



# **Biodiversity: the UK Overseas Territories**

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#### Cover photographs

Front cover:

Top right: Southern rockhopper penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome chrysocome* (Richard White/JNCC). The world's largest concentrations of southern rockhopper penguin are found on the Falkland Islands.

Centre left: Down Rope, Pitcairn Island, South Pacific (Deborah Procter/JNCC). The introduced rat population of Pitcairn Island has successfully been eradicated in a programme funded by the UK Government.

Centre right: Male Anegada rock iguana *Cyclura pinguis* (Glen Gerber/FFI). The Anegada rock iguana has been the subject of a successful breeding and re-introduction programme funded by FCO and FFI in collaboration with the National Parks Trust of the British Virgin Islands.

Back cover:

Black-browed albatross *Diomedea melanophris* (Richard White/JNCC). Of the global breeding population of black-browed albatross, 80 % is found on the Falkland Islands and 10% on South Georgia.

Background image on front and back cover:

Shoal of fish (Charles Sheppard/Warwick University).

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## Acknowledgements

Many people have been involved in the production of this document. The text was compiled by Sara Oldfield at WCMC under contract to JNCC, with help from Sara Cross and Mike Pienkowski, who collated input from partners in the Overseas Territories Forum. Specific acknowledgements are given at the end of each profile. Subsequent editing has been undertaken by Deborah Procter and Vincent Fleming. Colleagues at the FCO have provided information and support valuable to the final production: in particular we thank Iain Orr, Alison King and Malcolm Whatley. We are also grateful to those involved in final production: Kate Gordon-Rogers, Alison Littlewood (JNCC), Claire Minto, Ann Waters (JNCC), Gordon Leel (English Nature) and Trudi Harris (JNCC). As ever, final responsibility for errors and omissions lies with us.

# 1: Introduction

The Overseas Territories (OTs) of the United Kingdom have long been acknowledged as being rich in biodiversity (Anon. 1994; Oldfield 1987; Oldfield & Sheppard 1997; UKDTCF 1996). With the exception of the British Antarctic Territory and Gibraltar, they are all islands, small in size and isolated to varying degrees. These attributes, combined with their geographic location, has often resulted in a high degree of endemism (Table 1). Equally, the territories are often host to significant populations of breeding birds or marine turtles, and have rich terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Yet, many of these species and habitats are threatened. This report provides a profile of the biodiversity of the United Kingdom's Overseas Territories as a contribution to the development of plans for their conservation and sustainable use.

## Background

In June 1992 representatives from the governments of over 150 countries met in Rio de Janeiro for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which subsequently became known as the 'Earth Summit'. Amongst many agreements that the world's governments adopted at that meeting was one called the Convention on Biological Diversity—or the Biodiversity Convention for short. This pledges them to conserve biodiversity, to use its components in a way that will ensure that they continue to be available in the future, and to share out the benefits of biodiversity fairly and equitably between all nations and all people. Including the United Kingdom as well as the European Union, 159 governments signed the convention in Rio and it came into force in December 1993. So far six of the UK Overseas Territories have also signed the Convention.

One outcome of the Biodiversity Convention was a requirement by signatories to produce their own national plans for the conservation of biodiversity. In the UK, this resulted in the

publication of Biodiversity the UK Action Plan (Anon. 1994). This document provided a summary of the state of UK biodiversity (including Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories) and the actions being taken to conserve it. Most importantly, it contained in a final section a set of '59 steps' to be implemented by Government and its agencies. These steps encompassed a whole range of activities, from the need to continue with the programme of European site designations required by EU Directives, to the limitation of UK fishing activities, developing education and awareness programmes, and to action for Overseas Territories. Specifically, the final step (number 59) aimed to "Encourage individual Overseas Territories to develop strategies for biodiversity conservation including updating existing legislation and developing new legislation as appropriate". In the UK, under the guidance of a specially created steering group (Anon. 1995a), this process has resulted in the identification of priority species and habitats for which action plans have been produced, or which are in preparation. Volume 2 of the UK Steering Group report (Anon. 1995b) included a first tranche of 116 species action plans and 14 habitat action plans. Further plans (c.290 species and 24 habitats) are in preparation. A significant number of local biodiversity action plans, typically based on local authority boundaries, are also completed or underway. These plans, and the process that underpin them, provide a useful model that might be applied elsewhere (Scottish Biodiversity Group 1997).

The recently published white paper on the United Kingdom's Overseas Territories (Anon. 1999; FCO website: <http://www.fco.gov.uk>) identified an objective, common to the UK and the territories, of using the environment in a sustainable manner, to provide benefits to the residents of the territories whilst also conserving the natural heritage (Box 1). Within this objective, specific aims were identified (set out below) with

the intention that these aims should be achieved through the drafting and implementation of environmental charters agreed between the UK and the Overseas Territories. The aims were:

- to promote the sustainable use and management of the natural and physical environment of the Overseas Territories;
- to protect fragile ecosystems from further degradation, and to conserve biodiversity;
- to promote sustainable alternatives to scarce resources or species which are used for economic purposes;
- to enhance participation in, and implementation of, international agreements in Overseas Territories.

