

UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM



The three low-lying Cayman Islands are strung along a submarine mountain ridge south of Cuba, west of Jamaica. The rapidly increasing human population is concentrated in Grand Cayman. Environmental conservation is shared between the National Trust for the Cayman Islands and the local Department of Environment.

The Cayman Islands are clothed in subtropical dry forests and mangrove wetlands, supporting diverse life typical of the Greater Antillean region.

Economic success and exponential population growth are taking a toll on the Cayman Islands, with ongoing deforestation threatening areas such as mangrove wetlands and ancient dry forests on all three islands. The National Trust for the Cayman Islands is working to establish a protected area system, giving priority to areas rich in biodiversity. Land owned by the Trust is protected in perpetuity. Trust nature reserves include the Booby Pond Nature Reserve on Little Cayman, a "Ramsar" Conservation Wetland of International Importance, home to 20,000 red-footed boobies. The Brac Parrot Reserve protects forest important for nesting of Cayman Brac's critically endangered parrots. The Salina Reserve, Mastic Reserve and Central Mangrove Wetland (pictured) on Grand Cayman protect a wide range of pristine forest environments. The Trust works also to preserve species like the endangered blue iguana, which is making a comeback from the brink of extinction thanks to captive breeding and restocking of protected habitat. In the marine environment, the government's Department of Environment manages an extensive system of Marine Parks, monitors coral reefs and works on sustainable harvest policies.

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (www.ukotcf.org) brings together non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and institutions in UK and the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs). It promotes the co-ordinated conservation of the diverse and increasingly threatened plant and animal species and natural habitats of the UKOTs. It does this by providing assistance in the form of expertise, information and liaison between NGOs and governments, both in the UK and in the UKOTs.

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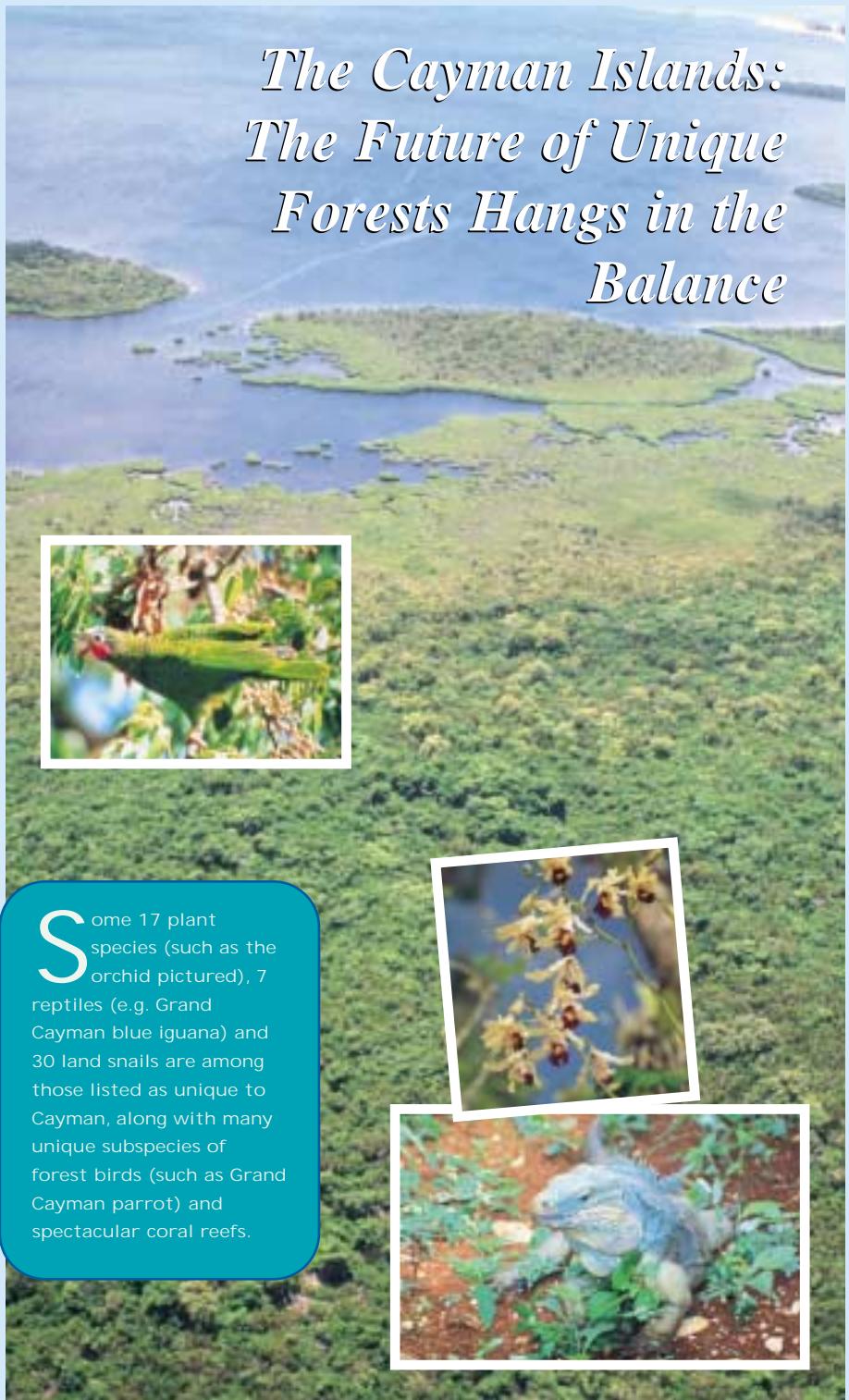


