

Diego Garcia Chagos Conservation Pamphlet

Prepared by:
Chagos Conservation Trust in 2004

Appendix T

A NATURAL PARADISE

On our increasingly crowded planet, the Chagos Archipelago provides a rare refuge. Scattered over half a million square kilometres of ocean there are 55 tiny islands, set like gems on sweeping banks of coral reefs. Diego Garcia, the largest island in the group, lies at the southern end of the Archipelago.

The islands are home to the most diverse seabird communities in the Indian Ocean. Marine turtles breed and feed in these waters and many haul out on shore to lay their eggs. Dolphins and whales are abundant in the surrounding waters.

Coral reefs cover a vast area, providing a stronghold and also a natural staging post in the movements of corals and other creatures across the Indian Ocean. A thousand different types of fish are found here, 220 stony corals and a host of other animals.

Coral reefs are of tremendous importance to humans, providing food, protecting beaches from erosion, and forming a treasure-house of genetic diversity. But scientists fear that up to half of the world's coral reefs could be lost by 2050.

The relatively pristine natural environment of the Chagos Archipelago provides us with a benchmark, a healthy wilderness where scientists can still measure the way the world should be. This is critically important in helping us to understand problems such as pollution, climate change, and the loss of biodiversity.

LOOK AFTER IT



FURTHER INFORMATION

BIOT ADMINISTRATION

The Chagos Islands have belonged to Britain since 1814 and were constituted as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in 1965. Since 1966 BIOT has been reserved for the defence purposes of Britain and the United States. Through the BIOT Administration, the British Government is committed to conserving the environment of the area. Further details of environmental legislation can be obtained through BIOT Administration, FCO, King Charles Street, London SW1A 2AH.

CHAGOS CONSERVATION TRUST

The Chagos Conservation Trust, incorporating the Friends of the Chagos, is a charitable, non-political association whose aims are to promote conservation, science and education in relation to Chagos. It supports a number of projects and offers publications by leading authorities. It welcomes new members.



Current publications include:

- The book *Peak of Limuria*, a history of Diego Garcia and the Chagos (£15/\$20, plus postage)
- A set of four illustrated booklets (£3/\$5 each; £10/\$20 the set, plus postage)
 - *Reef Fishes of Chagos*
 - *The Sea Shores of Chagos*
 - *Birds of Chagos*
 - *Plants of Chagos*
- A CD of photographs of the Chagos and its wildlife (£10/\$20)

The annual membership subscription is only £10/\$20 or £50/\$100 for six years. This offers a unique opportunity to learn more about Chagos, and to stay in touch. It includes a newsletter and reduced price publications.

For further information, orders or membership applications please contact the Secretary at:

SimonHughes@hughes-mccormack.co.uk
29 Champion Hill, London SE5 8AL.

Publications can also be obtained on Diego Garcia from the Cable and Wireless Offices.

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THE BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY

DIEGO GARCIA and the CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO



One of the most precious, unpolluted, tropical environments left on Earth

This leaflet describes its importance and explains how you can help to protect its beauty and wildlife

A place to treasure

There is nowhere in the world like Chagos. Get out and look for yourself. Try to learn a little about this wonderful environment.

On land

- Take only photographs.
- Look out for the rare coconut crabs, but do not take or disturb any animals. They are all strictly protected.
- All the plant life is important. It is used by many animals, and protects the coasts from erosion. You may not remove any of it.



The coconut crab is the world's largest land invertebrate - its pinchers can exert a pressure of 2,000 psi

In the water

- Have a go at snorkelling in the lagoons.
- Learn the names of a few fish and corals - you will feel more at home. Look out for the Chagos anemonefish, found nowhere else in the world.
- Don't touch anything. Quite a few creatures are poisonous, but even those that aren't are sensitive to human touch.



The Chagos anemonefish

Boat-users

- Anchors and chains kill corals, so only anchor in sandy areas.
- Take trash away with you.
- Pump out sewage or bilge at least 5 kilometres from the reefs and don't release grey water in lagoons.
- Do not approach within 200 metres of the strict nature reserves (see map).



Reef sharks are not uncommon on Chagos reefs. They are not dangerous, but like all marine life, should be treated with respect

Fishing

Access to Diego Garcia is highly restricted, but for those lucky enough to be posted here there are strict rules regarding recreational fishing. Inform yourself about the current regulations before undertaking any fishing activity.

- Spear-fishing is strictly prohibited.
- Fish only by rod and line for your own consumption.
- Release what you don't need, and if game fishing, release your catch after weighing and photographing.



The outer islands

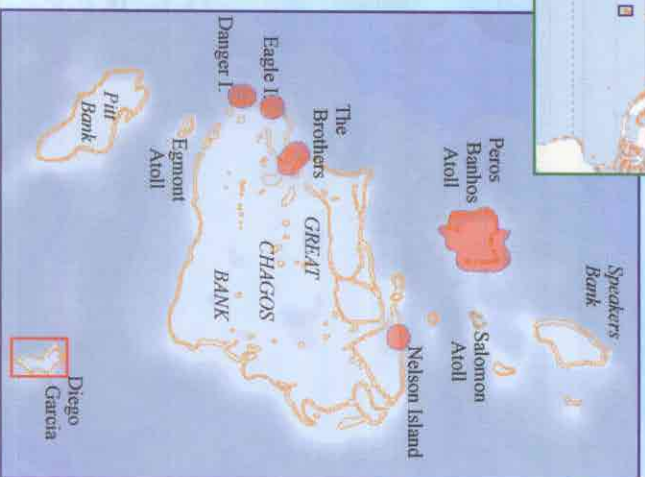
There can be few more beautiful tropical islands anywhere in the world, but remember these are sensitive environments.

- Please only go ashore during daylight hours, and no pets ashore at any time.
- No landing at all in the strict nature reserves.



The Chagos Archipelago lies to the south of the Maldives in the centre of the Indian Ocean (above)

Rising up from deep waters the Archipelago (right) has been built by a maze of coral reefs (in orange). Many of the small islands and their surrounding waters have been protected as Strict Nature Reserves (in red)



A commitment to protection

Over 500,000 square kilometres of ocean around the Chagos Archipelago have been declared an Environmental Zone. Legislation is in place to protect these natural resources: strict controls over fishing, pollution (air, land and water damage to the environment, and the killing, harming or collecting of animals).

Some of the most important land and sea areas have been aside for additional protection. Most of the lagoon areas a large part of the land area of Diego Garcia are protected as Restricted Areas, four Special Conservation Areas and a Nature Reserve (no access). Strict Nature Reserves (no cover the land and surrounding waters of the islands of Great Chagos Bank and a large part of Peros Banhos Atoll).

The Chagos Archipelago is also subject to further levels of internationally binding legal protection. This includes the Ramsar Convention (wetlands); the Whaling Convention (including an Indian Ocean Whale Sanctuary); the Law of the Sea Convention (with provisions to protect fish stocks); the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission; the CITES Convention (regulating trade in wildlife, including corals); and the London Convention (with provisions to protect marine turtles and cetaceans).

Diego Garcia - away from the main government and military facilities, wide areas of land and sea are protected