To achieve these aims adequate information on the state of biodiversity in the relevant territory, and on any trends that may be occurring, is necessary. This allows priorities to be established, gaps in information to be identified and further action determined. To assist this process, the Joint Nature

Conservation Committee (Box 2), in our role as adviser to Government, commissioned the following profiles of biodiversity in all of the UK's Overseas Territories from the World Conservation Monitoring Centre. These profiles aim to:

- summarise the salient features of biodiversity in each of the 15 Overseas Territories;
- provide a reference document of use to a broad constituency;
- stimulate further action to conserve biodiversity.

Much has already been achieved for the conservation of biodiversity in the territories and this has been assisted by governments and by NGOs, both in the UK and in the territories themselves. The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), for example, exists to promote a co-ordinated approach to conservation between NGO's and Governments of these geographically dispersed territories. We recognise, however, that this report is not, and should not, be seen as the final word on the biodiversity of the Overseas Territories. For example, we do not set the biodiversity of the

**Table 1** Numbers of endemic taxa in the Overseas Territories (updated from Anon. 1994)

Overseas Territory	Location	Size (sq. km)	Plants	Terrestrial invertebrates	Reptiles & amphibians	Birds
Anguilla	Caribbean	91	1	0	8	0
Ascension	Atlantic	88	12	28	-	1
Bermuda*	W Atlantic	55	15	31	1	2
BAT	Antarctica	1.7 m	0	-	0	0
BIOT*	Indian Ocean	60	1	3	0	0
BVI	Caribbean	153	3	2	7	0
Cayman Isles	S Atlantic	259	24	>64	21	17
Falkland Islands	S Atlantic	12,173	15	70% (insects)	0	17
Gibraltar	Mediterranean	6	3	3	0	0
Montserrat	Caribbean	104	2	>6	2	1
Pitcairn Islands	S Pacific	43	24	170	0	4
St Helena	S Atlantic	122	50	c. 300	-	1
South Georgia	Sub-Antarctic	3,755	1	c. 55	-	2
S Sandwich Islands	Sub-Antarctic	310	0	-	-	0
Tristan da Cunha	S Atlantic	178	20	22	-	9
Turks & Caicos	Caribbean	500	9		7	0

\* - also 3 species of endemic fish.

territories in the wider ecological context of the region in which they occur. Nevertheless, these profiles provide a summary of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories. Although other authors have suggested priorities for conservation (UKDTCF 1996), and have reviewed the application of measures to conserve biodiversity (Cross & Pienkowski 1998), it is not the role of these profiles to identify priorities or to suggest actions. That is for the Overseas Territories to determine themselves, in collaboration with the UK Government and other advisers. We hope that, individually, these profiles will be built upon and, indeed, superseded by the territories as they each develop their environmental charters.

### Structure of the profiles

With the exception of the British Antarctic Territory and South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, each Overseas Territory is profiled individually. However, because of their isolation and distinct features, separate accounts are given for St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and Ascension, even though, constitutionally, they form a single group of associated territories. The availability of information varies markedly between territories depending on the amount of research and study that has taken place. In the case of the British Antarctic Territory (BAT), South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, there is a vast amount of published information that has arisen from the dedicated work of the British Antarctic Survey. In these cases, any attempt here to provide a profile of their biodiversity could only give the briefest of outlines and more comprehensive accounts are available elsewhere. However, for the sake of completeness, a summary account is provided of the international obligations and legislative provisions only relating to these territories.

The profiles provide a brief introduction to each territory, its population, location and physical and socio-economic features. Following the introduction, those Conventions and other international agreements relevant to nature conservation, to which the territory is a Party, in its own right or through the UK, are listed. The

following section looks at how these international obligations are implemented through legislation or other means. Additional sections look at the type, number, and extent of protected areas within the territory (IUCN 1992a, b, c, d) and at the habitats and species of major significance. An up-to-date summary of existing and candidate Ramsar sites for the Overseas Territories can be found in JNCC (1998). Measures to protect species are then addressed.

Where the risk of extinction for a species has been evaluated, its IUCN threat category is presented. Unless otherwise stated, these evaluations are derived from either the 1996 *Red list for animals* (IUCN 1996), the 1997 *Red list for plants* (Walter & Gillet 1998) or the *World list of threatened trees* (Oldfield et al. 1998). Whilst the 1996 and 1998 red lists use the revised IUCN threat criteria (IUCN 1994), the 1997 list for plants does not do so. Abbreviations for both old and new threat categories are, therefore, used in the text and are summarised below. If any assessment of threat is at regional or local, rather than global, level this is stated and the relevant reference given.