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Photographs courtesy of Frederic J. Burton and Michael Gore FRS.

The Cayman Islands: The Future of Unique Forests Hangs in the Balance



Some 17 plant species (such as the orchid pictured), 7 reptiles (e.g. Grand Cayman blue iguana) and 30 land snails are among those listed as unique to Cayman, along with many unique subspecies of forest birds (such as Grand Cayman parrot) and spectacular coral reefs.

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An archipelago of 60 islands and cays, BVI is located 60 miles east of Puerto Rico and has a population of 19,842 people. Established in 1961, the British Virgin Islands National Park Trust is a non-profit, statutory body, which manages national parks and designated marine and terrestrial protected areas. The Trust also administers several environmental programmes including marine conservation and biodiversity conservation programmes.

BVI has environmental legislation for the protection of the territory's natural resources, the most recent of which is the Fisheries Act of 1997 which regulates fisheries activities throughout the islands. The Territory is a signatory to several international environmental agreements such as the Convention of Biological Diversity, the Convention of International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) and the "Ramsar" Convention on Wetlands amongst others.

Full enforcement of legislation is hindered by the lack of adequate facilities and manpower. Development of marinas along the coastal areas has been an on-going issue in the territory. Mangroves and sea grass beds are destroyed and reefs are smothered to make way for the tourism-related infrastructure as development continues to compete with the environment on which it is based.

The Trust has managed several internationally funded biodiversity programmes. A recent one is a Darwin Initiative funded programme, which includes training in the management of terrestrial biodiversity.

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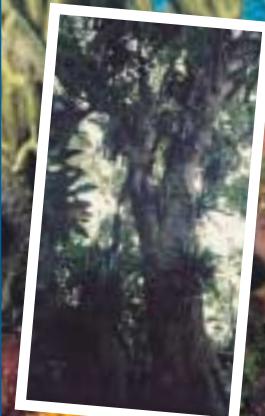


