

BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY (CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO)

LAND AREA 60 km² HUMAN POPULATION No permanent population
NUMBER OF IBAs 10 TOTAL AREA OF IBAs 9.25 km² STATUS OF IBAs 10 unprotected



All ten IBAs in the Chagos Archipelago support globally significant breeding concentrations of seabirds, including Barton Point Nature Reserve (IBA 1) on Diego Garcia. (PHOTO: COMMODORE C. C. PEACH)

KEY HABITATS AND BIRDS

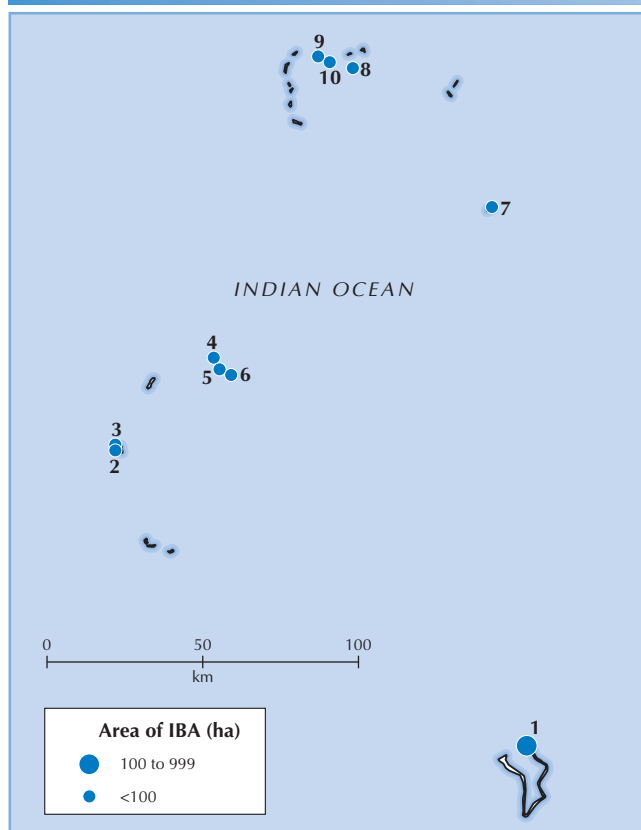
- The Chagos Archipelago lies at the southern end of the Laccadives-Maldives-Chagos ridge, in the geographical centre of the tropical Indian Ocean, and includes the Great Chagos Bank, the world's largest atoll. Although most of the Great Chagos Bank is submerged, the above water landmass of the archipelago totals approximately 67 individual islands in five main groups: Peros Banhos and Salomon Atolls to the north, the Chagos Bank and Egmont Atolls to the west and Diego Garcia Atoll, the largest landmass, to the south. It has a rich marine life, and supports important breeding populations of several tropical seabird species, principally Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*, Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* and Lesser Noddy *A. tenuirostris*.

CONSERVATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM

In 1965 the Chagos Archipelago was established with other Indian Ocean islands as a United Kingdom Overseas Territory, known as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), administered from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London. There is currently no permanent population, although there are military and their support staff stationed at a base on Diego Garcia. In November 2000, the high court ruled that 2,000 Ilois people deported to Mauritius between 1967 and 1973 had been removed unlawfully, and the way is being cleared for their resettlement.

BIOT has an Environment Charter for the protection of its biodiversity. The responsibility for implementing conservation measures lies with the senior UK representative stationed in the territory. As a UK Overseas Territory, BIOT is included under the

Map 1. Location and size of Important Bird Areas in the British Indian Ocean Territory.



UK ratification of international conventions (e.g. CITES, CMS), although the Convention on Biological Diversity has still to be extended to the territory.

OVERVIEW OF THE INVENTORY

- Although the information available on the birds of the Chagos Archipelago is far from complete, it has been possible to identify 10 IBAs with globally significant breeding concentrations of seabirds.
- The 10 IBAs cover approximately 15% of the land area of the Chagos Archipelago.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- The Chagos Archipelago was first occupied by man in the nineteenth century, when the growth of the copra and coconut industries resulted in widespread deforestation. These industries were much reduced by the 1930s, since when the geographic isolation and lack of disturbance has allowed much of the archipelago to start to revert to its natural vegetation. This regeneration of vegetation is likely to benefit many of the seabird species, particularly those which nest in trees. It is even possible that the Critically Endangered Abbott's Booby *Papasula abbotti*, which has occurred on Chagos and may have bred there in the past, might re-colonise the archipelago.

