

# Ascension Island (STH)

7° 57' S, 14° 22' W

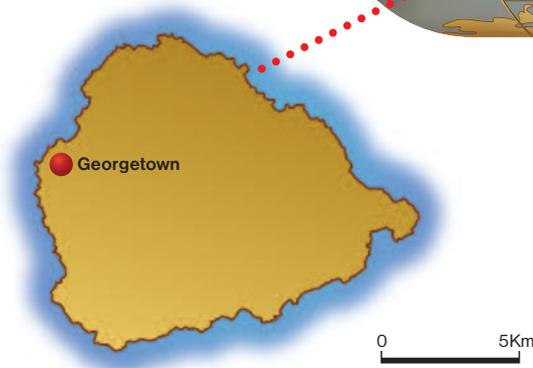
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# Ascension

Author: **Olivia Renshaw**,  
Assistant Conservation Officer,  
Ascension Island Government.

More information available at -  
[www.ascension-island.gov.ac](http://www.ascension-island.gov.ac)



## Basic facts and Figures

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

<b>Location</b>	Ascension is a dormant volcanic island in the South Atlantic Ocean, ca. 1,700km from Africa. Ascension lies seven degrees south of the equator (7° 57' S, 14° 22' W) and is extremely isolated.
<b>Area</b>	Approximately 90km <sup>2</sup> .
<b>Number of islands</b>	A single inhabited island and some small off shore islands. The largest is Boatswain Bird Island.
<b>Population</b>	c. 900 people.
<b>Topography</b>	Ascension's origin is volcanic; lava flows and cinder cones are conspicuous throughout. The landscape is dominated by Green Mountain, the island's peak and a National Park.
<b>Main economic sectors</b>	The residents on Ascension are mainly the employees (and their families) of the local government. The population consists of civilian contractors from St Helena, some civilian contractors from the UK often on short term contracts with the Ascension Island Government, military from the UK and US and commercial operations.

# Legislative and Policy Framework

## Multilateral environmental agreements

Ascension has been included in the UK's ratification of 19 multilateral environmental agreements (MEA). Status of ratification of key MEAs:

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

Ascension has 11 ordinances that are relevant to the environment. See Appendix 1 for more details on environmental legislation for Ascension.

## National environmental strategies

Ascension Island Government (AIG) signed an Environmental Charter in 2001 that outlines a number of commitments that both the AIG and the UK government have agreed to. There are five other biodiversity conservation related strategies described at Appendix 2.

## Protected Areas

Ascension has one area designated under its National Protected Areas Ordinance: Green Mountain National Park. There are also a number of proposed Protected Areas. See Appendix 3 for more details.

## Research Priorities

- Review of long-term population trends of re-introduced endemic and native species to inform habitat restoration efforts and determine methods to ensure survival.
- Assessment of the ecological implications of invasive species on native species and habitats and development of long-term strategies for reducing the rate of encroachment by invasive species onto key habitat areas.
- Data on rainfall and temperature trends (due to climate change) to inform the most effective and sustainable conservation techniques.



Sisters Peak, Ascension © Anselmo Pelembé

## Institutional Arrangements

**Government:** The lead government environmental department is the AIG Conservation Department which is responsible for fisheries, terrestrial and marine conservation, national protected areas, animal husbandry, and invasive species control in conservation areas. AIG Environmental Health Section works on island wide invasive species control (rats, feral animals, plants), and water testing.

**Non-Governmental Organisation:** The Ascension Island Turtle Group (AITG) carries out annual green turtle monitoring and beach raking.

## Ecosystems and Habitats

**Terrestrial:** Ascension has 14 classes of vegetation. These include desert and woodlands. The Green Mountain summit was once covered in a carpet of ferns with many endemic plants. Hardly any of this carpet now exists due to intensive efforts to increase vegetation in the mountain. Few small rocks still hold a number of endemic species, but even these areas are quickly being overwhelmed by invasive plants and animals. See Appendix 4 for a vegetation map of Ascension.

**Marine:** There is very little information about marine habitats, however they appear to be in pristine condition.



Ascension Frigate Bird © Anselmo Pelembe

## Species

At only one million years old, Ascension is a young island and this, together with its isolation, explains its species-poor biodiversity. However, the degree of endemism of terrestrial and marine biodiversity is high. Twenty-five species are thought to be native to the island, of which 10 are endemic. Three of the endemic species are thought to be extinct.

The relative lack of diversity of marine species compared to other tropical islands is compensated by its special, unique species: the fauna includes an impressive nine species of endemic fish as well as two endemic shrimps. See Appendix 5 for relevant species lists.

IUCN redlisted species for Ascension and Tristan da Cunha are included in the summary table in the St. Helena chapter.

## Threats

**Invasive species:** Ascension is more heavily impacted by invasives than almost any other island on Earth (95% of plant species are introduced). The Mexican thorn *Prosopis juliflora* has been particularly destructive to native vegetation.

**Climate change:** Little is known about the potential impacts of climate change on biodiversity in Ascension. Current climate change research is pulling together global circulation model data and meteorological data from Ascension to try and assess the likely outcomes.

Illegal fishing is also a threat to marine life. See Appendix 6 for further information.

## Projects

In addition to its core work in environment, AIG Conservation Department has undertaken a number of externally funded environmental projects over the last five years. These include the creation and development of a National Park, feral cat eradication, seabird restoration and monitoring, environmental education, endemic plant propagation and restoration. See Appendix 7 for more information on Ascension conservation projects over the last five years.

### Case Study: Protected Areas Management

**Funded by:** OTEP

**Dates:** April 2004 – End of April 2005

Green Mountain is a site of natural beauty and an important habitat for Ascension's endemic species of plants. The project focused on improving management planning for the Park, endemic plant protection and restoration as well as improved public awareness.

#### Main outcomes:

- The development of a park management plan.
- Improved public access.
- Provision of a pilot for future protected areas on Ascension.
- Protection of wild endemic plant colonies.
- Creation of an endemic plant nursery.
- Public awareness campaign.



Stedson Stroud © Tara Pelembe

## Contacts

### Stedson Stroud

#### Conservation and Sea Fisheries Officer

Ascension Island Government Conservation Department

Georgetown; Ascension Island; ASCN IZZ

Phone/Fax: +(247) 6359

E-mail: [stedson.stroud@ascension.gov.ac](mailto:stedson.stroud@ascension.gov.ac)

Website: [www.ascensionconservation.org.ac](http://www.ascensionconservation.org.ac)

### Project Partners

Ascension works with a number of organisations and researchers, but key partners include: RSPB; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; University of Exeter, UKOTCF.

## Acknowledgements

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## Appendices

All appendices referred to in this chapter are available at

<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5744>