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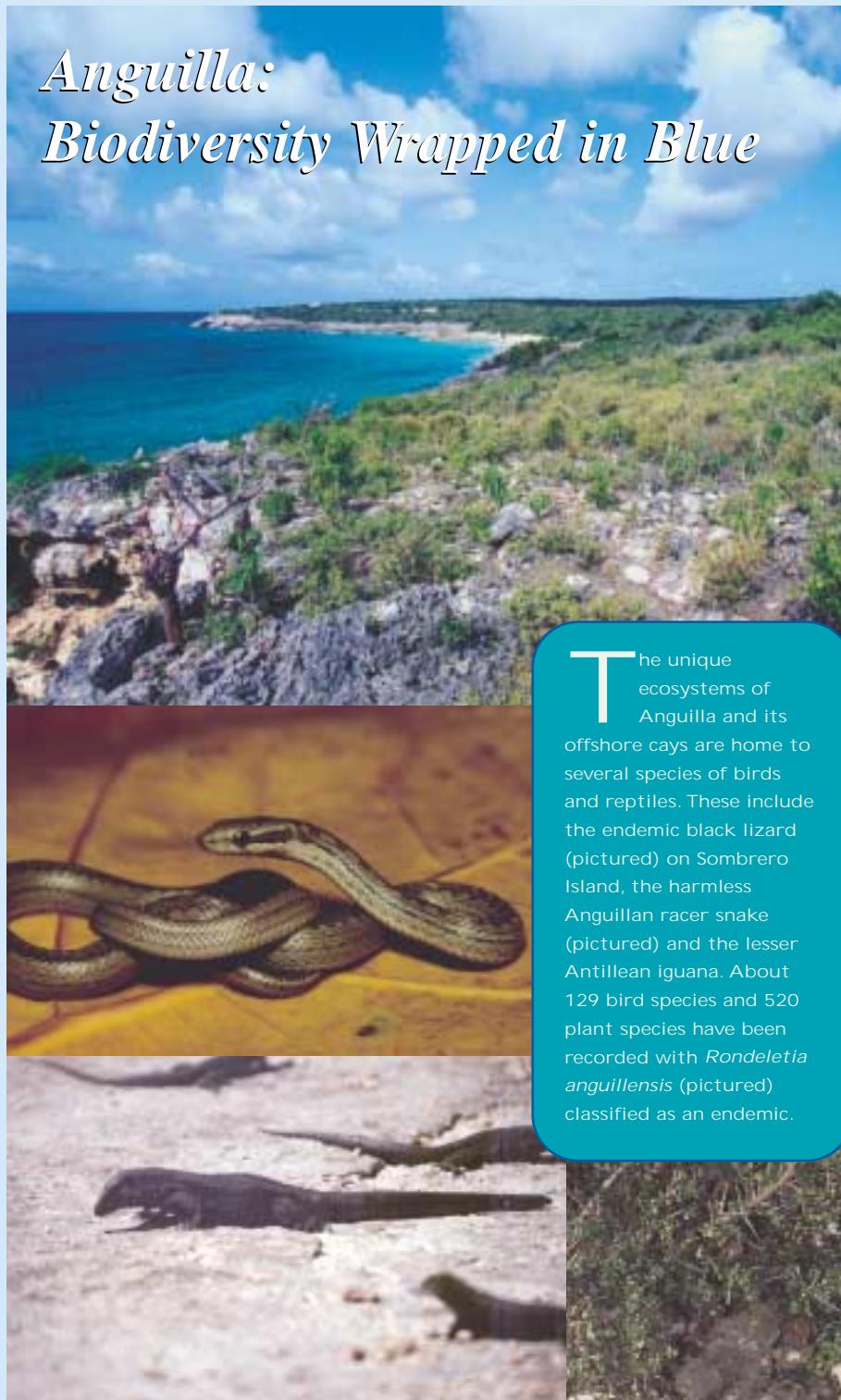


Photographs courtesy of Glenn Gerber, Jim Scheller and National Parks Trust

British Virgin Islands: Diversity Abounds in Nature's Little Secrets



The islands support a number of endemic and threatened species of international importance, such as the critically endangered endemic Anegada rock iguana. Eighteen roseate West Indies flamingoes were reintroduced to Anegada in 1992 where a colony of 51 flourished by 2000. BVI also possesses a number of globally significant plant species, some of which occur only on one or two islands, such as pokemeboy and *Calypttranthes kiaerskovi*.



Anguilla: Biodiversity Wrapped in Blue

The unique ecosystems of Anguilla and its offshore cays are home to several species of birds and reptiles. These include the endemic black lizard (pictured) on Sombrero Island, the harmless Anguillan racer snake (pictured) and the lesser Antillean iguana. About 129 bird species and 520 plant species have been recorded with *Rondeletia anguillensis* (pictured) classified as an endemic.

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Anguilla the most northerly of the Leeward Islands is located 18.3° north by 63° west. Its name derived from its eel-shape. The coral limestone island's area is 91km², together with several offshore islands and cays. Anguilla is home to 13,527 people (estimated 1999). Tourism and off-shore finance are the major contributors to the island's economy.

