determinable to species level. Already, this includes a good number of species not previously recorded on Montserrat based on the material currently available, although moth surveys have been run by Montana State University, Montana, and so lists from these surveys may well contain at least some of these species. Currently, as of 8th August 2024, having uploaded over 800 images, identifications to some level have been made for over 120 different species of moth from the trip. You can see all my iNaturalist observations at https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?place_id=10304&subview=table&user_id=msbotham.



A small selection of some of the moths caught during light surveys between 22nd June and 5th July 2024. From left to right, top to bottom current identifications, some of which are still awaiting confirmation so may not be correct (= species likely to be new records for Montserrat): Synclera jarbusalis*, Perasia garnoti, Cydosia nobilitella, Pheia daphaena*, Synchlora sp, Callopietria floridensis, Agathodes designalis, Xylophanes pluto, Epimecis detexta*, Pheia haemupleura*, Protambulyx strigilis, Gonodonta sp (possibly nitidimacula*), Streptopalpia minusculalis*, Anticarsia gemmatalis, Rhuda focula**

They stink and suck!

By Wolfgang Rabitsch

The true bugs, or Heteroptera, are a fascinating and very diverse group of insects with more than 40,000 described species worldwide. They come in very different body-shapes, life-styles and colours. So far, there has been no comprehensive list of the true bugs of Montserrat and my plan is to write up one. This requires going out in the field looking for them. They can be found on plants, on the ground, in the litter, but also in ponds and brooks as the group includes aquatic species. Different techniques are required to find them. You can look at the plants directly or hunt them on the ground by visual inspections, but it is more efficient to use a sweeping net and beating tray. Care is necessary when sweeping or beating thorny or sticky plants for the sake of the equipment and your own safety. Some true bugs are nocturnal and attracted to light and, while this is not as spectacular as for the moths in terms of numbers and diversity, it is sometimes the only technique to find particular species. The same is true for other specialist species, living in the leaf-litter or high up in the usually unreachable canopies of trees. For the aquatic species, you need a pond-net to collect them from standing or running waters, although some aquatic species come to light as well. True bugs are the only insects that have conquered marine habitats, with a few species of water-striders living on the open sea, in mangroves and coastal habitats.

Producing a list of true bugs of a certain area therefore requires applying different techniques in different habitats and, because species are present only during some times of the year, you have to go and find them at different times of the year. The scientific identification of the species can be a time-consuming task. While some species are easy to identify in the field or on pictures, for others you need a hand-lens or microscope and, for some, you have to study internal anatomical structures. The easy identification of some species on pictures means that platforms such as iNaturalist can help and provide useful data of the occurrence and distribution of these species. For the more difficult ones, comparison with previously collected material in adjacent areas of the Caribbean in museum collections is necessary. Considering the geological history of Montserrat, despite its relative proximity to other islands, it is likely that there are endemic species of true bugs that do not occur anywhere else on the planet.

Heteroptera is Greek and means “different wings”, describing a characteristic feature of the forewing, having both a membranous and a hardened portion, which helps (among other things) separating true bugs from other insects. Contrary to beetles or butterflies, and similar to e.g. grasshoppers, they go through consecutive (usually five) larval stages that look similar to adults, but lack the wings and reproductive organs. Some true bugs are very small (< 1 mm) and some are quite large (the so-called giant water-bugs can reach up to 10 cm in body size).

All true bugs suck food through their straw-like mouthparts, so they can only live on liquid food. Most species feed on plants, sometimes with a preference for specific plant species or family; some are predators feeding on other insects; and there are species that suck on fungi and a very few species suck on blood, such as the infamous bed-bugs feeding on us (other members of this family feed on bats or birds), and kissing bugs, who can transmit diseases (but are not present on Montserrat). While some of the

plant-feeders – such as the introduced black bean bug – can be pests in gardens and orchards, some of the predatory species are beneficial by keeping under control other plant pests, including aphids, scales and thrips.

Most true bugs can produce odours from specific glands for protection against predators, and most people would say they stink. I consider the smell not particularly unpleasant (although I might be biased), and indeed they have been used as perfume substitutes in Europe in the 18th century. Also, some aquatic bugs are still being used to spice up certain dishes in Asia and Central America today, giving a corianderish flavour.

