

14: South Sandwich Islands



Introduction

The South Sandwich Islands lie 470 km south-east of South Georgia and 1300 km from the Antarctic Continent, between 56° 18' and 59° 28' S, and 26° 14' and 28° 11' W. The group consists of 12 volcanic islands. The larger islands are largely ice-covered whereas the smaller ones are virtually ice-free. The total land area of the South Sandwich Islands is 310 km². The islands are uninhabited. The South Sandwich Islands are part of the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands dependency. The Dependency is administered by a Civil Commissioner based in the Falkland Islands (who is concurrently the Governor of the Falkland Islands).

The islands form the only volcanic arc in the Antarctic region and are bounded by a deep sea trench, up to 8,265 m deep, on its eastern side. The west side is bound by the Scotia Sea. The islands range in length from 1–28 km and from 190–1,370 m in altitude. The larger islands, Bristol, Cook, Montagu, Saunders, Thule and Visikoi, are mainly

covered by ice; the smaller islands are almost ice-free in summer. Virtually all the islands show signs of recent volcanic activity, several have active fumaroles, and recent eruptions have occurred

Only a summary of international obligations, legislative provisions relating to nature conservation, and key contacts are provided here. Comprehensive information on the biodiversity of this territory is researched by, and is available, through the British Antarctic Survey.

International obligations relevant to nature conservation

- Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention)
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention)

- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention)
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- International Convention on the Regulation of Whaling
- Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR)
- Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals (CCAS)

Protected Areas

- **Falklands Islands Dependencies Conservation Ordinance 1975:** governs the conservation and protection of flora and fauna. Under this Ordinance, sites may be designated as Specially Protected Areas, protected in order to preserve their ecological systems, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Entry into these areas is by permit only. No sites have been designated in these categories as yet. Areas may also be designated Areas of Special Tourist Interest which are open for tourism and recreation, but no such areas have been declared as yet. New legislation may stem from the South Georgia Management Plan being prepared by the British Antarctic Survey for the administration of the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands Dependency (BAS in prep.).

A 200 nautical mile Maritime Zone was declared around South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands in 1993 which makes provision for, amongst other things, the management and conservation of fisheries, mineral resources and control of whaling activities. A substantial area of the Maritime Zone to the south of the South Sandwich Islands extends south of 60° S and therefore into the Antarctic Treaty Area. Under

the SGSSI 1993 Fisheries Ordinance, regulation of fishing activities does not extend to this part of the Maritime Zone.

Species protection

- **Falkland Islands Dependencies Conservation Ordinance 1975:** in accordance with this Ordinance, it is an offence to kill, wound, capture, molest or export any native mammal or native bird; or collect or destroy any native plant, except under permit.

Key names and addresses

Assistant Commissioner and Director of Fisheries,
Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich
Islands, Government House, Stanley, Falkland
Islands. Tel: 27433; fax 27434;
e-mail: gov.house@horizon.co.fk.

British Antarctic Survey (The Director), High
Cross, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0ET. Tel:
01223 221400; fax: 01223 362616;
web site: <http://www.nbs.ac.uk>.

Conservation agencies

Under the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands Order 1985, the islands are administered by the Governor of the Falklands in his capacity as Commissioner of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. Local administration of conservation regulations is also delegated to the Director of BAS.