The Anguilla National Trust is charged with ensuring that the natural resources of the island are protected as well as the preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of the island. The Trust has close links with Forum member organisations such as FFI, RSPB and WWF-UK which help it to build its resources base for the conservation of Anguilla's biodiversity. The work done by other local organisations, such as the Anguilla Beautification Club (Environment) and the island's School Environment Clubs, also plays a part in the promotion of environmental awareness.

The Anguilla National Trust, through its conservation programme, is collaborating with its regional and international partners, with the major goal of developing a system of parks and protected areas. Inventories of the island's bird life are in progress. Of utmost importance are Anguilla's salt ponds. These wetlands are habitat for various bird species, which include the endangered roseate terns, least terns and red-billed tropic birds, a species of special concern. During hurricanes and periods of heavy rains, they act as flood control areas.

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Production of this board was supported by RSPB (the UK partner of BirdLife International) and the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

THE ANGUILLA NATIONAL TRUST



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CONSERVATION FORUM

The isolated island chain of Bermuda is located in the western North Atlantic 965 km east of Cape Hatteras, USA. With a total land area of just 55 km², the UK's oldest Overseas Territory comprises over 150 limestone islands that sit on the largest of three volcanic seamounts formed about 110 million years ago.

Influenced by the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, Bermuda's shallow-water platform covers an area of about 1000 km², and supports the northernmost coral reef system in the world.

Despite a long history of conservation, the Island's conservation agencies are faced with a challenge. Bermuda's low-rolling hills are largely suburban in character, supporting a resident population of over 60,000 concentrated on the 7 largest islands. Economic growth, based on tourism and international business, attracts 500,000 visitors each year. The pressure for development, coupled with the ever-increasing problem of introduced species, pose an escalating threat to the fragile ecology of the Island.

Organisations such as the Bermuda Audubon Society and Bermuda National Trust have focused on the acquisition, restoration and management of critical habitats, most notably wetlands, as well as conservation advocacy. The Bermuda Zoological Society meanwhile has concentrated on promoting environmental education and community participation in *in-situ* research and conservation activities. All work closely with the Bermuda Government's conservation efforts.

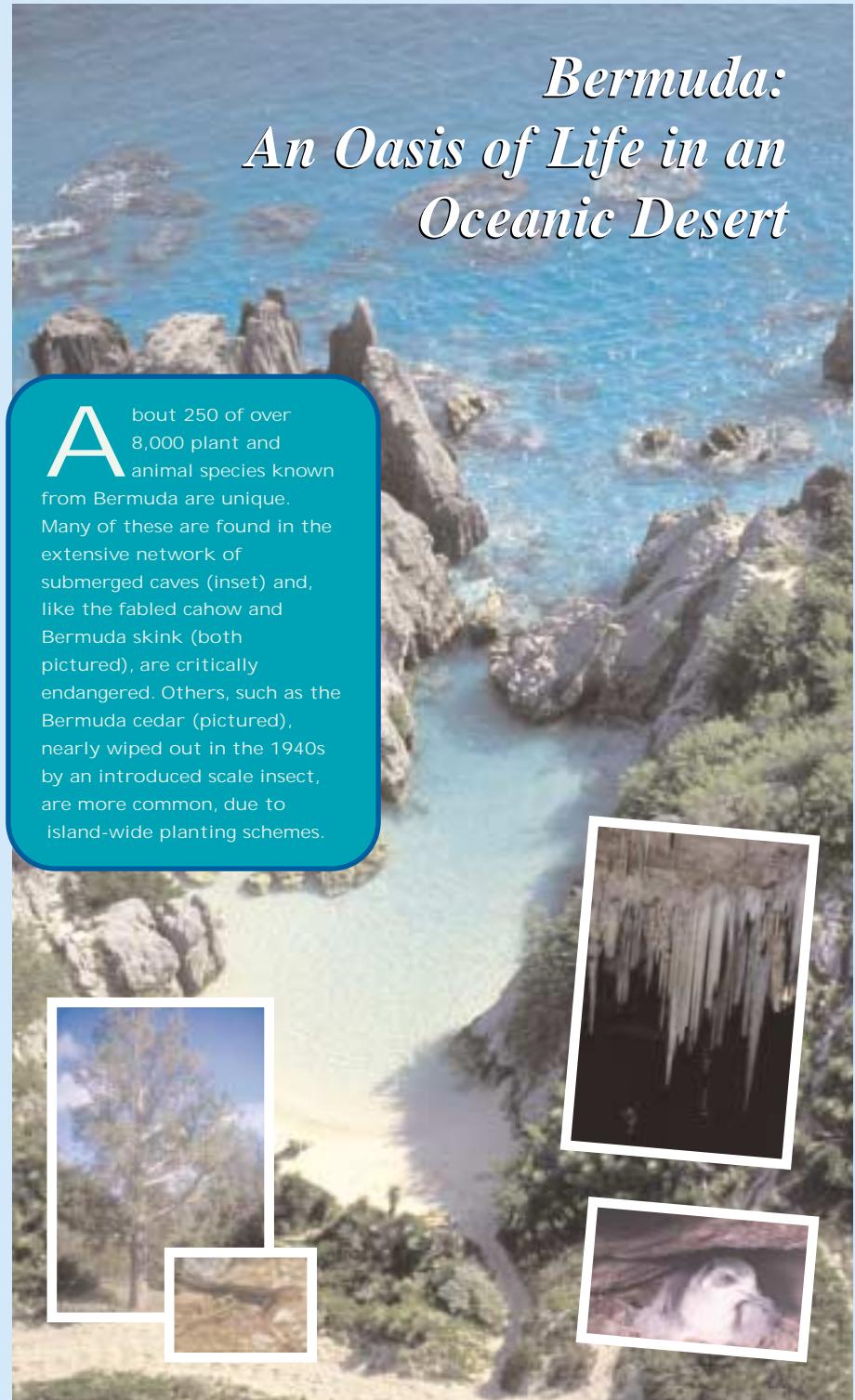
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Photographs courtesy of Bermuda Government Information Services: Stephen Bainbridge; Richard Ground; Martin Thomas.