This was my second visit to Montserrat searching for true bugs and, beside the sometimes strenuous field work and the complex process of identifying the species, it is an absolute pleasure and privilege to do this in such a fascinating and beautiful place and I cannot wait coming back and exploring more of Montserrat (and its true bugs)!



Zelus longipes, the milkweed assassin bug, is a generalist predator feeding on other insects. (All photos in this article by Wolfgang Rabitsch)



Brachyplatys subaeneus, the black bean bug, is native to Asia and was first found in the Western hemisphere in 2012 in Panama and is spreading fast. It is very common in gardens and along road edges and is a pest on legume crops.



Tetyra pinguis belongs to the Jewel bug family (Scutelleridae) and comes in different colour varieties. This reddish one is less often seen.



A larva of *Arvelius albopunctatus*, the tomato stink bug. It feeds on different nightshade species, including tomato, beans, pepper and eggplant.



Pseudacysta perseae, the Avocado lace bug, is only 2 mm in body size. It can cause damage to avocado leaves, often caused by subsequent fungal infections.



The Saint Andrew's cotton stainer *Dysdercus andreae* feeds on the Portia tree *Thespesia populnea*. It can be found abundantly on Woodlands beach.

Reviving Montserrat's botanical heritage: Montserrat National Trust's effort to restore the National Herbarium

By Sofie Meeus and Quentin Groom

The Montserrat National Trust has taken a leading role in an important initiative to restore and revitalize the island's National Herbarium, an essential resource for preserving Montserrat's botanical heritage. The Trust's work is central to this effort, driving a resurgence in the herbarium's significance through key projects like *From Blue Iguanas to Blue Vervain* and the DPLUS192 project.

The Montserrat National Trust recognized the need to preserve the island's rich botanical legacy, and this vision catalysed a partnership with Meise Botanic Garden in Belgium. Meise's extensive herbarium, with over 4 million specimens, provided a model and partner for Montserrat. Botanists Quentin Groom and Sofie Meeus joined the Trust in their mission to establish a reference collection of medicinal plants, integral to the use of traditional herbal medicines. This initiative aimed to ensure that the knowledge passed down through generations would not be lost but instead preserved and accessible.

From the outset, the Montserrat National Trust played a pivotal role, facilitating training in herbarium management and specimen mounting. However, a crucial component was missing—a specialised metal cabinet necessary to protect the dried



Quentin Groom and Chris Sealys at the special herbarium in a room air conditioned to protect the plant material. But a herbarium is more than a cabinet. Each folder is the result of much careful work, as outlined in this article. (All photos: Sofie Meeus and Quentin Groom)



Some of the team and their specimens at one of the workshops on herbarium techniques



Hard work in the workshop – but fun too!

plant specimens from insects and deterioration. Recognizing the importance of this cabinet, the Trust worked with its partners to overcome this challenge.

The breakthrough came when the International Association for Plant Taxonomy (IAPT) announced funding opportunities for botanical projects. The Montserrat National Trust, with the support of Meise Botanic Garden and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, successfully applied for a grant to secure the cabinet. Despite the logistical difficulties, the cabinet arrived on the island earlier this year, marking a significant step forward.

In July, the Trust once again collaborated with the Meise team, who returned to the island to assist in the critical work of cataloguing and properly storing the herbarium's collections. This included specimens collected by Richard Howard in the 1970s, a key figure in Caribbean botany, as well as specimens that had been held in storage for nearly two decades. The Trust's dedication to this project ensures that these valuable collections are available for future generations.

The Montserrat National Trust's leadership in this endeavour has been instrumental in not only reviving the herbarium but also in making it a recognized part of the global botanical community. The herbarium has now been officially registered



Chris Sealys and Sofie Meeus oversee a group of enthusiastic children learning hands-on about plants and herbaria.

in the Index Herbariorum, joining a network of scientific collections that enables researchers worldwide to access and reference Montserrat's botanical specimens.

This project exemplifies the Trust's commitment to safeguarding Montserrat's natural heritage. Through careful management, the Trust is not just preserving the island's past but also laying the groundwork for future research and conservation efforts. The revival of the Montserrat National Herbarium is a testament to what can be achieved when local leadership, international collaboration, and a deep respect for tradition come together.

More Montserrat Moths, and More

By David K. Clements

Past readers of this newsletter may remember that I first visited the island as an entomologist in 2022 to collect and document the insects and invertebrates, and that in 2023 I was subsequently able to visit the West Indian Beetle Fauna (WIBF) project at Montana State University (MSU) in the USA in order to identify and photograph examples of many of the island's species (see *SOSNoM* 13 & 16 – September 2022 & June 2024).

