

St. Helena

15° 58' S, 5° 43' W

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St. Helena

Author: **Isabel Peters**, Environmental Coordinator and **Annalea Beard**, Environmental Assistant, Environmental Planning and Development Section, Secretariat, St. Helena Government.

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Basic facts and Figures

Note: St. Helena forms part of a single UK Overseas Territory with Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, the Governor of which resides in St Helena.

Location	St Helena lies in the South Atlantic Ocean at Latitude 15° 58' S and Longitude 5° 43' W. The nearest continental land mass is South Africa 1,800km to the east. South America 3,260km to the west. The closest island is Ascension 1,300km to the northeast. The highest point on St Helena is 820m above sea level.
Area	Approximately 121.7km ²
Population	Approximately 4,250
Topography	St Helena is a volcanic island defined by a high central ridge. The island emerged from the sea in the Miocene Epoch approximately 14 million years ago due to the activity of two, now coalesced, shield volcanoes. The north-eastern volcanic centre located at Flagstaff and Knotty Ridge formed the bulk of the island; the younger south-western volcanic centre is found at Sandy Bay. Rocks on the island are almost entirely volcanic in origin. The soils are variable from place to place; the majority of soils are heavy clays that have poor structure and are mostly acidic, however along the central ridge there are extremely acid, peaty soils.
Main economic sectors	The residents on St Helena are mainly employed by the government and through the commercial sector. St Helena has a high import dependency and relies heavily on financial aid, therefore most income is sourced through UK Aid, this includes a shipping subsidy and development aid. The only significant export from the island is fish.

Legislative and Policy Framework

Multilateral environmental agreements

St. Helena has been included in the UK's ratification of 17 multilateral environmental agreements (MEA). See Appendix 1. The status of ratification of key MEA's:

Multilateral Environmental Agreement	Included in ratification?
Convention on Biological Diversity	✓
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species	✓
Convention on Migratory Species	✓
Ramsar Convention on Wetlands	✓
World Heritage Convention	✓

National environmental legislation

Local Environmental legislation is rather fragmented with different aspects incorporated in at least 17 different ordinances (Appendix 2). However, as part of the proposed revised institutional arrangements for Environmental Management on St Helena a new and comprehensive Environmental Management Ordinance is proposed.

National environmental strategies

The Environment Charter Strategy for Action (2004) is broadly used by Government Departments and the National Trust as a tool to identify gaps and input into strategic planning. It is however recognised that it is now out of date and needs to be revised urgently.

Protected Areas

St Helena currently has only one legally designated Protected Area, but is developing a Protected Areas Network. See Appendix 3.

Research Priorities

(See also Appendix 3 and 4)

- Baseline flora and fauna surveying and monitoring of terrestrial and marine habitats and analysis and subsequent utilisation of data.
- Terrestrial Ecological Restoration.
- Climate Change Implications on terrestrial and marine species, habitats and ecosystems.

Institutional Arrangements

Government: There are currently four sections within the St Helena Government that deal with St Helena’s conservation and wider environmental issues. In the Agriculture and Natural Resources Directorate: the Environmental Conservation and Marine Sections; In the Secretariat: the Environmental Planning and Development Section; and in the Health and Social Welfare Directorate: the Environmental Health Section.

Non-Governmental Organisation: The St Helena National Trust, established in 2002, has brought together all the Non-Governmental organisations that were involved in environment and/or conservation matters under one umbrella organisation. See also Appendix 5.

Ecosystems and Habitats

St Helena’s habitats can be broadly categorised into 12 categories (Appendix 6): A detailed habitat analysis was done as part of the South Atlantic Invasives Species Project and 64 types were identified. See Appendix 6.

Currently very little information is known about the marine habitats.



Half Tree Hollow © St Helena National Trust

Species

St Helena has a high level of endemism, which defines its natural environment and is our greatest asset. The island’s endemic flora consists of approximately 51 flowering plants and ferns and 25 bryophytes (mosses, liverworts and hornworts). The lichen flora is highly diverse with approximately 223 species occurring on the island, this includes nine endemic species. St Helena has an exceptional diverse invertebrate fauna with over 400 of the 1,000+ invertebrates being endemic. The most well known, the endemic giant earwig *Labidura herculeana* and ground beetle *Aplothorax burchelli* are thought to have been driven to extinction through destruction of habitat and human interference. These insects are thought to have been severely affected by introduced predators (vertebrate and invertebrate). St Helena has only one endemic land bird species. See Appendix 7 for species lists.

Summary of the 2008 IUCN red listed species for St. Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha.

Critically endangered	Endangered	Vulnerable	Near Threatened	Extinct (Extinct in the wild)	Lower risk/ conservation dependent	Data Deficient
18	15	27	10	38	1	21

Threats

Invasive species: Invasive species are contributing to the loss of native biodiversity, undermining food production, limiting water supply and raising concerns for human health. They also lead to reduced access to heritage and recreational sites, with negative impacts for tourism. The ongoing control of invasives is a huge financial burden on the island. The key invasive species identified as part of the recent EU funded South Atlantic Invasive Species Project are given in Appendix 8.

Climate change: At present the extent to which St. Helena's natural environment will be affected by climate change seems uncertain. It would be beneficial for the island to assess the biological and ecological implications of climate change on native biota and ecosystems.

See Appendix 8 for more information on other key issues.

Projects

There have been a number of externally funded environmental projects carried out on St Helena over the last five years (see Appendix 9). These include the establishment of monitoring programmes for seabirds, turtles, cetaceans and grouper; endemic plant propagation and species and habitat conservation; wirebird conservation and establishing an environmental information system for St Helena.

Case Study: Enabling the people of St Helena to conserve the St Helena Wirebird

Funded by: OTEP

Dates: April 2006 – June 2007

The project undertook research to better understand the wirebird's ecology and assessed the extent of threats to this

species and identified and tested solutions to address these.

Main outcomes:

- The culmination of the project works was a Species Action Plan for the Wirebird.



St. Helena Wirebird © Gavin Ellick

Contacts

Miss Isabel Peters,

Environmental Co-ordinator Environmental Planning & Development Section,
Secretariat, No 1 Main Street, Jamestown, St Helena Island, South Atlantic Ocean STHL 1ZZ
Phone/Fax: + (290) 2105
E-mail: isabel@sainthelena.gov.sh

Mr Darren Duncan,

Director of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Agriculture and Natural Resources
Directorate Scotland,
St Helena Island, South Atlantic Ocean STHL 1ZZ
Phone: + (290) 4724 Fax: + (290) 4603
E-mail: director@anrd.gov.sh

St Helena National Trust,

PO Box 113, Broadway House, St Helena Island, South Atlantic Ocean STHL 1ZZ
Phone: + (290) 2190
E-mail: sth.natrust@cwimail.sh
Website: www.nationaltrust.org.sh

Project Partners

Government: Department for Environment, Food and Rural affairs (DEFRA); Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS); Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC); Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew.

Non Government: Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB); United Kingdom Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF). Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust.

There are a number of cross territory working groups that St Helena is a part of: Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG); Overseas Territories Biodiversity Group (OTBG); Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Training and Research Programme Steering Group.

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Bibliography

See Appendix 10.

Appendices

All Appendices referred to in this chapter are available at
<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5753>