Gibraltar: A Crossroads for Wildlife

Soaring birds (like this short-toed eagle) pass over twice a year. Gibraltar's waters are home to dolphins and many other animals; many traverse the Straits between Mediterranean and Atlantic. Species confined to Gibraltar include sea-slugs, snails and plants (e.g. Gibraltar candytuft in the main picture). Within Europe, Barbary macaques (the famous "apes") are unique to Gibraltar.

UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES



CONSERVATION FORUM

Gibraltar is a narrow peninsula 7km long attached to Iberia by a low, sandy isthmus. A Mediterranean wildlife community survives on the impressive limestone cliffs and slopes with their scrub, patches of woodland, caves and rocky shoreline. A steep cliff rises from the Mediterranean on the east to 398 metres. On the west the Rock slopes more gradually through scrubland, with the city (where most of the 28,000 people live) nestled at the foot, partly on land claimed from the sea. To the south are a series of stony terraces.

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society, a Partner of BirdLife International and of the Forum, is the membership-based voluntary organisation working to study, protect and manage the fauna and flora.

Urban development has been dramatic since the early 1900s. This continues, with loss of natural habitat. Important plant and animal species are protected and much of the Mediterranean scrub and cliffs are within a nature reserve. There is a continuing need to extend protection to other sites including the sea.

A longstanding problem is commercial net-fishing and seabed-raking in territorial waters by Spanish fishermen, with an adverse effect on marine life.

Environmental impacts that need management include intense use of land and sea for tourism, and sea and air pollution from industrial activities in the region. Exotic invasive plant species present problems; there is potential for work in habitat restoration and re-introduction of plants and animals to restored or newly protected areas.

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Ascension Island lies in splendid isolation, just south of the equator, in the middle of the Atlantic. It has spectacular volcanic scenery. Because of its remoteness, it was not settled until the 19th century when Napoleon was held captive on the neighbouring island of St Helena, 1,300 km away. At that time, the main island, though very barren, held huge populations of seabirds. However, rats soon arrived by ship, and donkeys and cats were deliberately introduced. In an effort to beautify the island, many tropical flowers were planted. The result of all these introductions was the rapid decline in seabird numbers so that, today, most can nest only on smaller islets offshore. The only residents are those working there under short-term contracts for the military and civilian organisations which have operations there. The local voluntary conservation organisation is the Ascension Heritage Society.