This work has resulted in the development of a baseline *Field Guide to the Insects and other Invertebrates of Montserrat* for use by conservation and environmental staff on the island, a project which is now nearing completion. My work on the island was made possible under the Darwin Plus grant DPLUS155, together with additional input from Buglife UK and the UK's Species Recovery Trust (SRT), and coordinated through the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF). As the three-year DPLUS grant comes to an end, I was invited to return to Montserrat to carry out further fieldwork, particularly in regard to the moth fauna, and also to fill gaps in the *Field Guide* wherever possible. This I was very pleased to do and, as a result, I returned to the island for six weeks in July and August of 2024.



A typical entomologist's pose – removing insects from the net at Upper Barzey's. Photo: Leigh Morris

As set out in my last piece, work on the beetle (Coleoptera) fauna of Montserrat has proceeded apace at the WIBF over the last 25 years or so, with over 730 species now being confirmed for the island by Prof. Mike Ivie and his colleagues. Work on the larger moth ('macrolepidoptera') fauna has also progressed significantly in recent years, mainly thanks to past work by visiting specialists such as Matthew Barnes, Marc Botham, Steve Bird, the late Bernard Lalanne-Cassou and others, together with Montserrat resident Ajhermae White who has done so much to document both the fauna and flora of the island over the last few years. Indeed, Ajhermae's contribution has been so wide-ranging and significant that she has now become a co-author for the forthcoming *Field Guide*.

Arriving in mid-July, I immediately started trapping for moths at night, using light-traps brought over specially from the UK. In contrast with my previous visit where captured moths were only photographed, the intention this time was to collect



Moth-trapping near the forest edge at the 7th Day Adventist Church on Mongo Hill. Photo: Chris Sealys.

actual specimens which can be subject to detailed laboratory investigation including, where necessary, by means of dissection and DNA analysis. The moth fauna of the West Indies contains many taxonomic and nomenclatural conundrums, and it is likely that a significant proportion of the species currently recognised from Montserrat are misidentified, represent unresolved species complexes or are, in several cases, completely undescribed species. Many of these 'hidden' species are likely to be endemic in nature, being confined either to Montserrat alone, or to Montserrat and few adjacent islands, or to some other subset component of the Windward Islands, Lesser Antilles or the wider West Indies region. Such endemic species are found nowhere else in the world and therefore represent a globally significant scientific resource, responsibility for the conservation of which rests with the authorities tasked with management and protection of the island's ecological treasures.

At a time when natural habitats are fast disappearing, on Montserrat as in every other part of the world, the need to research and document the biodiversity of the island has never been more urgent and yet the published literature for much of the less charismatic fauna of the island is scattered, obscure and difficult to find. The *Field Guide* project is therefore a first step towards the creation of an easily available and readily usable identification resource to these groups.

There is, however, still much work to be done, even in a group as well-known as the butterflies for example, where three species have been added to the known Montserrat fauna in just the last two years. These are the gray hairstreak *Ministrymon azia*, a cracker butterfly *Hamadryas* sp. and an as-yet unidentified member of the skipper family Hesperidae. The cracker butterflies, the precise identity of which has still to be established, are a large and conspicuous species. It seems rather unlikely that they have been overlooked in the past and it is therefore possible that it has only recently colonised the island, although they do tend to be a denizen of dense dry forest habitats and so may have escaped detection previously. Be that as it may, my most recent visit has shown this species to be well established in the dry forest around Garibaldi Hill, where at least a dozen individuals were seen over several weeks. The butterfly shows a distinctive



A cracker butterfly, *Hamadryas* sp., recently found to be well-established at Garibaldi Hill. First found on Montserrat by Ajhermae White earlier this year. Photo: Ajhermae White

and characteristic territorial behaviour in which males patrol an area of forest from one or more chosen lookout or ‘master’ trees. These are typically large trees standing on a trackside or in a clearing, in a pool of sunlight. The butterflies perch high up on the trunk, head down and with the wings spread out, hastening off to intercept any other butterfly which looks like it might be another of the same species. If it is a female, a mating is attempted; if it is a male, an aerial battle ensues. Since I was there quite late in the season, most of the individuals I saw had very battered wings as a result of these frequent aerial tussles.