Standard abbreviations for threat categories are used as follows:

New (1994) categories	Old categories
EX – extinct	Ex – extinct
EW – extinct in the wild	E – endangered
CR – critically endangered	V – vulnerable
EN – endangered	R – rare
VU – vulnerable	I – indeterminate
LR – lower risk	
cd – conservation dependent	
nt – near threatened	
lc – least concern	
DD – data deficient	K – insufficiently known

Finally, each profile concludes with a list of key contacts for each territory, and a bibliography to enable the reader to follow up any subject areas of interest. Much information lies within unpublished reports, the so-called 'grey literature', and is not readily accessible. We do not claim that the bibliographies are fully comprehensive.

In the period between the completion of these profiles and their publication, much additional work may have been undertaken and, indeed, published. New threats to biodiversity may have arisen, progress may have been made with site designations and conservation programmes, or the taxonomy of putative endemic taxa may have been re-evaluated. Some mistakes may have been made in the profiles, though we made every effort to avoid this. It is also possible that we have overlooked published or unpublished studies. As it is our intention in future to maintain these profiles on the JNCC web page (<http://www.jncc.gov.uk>), we would be grateful to receive any comments, additions or corrections to these accounts.

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## Box 1

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) has recently re-organised the way it deals with OTs. The geographical desks for all OTs, except Gibraltar, have been brought together in the Overseas Territories Department (OTD). The Gibraltar desk remains in the Southern European Department. However, the lead department on some subjects in the OTs lies with functional departments: Environment, Science & Energy Department (ESED) leads on environmental issues, and Aviation & Maritime Department (AMD) leads on maritime and fisheries issues.

When the Foreign Secretary introduced the 17 March white paper on the Overseas Territories (Anon. 1999), he also announced that the FCO would make £1.5m available to support environmental work in the OTs over the next three years. This new funding is administered by ESED which is currently working on guidelines on how this will be used. In recent years about £150,000 p.a. has been provided for environmental projects in the OTs (Annex 1). ESED also co-ordinates work on multilateral environmental agreements (MEA) and the OTs.

## Box 2

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee is a forum through which the three country nature conservation agencies – the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), English Nature (EN) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) – deliver their statutory responsibilities for Great Britain as a whole and internationally. These responsibilities, known as the special functions, contribute to sustaining and enriching biological diversity, enhancing geological features and sustaining natural systems. The special functions are principally:

- to advise ministers on the development of policies for, or affecting, nature conservation in Great Britain and internationally;
- to provide advice and knowledge to anyone on nature conservation issues affecting Great Britain and internationally;
- to establish common standards throughout Great Britain for the monitoring of nature conservation and for research into nature conservation and the analysis of results;
- to commission or support research which the Committee deems relevant to the special functions.

The work falls into two broad categories: core work, which covers all of the main advisory functions, and a series of projects which are of fixed duration.

The work can be done through the Committee's own Support Unit, composed of staff assigned from the three country agencies, by one country agency leading on behalf of the others, or through a network of agency staff. Much of the work is contracted out.

The Special Functions are managed by a Joint Management Group, which includes the Managing Director, Projects Director and Business Manager of the Support Unit and country agency representatives.

## GLOSSARY

ANT	Anguilla National Trust	IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
BAMZ	Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo	IWRB	International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (now called Wetlands International)
BBP	Bermuda Biodiversity Project	MNT	Montserrat National Trust
BIOT	British Indian Ocean Territory	MOD	Ministry of Defence
BVI	British Virgin Isles	NCC	Nature Conservancy Council
BZS	Bermuda Zoological Society	NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
CANARI	Caribbean Natural Areas Resources Institute	NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
CARICOM	Caribbean Community	NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity	OECS	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States
CCAMLR	The Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources	OT	Overseas Territory
CCAS	Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals	RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
CINT	Cayman Islands National Trust	SCAR	Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species	SEDS	Sustainable Environment and Development Strategy
DETR	Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions	SPAW	Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife
DfID	Department for International Development	TCI	Turks and Caicos Islands
DOE	Department of Environment (Cayman)	UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
ECNAMP	Eastern Caribbean Natural Area Management Program	UKOTCF	UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum
EBA	Endemic Bird Area	UNCED	United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
EU	European Union	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
ESED	Environment, Science & Energy Department of the FCO	USVI	United States Virgin Isles
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office	WCMC	World Conservation Monitoring Centre
FFI	Fauna and Flora International	WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature (still called World Wildlife Fund in some countries)
FIG	Falkland Islands Government		
GEF	Global Environment Facility		
GIS	Geographical Information Systems		
GONHS	Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society		
ICBP	International Council for Bird Preservation		
ITE	Institute of Terrestrial Ecology		