The main threats to the island's conservation interests are twofold: public ignorance or disinterest in the value of Ascension's biodiversity; and spread of introduced species, particularly mesquite thorn, cats and rats.

Currently, two globally endangered birds, Ascension frigatebird (pictured) and red-footed booby, are threatened. The recently introduced Mexican thorn bush threatens Ascension's green turtle population (pictured), the surviving unique desert flora and fauna and some geological features.

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Ascension Island: More Than Meets The Eye

Much of Ascension's global conservation importance comes from the island's remoteness, which has produced one of the most remarkable island floras and faunas in the world. It is of world significance for its 11 species of breeding seabird, especially the unique Ascension Island frigatebird. It has also one of the most important breeding green turtle populations in the world. There are 6 unique species of land plants, 9 of marine fish and shellfish, and over 20 of land invertebrates.

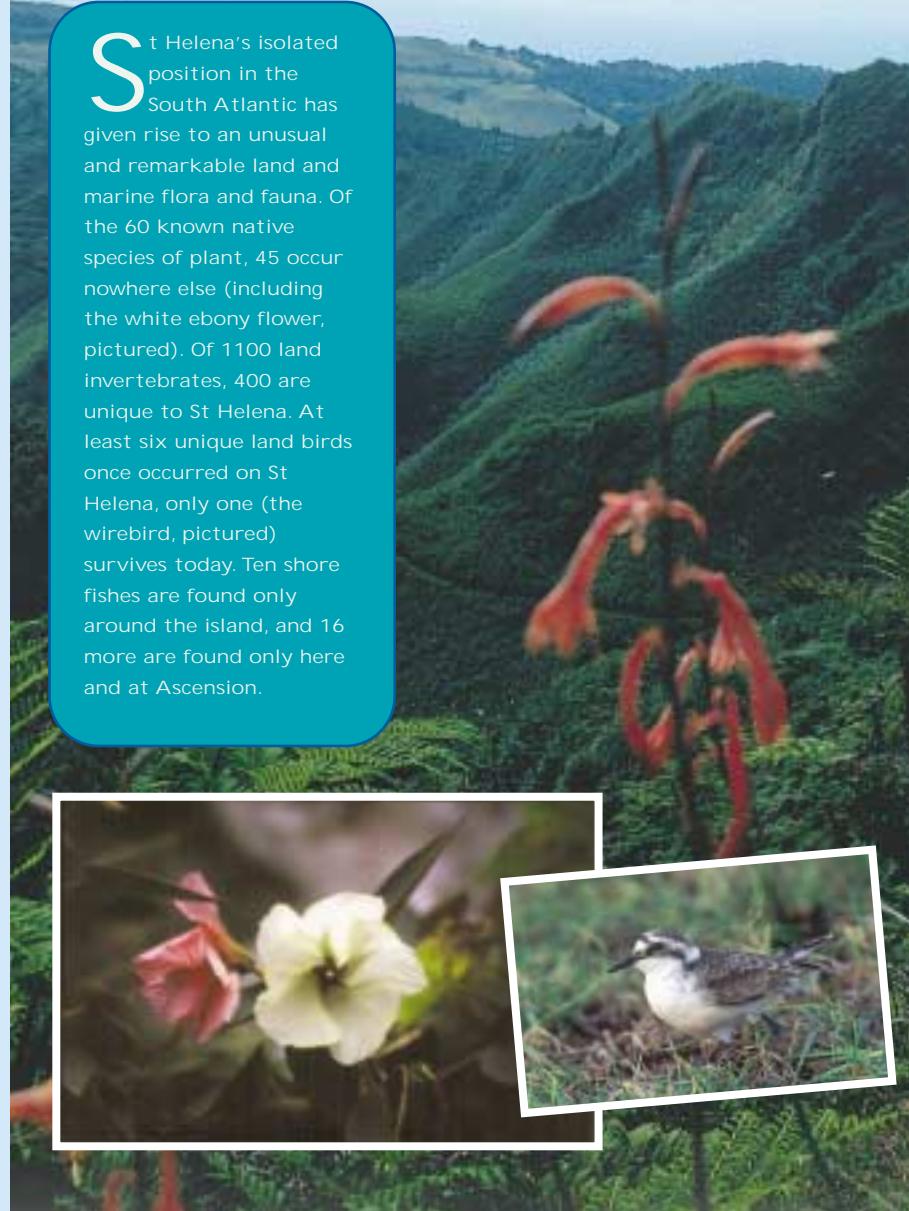
Photographs courtesy of Jim Stevenson (RSPB) & National Museums of Kenya.