The new skipper is also something of a mystery. It does not appear to be a species which has previously been recorded on Montserrat and yet it is quite common, both in the forests and in the scrubby grasslands of the island. It isn't yet clear whether this is actually an unrecorded species or just a very dark form of another species, possibly the yellow-tipped flasher *Telegonus anaphus*, which has a similar wing shape. If it is the latter then it is possibly a local form, perhaps one which is peculiar to Montserrat, as it is much darker and lacks any of the markings which the flasher normally exhibits.

The moth-trapping has also turned up a number of exciting new species. Recent additions to the island fauna have included several of the large sphinx or hawkmoths (Sphingidae), as well as a number of smaller and less conspicuous species, such as the pretty crambid-moth *Dichogama innocua*. These will all be



Native dry forest at Garibaldi Hill, a special habitat of Montserrat which supports a number of localised and characteristic invertebrates. Photo: David Clements



The moth *Dichogama innocua* found new to Montserrat from the moth-trap in Old Towne and elsewhere. Photo: David Clements

added to the emerging *Field Guide* in due course.

Another area where research has recently advanced concerns the large carpenter-bees which are known locally as ‘bumblebees’ (*Xylocopa* sp.). The large purple-blue females are a well-known sight on the island, and yet it is far from clear what their precise species name should be. Historically they have been referred to either as *Xylocopa caribea* or *X. mordax* – sometimes both – and yet it appears that the Montserrat species is neither of these, and may indeed be a wholly undescribed species. Recent work at the Oxford University Museum and at MSU indicate that the names *caribea* and *mordax* both, in fact, refer to the same species and that, whilst that species is widespread in the region, it is almost certainly not the species which occurs on Montserrat.

While on the island I have therefore been collecting specimens of the carpenter-bees for further research. Male carpenter-bees, which are actually tan-brown in colour and quite different in appearance to the females, do not appear to have been collected from Montserrat although one was photographed just this year at Lookout. The collection of male carpenter-bees was a primary objective of my visit, but unfortunately it looks as though I was too late in the season to actually see these myself this time – a good reason for coming back again in the future!

Other interesting finds include a rather pretty new bee-fly, two examples of which were found amongst the nests of Jack Spaniard wasps *Polistes crinitus* on the bottle-bank at Isle Bay. Many bee-flies are nest parasites of bees and wasps, but whether or not this bee-fly, which appears to be an *Anthrax* sp. or nearby, is actually associated with the Jack Spaniards is not known – it seems unlikely, since the wasps are common on the island and the fly is quite conspicuous and therefore unlikely to have been overlooked until now.



A bee-fly, possibly an *Anthrax* sp., found new to the island at Isle Bay. Photo: David Clements



The tailless whip-scorpion *Phrynus goesii*, a ferocious predator of other invertebrates, found at Olveston Bridge. Photo: David Clements

There is little information available about the spiders of the island and, whilst this was not a primary objective of the present surveys, samples of the common spiders were collected alongside other invertebrates wherever they were found; these will be sent to a specialist at the Natural History Museum in London for identification. It was also possible to catch a specimen of the large tailless whip-scorpion (Amblypygidi) which occurs on the island, allowing it to be positively identified as the species *Phrynus goesii*. This species was found lurking in the so-called “puttock holes” (timber post-holes) in the walls under the arch of the old Olveston Bridge, amongst members of a curious and so-far unidentified cave-cricket – one of two currently unnamed cave-cricket species found on Montserrat by the present surveys, the other being on the scrub-shaded undercliff at Isle Bay.

I became aware of the fauna at Olveston Bridge as a result of a field exercise which I carried out with MNT for a summer-school event during my most recent visit. About 40 junior school students and their teachers trooped down to the Nantes River by Olveston Bridge to watch me splashing about in chest-waders, in about 95° of heat, with a pond-net trying to catch aquatic invertebrates to show them. The returns were fairly modest: mostly some water-snails, freshwater shrimps and a few mayfly larvae, although we did also get a juvenile crayfish and saw a large aquatic leech and some dragonflies.

Other activities while I was on the island included the deployment of passive wildlife recording equipment which can be left out unattended in the field to record the calls of animals such as birds, bats and other mammals, reptiles and frogs etc – and even invertebrates such as cicadas and crickets. Calls can be recorded over long periods of time and the files sent away to be identified and catalogued by AI-driven software operated by specialised wildlife-data analysis companies such as Wildlife Acoustics Ltd. I also deployed a trail-camera at several locations on the island, but all this seemed to record was me setting the camera out and collecting it back in again! This was probably my fault rather than the camera’s, however, and it seems likely that such high-tech passive recording techniques will increasingly be a part of the ongoing research efforts being made to document and characterise the special habitats of the island.