- The seabird colonies in the Chagos Archipelago have been massively reduced by a combination of habitat loss and the introduction of alien predators, primarily rats and cats. However, some islands have remained free of these predators, and it is vital that they are prevented from spreading to new islands. A programme of cat eradication is underway on Diego Garcia, and could be expanded elsewhere.
- There are no protected areas in the Chagos Archipelago, but access to all of the IBAs is currently restricted. It is important that access continues to be controlled, to prevent both disturbance to nesting birds and the accidental introduction of rats and other alien species.
- Knowledge of the bird populations in the Chagos Archipelago is still at a very basic stage, and surveys and monitoring of the internationally important seabird colonies is required.
- The low-lying islands in the Chagos Archipelago are vulnerable to sea level rise associated with climate change.

SOURCES OF IBA DATA

The information presented here is from Carr (2004).

REFERENCES

- CARR, P. (2004) Important Bird Areas in the British Indian Ocean Territories. Unpublished report to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Table 1. Important Bird Areas in the British Indian Ocean Territory (Chagos Archipelago).

1	Barton Point Nature Reserve, Diego Garcia	Unprotected	■ A4ii,iii
	Coordinates 7°14'S 72°26'E Altitude 0–1 m Area 680 ha Habitats Coastline ■ Congregatory seabirds <i>Sula sula</i>		
2	Danger Island, Chagos Bank	Unprotected	■ A4i,ii,iii
	Coordinates 6°23'S 71°15'E Altitude 0–6 m Area 66 ha Habitats Coastline; Forest ■ Congregatory waterbirds <i>Anous stolidus</i> ■ Congregatory seabirds <i>Sula sula</i>		
3	Sea Cow, Chagos Bank	Unprotected	■ A4i,iii
	Coordinates 6°22'S 71°15'E Altitude 0–6 m Area 18 ha Habitats Coastline ■ Congregatory waterbirds <i>Anous stolidus</i>		
4	North Brother, Chagos Bank	Unprotected	■ A4ii,iii
	Coordinates 6°7'S 71°32'E Altitude 0–6 m Area 6 ha Habitats Coastline ■ Congregatory seabirds <i>Puffinus lherminieri</i>		
5	Middle Brother, Chagos Bank	Unprotected	■ A4i,iii
	Coordinates 6°9'S 71°33'E Altitude 0–6 m Area 8 ha Habitats Coastline ■ Congregatory waterbirds <i>Sterna fuscata</i>		
6	South Brother, Chagos Bank	Unprotected	■ A4i,iii
	Coordinates 6°10'S 71°35'E Altitude 0–6 m Area 23 ha Habitats Coastline ■ Congregatory waterbirds <i>Anous stolidus</i> , <i>Anous tenuirostris</i>		
7	Nelson, Chagos Bank	Unprotected	■ A4i,iii
	Coordinates 5°41'S 72°20'E Altitude 0–6 m Area 81 ha Habitats Coastline ■ Congregatory waterbirds <i>Anous stolidus</i> , <i>Anous tenuirostris</i>		
8	Petite Ile Bois Mangue, Peros Banhos	Unprotected	■ A4i,iii
	Coordinates 5°17'S 71°56'E Altitude 0–6 m Area 9 ha Habitats Coastline ■ Congregatory waterbirds <i>Anous tenuirostris</i>		
9	Ile Parasol, Peros Banhos	Unprotected	■ A4i,iii
	Coordinates 5°15'S 71°50'E Altitude 0–6 m Area 8 ha Habitats Coastline ■ Congregatory waterbirds <i>Sterna fuscata</i>		
10	Ile Longue, Peros Banhos	Unprotected	■ A4i,iii
	Coordinates 5°16'S 71°52'E Altitude 0–6 m Area 26 ha Habitats Coastline ■ Congregatory waterbirds <i>Sterna fuscata</i>		