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St Helena: Fragments of a Lost World

St Helena's isolated position in the South Atlantic has given rise to an unusual and remarkable land and marine flora and fauna. Of the 60 known native species of plant, 45 occur nowhere else (including the white ebony flower, pictured). Of 1100 land invertebrates, 400 are unique to St Helena. At least six unique land birds once occurred on St Helena, only one (the wirebird, pictured) survives today. Ten shore fishes are found only around the island, and 16 more are found only here and at Ascension.



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St Helena, 122 sq km, has a resident population of 5010. It lies 1,960km from the SW coast of Africa and 2,900km east of South America. The nearest land is Ascension Island, 1300 km north. The Environmental Conservation Section of the St Helena Government Agriculture and Natural Resources Department has been the lead agency in environmental conservation. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the St Helena Nature Conservation Group and the Sandy Bay Environmental Centre, are increasingly active in the development of conservation and education.

Massive destruction of native plants and animals followed the Island's discovery in 1502. Deliberate introductions of alien plants and animals have caused further declines of habitats and species. Remaining, scattered patches of native vegetation are too small to have preserved all the plants of the varied habitats. Six species have become extinct, and several survive only in cultivation. Small population sizes and alien species are the greatest threats to the survival of St Helena's land plants and animals. Reasons for the decline of wirebirds are being studied.

The activity most affecting the marine environment is fishing. St Helena's unique fishes are not important commercially. However, fishing effort directed at lobsters, glasseyes and groupers has impacted the inshore nutrient cycling systems. Quotas are now set for the grouper fishery after recognition of a danger of over-fishing.

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Photographs courtesy of Relaxed Carns-Wicks.

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Tristan da Cunha, rising to over 2000m above sea level, is miles from anywhere in the South Atlantic Ocean. With its neighbouring islands of Nightingale and Inaccessible, and Gough Island, 300km to the SE, it warrants a mention in the Guinness Book of Records as the most isolated inhabited island in the world, being over 1,900km from St Helena and 2,400km west of Cape Town.

Only the island of Tristan da Cunha itself is inhabited. At the start of the millennium, the population (which has never exceeded 300 throughout the previous 184 years of occupation) totalled 284.

Being isolated and devoid of all living organisms at its volcanic origin, the evolving flora and fauna of the island hold a special interest for scientists and visitors. The Tristan Government is keenly aware of the need to live in balance with its environment because the economy of the community is dependent on sustainable harvests of lobster and fish. The Department of Natural Resources is responsible for administering the Island's strict environmental policies. Over 40% of Tristan's territory is a declared nature reserve and Gough Island is a World Heritage Site.

There are no indigenous terrestrial mammals. Man has left his mark on the main island and the introduction of rats and mice in the 1880s destroyed much of Tristan Island's indigenous bird life. Fortunately the islands of Nightingale and Inaccessible remain rodent free and are home to several unique indigenous land birds. Continual education of new generations of Tristanians is required to safeguard their special environment.

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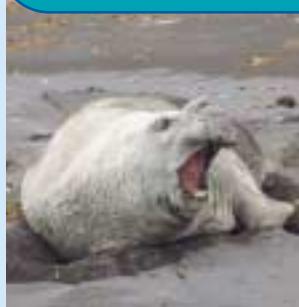
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A wide-angle photograph of a volcanic landscape, likely Mount Gower on Tristan da Cunha, with a bright blue sky and a single seabird in flight.

Tristan da Cunha: The Most Isolated Inhabited Island in the World

Those islands still rodent-free support unique indigenous land-birds, including the Tristan thrush (pictured) and the rare Inaccessible rail, the smallest flightless bird in the world.

Millions of seabirds, such as yellow-nosed albatross (pictured) and greater shearwater, breed - as do fur seals and elephant seals (pictured), now recovering from the hunting of the 19th century.



Photographs courtesy of Brian Baldwin.