Given the recent visit to the island by FERA-UK ant specialist Dr Noel Tawatao, only limited effort was made in finding ants this time around. The ants nevertheless found me! The red fire-ant *Solenopsis invicta* was first recorded on the island in 2022 from specimens which I collected on my previous visit, although clearly it must have been present for some considerable time before that. This painfully vindictive species, and the equally



Above: The historic Olveston Bridge on the Nantes River – home to tailless whip-scorpions and cave-crickets (and bats!) in the crevices and gaps of the stonework. Photo: David Clements

Below: Hunting for aquatic invertebrates to show to 5-11-year-olds at the summer-school event held by Montserrat National Trust.

Photo: Sandrae Thomas



The Vermillion Saddlebags dragonfly *Tramea abdominalis* seen on the Nantes River near Olveston Bridge.

invasive tropical fire-ant *Solenopsis geminata*, is now to be found in many locations on the island and appears to be far more common than when I was here previously. Perhaps they are spreading as a result of climate-change? Certainly, 2024 is widely held to be one of the hottest years anyone on Montserrat can remember and, together with the early onset of the hurricane season, could suggest that the climate is changing on the island. If so, then other changes in the insect and invertebrate fauna can be expected, making the *Field Guide* project all the more timely.



Looking for spiders at the Tropical Mansion Suites hotel, while being attacked by ants! Photo: Leigh Thomas



The invasive Australasian hammerhead-worm *Bipalium vagum*, a horticultural pest, found on Lawyer's Mountain in 2024. Photo: Veta Nicholas.

The arrival of the invasive Australasian hammerhead-worm *Bipalium vagum* on the island, a type of flatworm which preys on earthworms and other soil invertebrates, is another unwelcome example of a species which is spreading worldwide as a result of accidental human transfer aided by climate change: an example of this species was photographed on Lawyer's Mountain earlier this year.

All-in-all, I will have collected well over 1,600 specimens of insects, arachnids, molluscs and other invertebrates during my latest visit, including over 400 moth specimens. These will be taken back to the UK for expert analysis and identification involving a range of helpful specialists. A first draft of the *Field Guide* should become available by the end of 2024 and, although its initial circulation will be confined to the conservation staff on the island due to copyright issues affecting some of the images

used, it is hoped that a formally published book version will become available at some point in the future. For the moment, however, I must return to the wet and cold of the UK autumn with only memories of the sunshine and welcome of Montserrat to keep me warm until my next visit, whenever that may be. I hope it may be soon! In the meantime, my thanks especially to Chris Sealeys of the Montserrat National Trust for his help in finding and exploring sites, and to everyone at both the MNT and at the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & the Environment (MAHLE) on Montserrat, to the *Adopters of Wildlife Homes* and others allowing access to their land, and at UKOTCF, SRT and Buglife in the UK, for making my most recent visit possible.



Left: Sweep-netting for bees at Belham Rivermouth. Photo: Leigh Morris

Right: A case of specimens collected on Montserrat in 2024 – one of several to be taken to the UK for identification. Photo: David Clements



SOS Nature of Montserrat team

In previous Newsletters, we introduced many of the local and visiting members of the projects. Here we introduce another. We were delighted that the Adopt a Home for Wildlife project included support to restart Montserrat National Trust's Monty's Messengers programme for primary-school-age children – which had had to be suspended during the volcanic activity. We heard many requests from older young people that they would like a group for their age group. With the appointment of MNT's new Youth Coordinator, we are delighted that he can further develop Monty's Messengers and get Monty's Ambassadors for these teenagers started. Here, Sandrae Thomas tells us something of himself and his work.

It was Albert Einstein who said, "Every animal is smart but, if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend the

rest of its life thinking that it is stupid." Living by this quote, I have acknowledged that everyone was created with a purpose, and it is our duty as individuals to live up to our true purpose and recognize each day as an opportunity for us to become a better version of ourselves.

My name is Sandrae Thomas, a graduate of the Montserrat Community College and a student of life. Currently, I am employed by the Montserrat National Trust as the Youth Coordinator for the Darwin Plus Local 00093 Project. My role as the Youth Coordinator began in June of 2024 and, since then, I have successfully organized a new youth group on island known as the Monty's Ambassadors for persons aged 13-22. This group is dedicated to fulfilling the motto of the Montserrat National Trust: "Preserving the Past, Protecting the Present

and Embracing the Future.” To date, the members of Monty’s Ambassadors group have been introduced to various career opportunities in the field of Biodiversity and Conservation.

The young people have participated in several activities, including a Bio-Blitz on the Duck Pond Trail with the use of the iNaturalist app, and a clean-up of Margarita Bay with the use of the CleanSwell app. This valuable exposure has been made possible by the staff of the Montserrat National Trust, a cohort of scientists from the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), a team of experts from the Department of Environment on Montserrat and other professionals who continue to donate their time and expertise with the youths on island.

As a result of the knowledge shared by these individuals, some of the youths have expressed a growing interest in botany, protecting endangered species, exploring Montserrat’s hiking trails, and even archiving and documenting the island’s history. Several community projects and educational activities are currently in the pipeline for the Monty’s Ambassadors group. Some of these include beach-cleanup campaigns, exploring Montserrat’s ocean floor to learn more about our marine life and hiking through Montserrat’s dry and wetlands areas to broaden our knowledge about the wildlife within these diverse habitats.

As the Youth Coordinator, I also assist with the Monty’s Messengers Club which serves Primary School children aged 6 – 12. During our interactions, we provide them with learning opportunities to help them develop an early awareness and make informed decisions about environmental matters. For the next quarter, we plan to launch several after-school extracurricular activities for both the primary and secondary students. These will focus on specialised areas such as bird-watching, gardening and reef-cleaning, amongst other things.

Over the summer, the Montserrat National Trust and the Montserrat Children Society collaborated for the Children Society’s Annual Summer School. For four days, the children engaged in activities where they learned about the classical Elements (Water, Earth, Fire and Air). Presentations were made with assistance from Dr Dorothea Hazel-Blake, Director of Primary Healthcare and Ms Yonette Hunte, Environmental Health Officer. The children were exposed also to presentations on insects by Mr David Clements, entomologist for the Species Recovery Trust as part of the UKOTCF/MNT *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project and Mr Chris Sealys, Conservation Officer from the Montserrat National Trust. Fire Officers delivered a presentation on Fire Safety and gave practical demonstrations on how to extinguish fires. On the fourth day, the team from the Mountain Chicken Recovery Program visited the children and engaged them in activities about the Mountain Chicken Recovery Project.

The last event for the summer was a Back-to-School Extravaganza where both Monty’ Messengers and Monty’s Ambassadors received gift items to return to school. They also participated in a hike through Piper’s Lot and a sports day at Salem Park. The event was a collaboration between the Montserrat National Trust, Darwin Local and the We Care Foundation.

Ultimately, my aim for the Monty’s Ambassadors and Monty’s Messengers is to provide the youth of Montserrat with every available opportunity for personal and academic development in the field of Conservation. This will ensure that the biodiversity of Montserrat continues to thrive for future generations to enjoy.

Currently, I am working with the Manx Wildlife Trust to facilitate the twinning relationship between the Montserrat Secondary School and the Ballakermeen High School in the Isle of Man, another spin-off from the UKOTCF/MNT *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project. Together, we are working on the Youth and United Nations Global Alliance (YUNGA). The young people on island have already began working on the YUNGA Biodiversity badge and as they continue to work with the Manx Wildlife Trust, it is my hope that we can have exchange programmes between the schools so that the knowledge can be shared and experiences be gained.

On a personal level, I am a photographer. Balancing work and leisure, I always ensure to make time for my family and friends. Although my life is not as active as I would like it to be, the launch of the Monty’s Ambassadors group has allowed me to include hiking and beach outings in my list of hobbies. I anticipate adding Scuba Diver and Forest Ranger to the list of my achievements in the very near future and, with the dedicated team at the Montserrat National Trust who provides me with much needed guidance, I am confident that I will achieve these.



Sandrae Thomas

The current phase of *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project (DPLUS155 *Securing Montserrat’s threatened endemic species and natural capital through community-action*) and the project *Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat’s sustainable development* (DPLUS192) are currently resourced by the following organisations:

Partners in earlier phases of the Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat programme included some of those at the top of page 1, plus:

