

# Anguilla



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## Prickly Pear West

### General introduction

The Anguillan archipelago lies at the northern end of the Lesser Antilles where the Caribbean Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean. There are 22 islands in total, with the main island (Anguilla) being approximately 16 miles (26 km) long, 3 miles (5 km) at its widest point, and covering approximately 56.5 square miles (146 square km).

The islands lie within the Tropics at 18°N of the Equator on a longitude of 63°W and have a sunny climate year round with average temperatures of 27°C. The wet season extends from June to November and coincides with the Atlantic hurricane season, although most of the island's average rainfall of 900–1,000 mm can fall within a few weeks, causing localised flooding in low-lying areas. Anguilla is periodically hit by hurricanes such as Luis in 1995 and Lenny in 1999, and these can result in extensive wind damage, torrential rain and flooding.

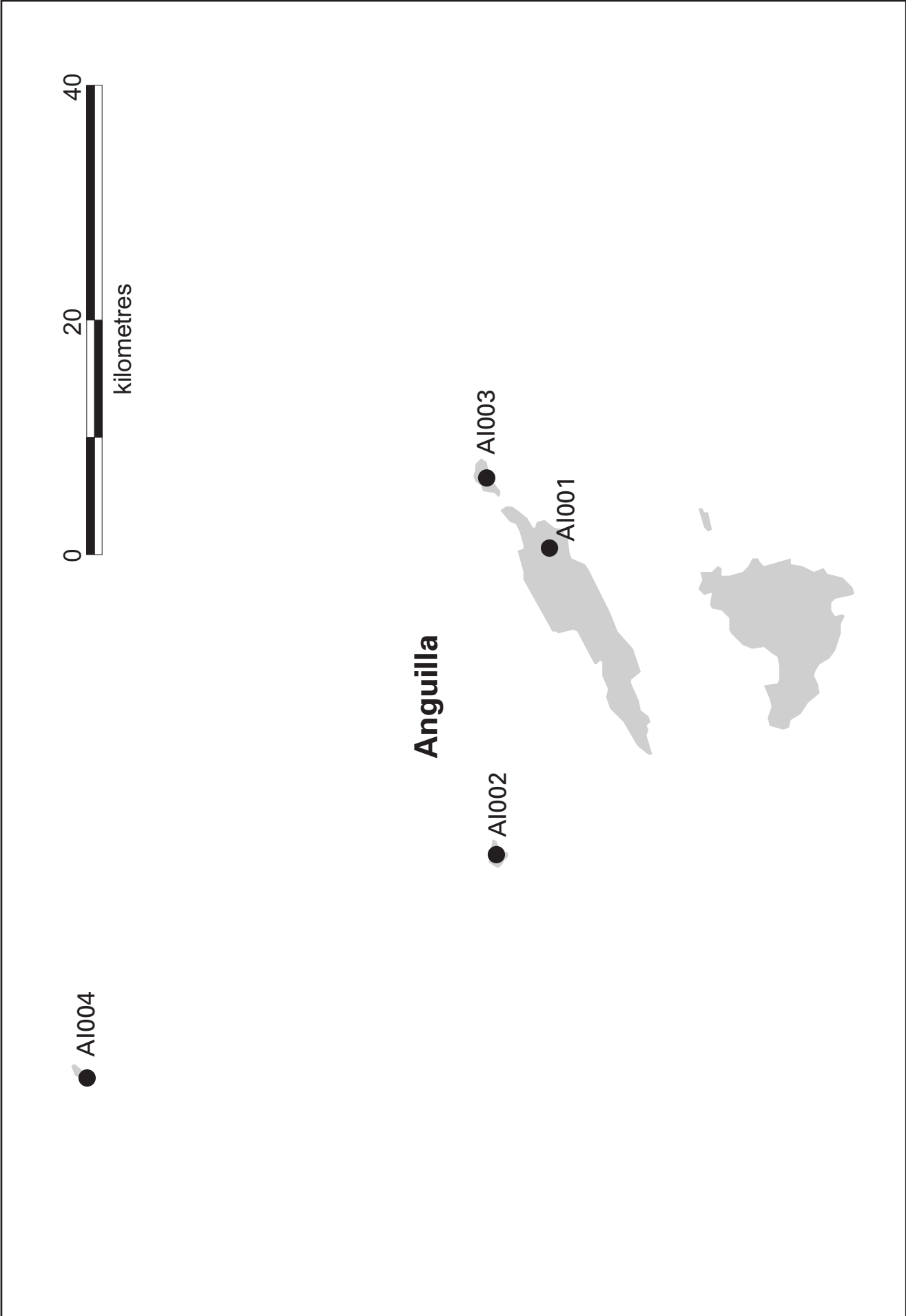
Anguilla and its many outer islands and cays are low-lying with a maximum elevation of 65 m. They are mostly rocky, with limestone, corals and sandstone predominating. The mainland and a few of the offshore islands have extensive, picturesque beaches, clear seas and inshore coral reefs, providing rich, natural resources and a basis for the island's tourism and fishing industries. Porous rocks capture rainfall as groundwater and these have traditionally provided the island's water resources, although recent concerns over

water quality have led to the development of a new desalination plant. Anguilla and three of the other larger islands have brackish coastal lagoons, and a few ponds on the mainland are fed by springs from the water table.

There is no doubt that Anguilla is rich in biological diversity. There are over 550 plants, 321 of which are indigenous. One plant species, *Rondeletia anguillensis*, is endemic to the island. There are 21 species of reptile, including the Sombrero Ground Lizard *Ameiva corvine*, endemic to Sombrero, and the Little Scrub Ground Lizard *Ameiva corax*, endemic to Little Scrub Island. At least 40 endemic insects are now confirmed for the small offshore island of Sombrero, which sits some 45 miles (72.5 km) north-west of Anguilla. The beaches are important nesting areas for turtles: Hawksbill Turtle *Eretmochelys imbricata* (CR); Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas* (EN); Leatherback Turtle *Dermochelys coriacea* (EN); and Loggerhead Turtle *Caretta caretta* (EN).

Habitats range from coral reefs to coastal cliffs, degraded evergreen woodland with scattered areas of grassland and scrub, to small areas of mangrove, and brackish and freshwater ponds.

More than ever before, Anguilla's biodiversity is under serious threat. A surge in development connected with housing and tourism-related activities has placed severe



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pressure on an already stressed environment. Scrub is constantly being cleared and salt ponds filled in and reclaimed. Anguilla has yet to establish a National Parks and Protected Areas System a challenge if the local land tenure system is considered, since the local government owns only 5% of all lands while the remaining 95% is under private ownership.

Although Anguilla is a small Territory, it is culturally and ethnically diverse in its own right. This is a result of the migratory habits of people throughout the Caribbean region, from slavery times to the present day. There is a large population of people of Irish descent, African-Caribbeans, Amero-Indians (who arrived in the Caribbean from Latin America), and a variety of Americans and

Europeans. The population of Anguilla is 11,561 (2001 census), supplemented by more than 50,000 visitors a year, helping to make tourism the most important economic activity on the island. The focus on tourism is placing many pressures on the environment, from destroying grassy savannahs to build golf courses to draining and dredging out wetlands for marina development. There is also a strong indication that offshore finance is becoming increasingly important (Pritchard 1990; Procter and Fleming 1999; Hilton *et al.* 2001).

As a UK Overseas Territory, the islands are governed by the locally elected Government of Anguilla with a governor representing the UK Government.

## Ornithological importance

To date, 139 bird species have been recorded on Anguilla, of which 38 are recorded as breeding and a further 101 as regularly occurring non-breeding species (Holliday and Hodge 2003).

Only one species of global conservation concern, the Near-threatened White-crowned Pigeon, is listed in BirdLife International (2004). It was once common on Anguilla but has not been sighted for over 10 years. Although there is one recent record (personal communication, Holliday 2005), it is considered extirpated and not used to qualify Important Bird Area (IBA) sites. A further two species of global conservation concern are recorded on Anguilla, though breeding has to be confirmed. The Vulnerable Piping Plover is a rare visitor during the winter season. The Near-threatened Caribbean Coot is suspected to be breeding at ponds on the mainland.

Anguilla is included in the Lesser Antilles Endemic Bird Area 030. It shares four restricted-range species with other islands in the Lesser Antilles chain. These include the Green-throated Carib, Antillean Crested Hummingbird, Pearly-eyed Thrasher and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch. In recent years there have been very few sightings of the Antillean Crested Hummingbird as it was virtually wiped out by Hurricane Luis in 1995. The Green-throated Carib, Pearly-eyed

Thrasher and Lesser Antillean Bullfinch are widely dispersed across the Anguilla mainland.

The A3 biome criteria has not been applied to the island.

At least 15 species of seabird currently breed on Anguilla, with a further two species, Audubon's Shearwater and Black Noddy, reported as former or possible breeding species. Surveys of Anguilla and its outer islands during 1999–2000 found more than 10,000 nesting pairs of gulls and terns, and over 2,000 nesting pairs of boobies, tropicbirds and Magnificent Frigatebirds. Although one of the smallest island groups in the West Indies, Anguilla holds up to 10% of the West Indian Masked Booby and Bridled Tern populations, almost all of the West Indies' Roseate Terns and 30% of the Brown Boobies. Anguilla's seabirds mostly breed on seven small, uninhabited islands. These are all easily accessible from the mainland except for the remote rocky outcrop of Sombrero. The mainland currently holds small populations of White-tailed and Red-billed Tropicbirds, nesting in holes on low cliffs, and several colonies of Least Terns breeding around coastal lagoons and ponds.

Anguilla's pond network provides an important site for wintering and passage of Nearctic wading birds including plovers, sandpipers and sanderlings.

## Conservation infrastructure and Protected Area system

Anguilla is included in the UK's ratification of the following agreements: Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage; Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat; and the Convention on the Regulation of Whaling.

Legislation in place for species protection includes the following.

- The Wild Birds Protection Ordinance 1913, which protects listed wild bird species and their eggs. It needs

to be repealed and replaced with appropriate legislation.

- The Fisheries Protection Ordinance no. 4 1988, which regulates the taking and killing of certain marine species and establishes close seasons, and the Fisheries Protection (Amendment) Regulations 1995, which enforce a moratorium on the harvesting of sea turtles and their products, including eggs.

The following acts also provide species protection in their own right: Animals (Diseases and Importation) Act, Revised Statutes of Anguilla, Chapter A85; Beach Control

## Important Bird Areas in the United Kingdom Overseas Territories

Act, Revised Statutes of Anguilla, Chapter B20; Beach Protection Act, Revised Statutes of Anguilla, Chapter B25; Fisheries Protection Act, Revised Statutes of Anguilla, Chapter F40; Fruit Trees (Destruction Prohibition) Act, Revised Statutes of Anguilla, Chapter F70; Fumigation of Plants Act, Revised Statutes of Anguilla, Chapter F75; Litter Abatement Act, Revised Statutes of Anguilla, Chapter L80; Marine Parks Act, Revised Statutes of Anguilla, Chapter M30; Plant Protection Act, Revised Statutes of Anguilla, Chapter P50; Protection of Animals Act, Revised Statutes of Anguilla, Chapter P110; Quarantine Act, Revised Statutes of Anguilla, Chapter Q5.

As mentioned in the general introduction, strategic land planning is difficult on Anguilla, with approximately 5% of land in government ownership and 95% owned by Anguillians; indeed, the land use plan has remained in draft form for over 10 years. To date there are no designated National Parks or Protected Areas, although Draft National Parks and Protected Area legislation has been prepared. The pressure for tourism development and

new housing to meet the needs of a growing population are placing increasing demands on land and natural resources. The Government of Anguilla retains environmental expertise within relevant departments and is responsible for policy and advising government on environmental matters. It provides support to the Anguilla National Trust (ANT), which was established by legislation in 1988 to act as custodian of Anguilla's heritage, preserving and promoting the island's natural environment and its archaeological, historical and cultural resources for present and future generations.

To date, most funding for conservation work is received from international donor agencies. There are two options proposed to set up a conservation fund in the future:

- 1 the existing environmental tax that is presently added on to electricity bills will be collected over a three- to five-year period
- 2 the Government of Anguilla could add an extra 1% to accommodation tax.

### Overview of the inventory

The IBA programme has identified four sites of global conservation importance. The sites cover an area of 594 hectares, which is about 5.8% of the total land area of Anguilla. One site covers species of global conservation concern and restricted-range species; the remaining three are important for their seabird populations (see table below).

Most of the data was collected by Sir Emile Gumbs (Chief Minister, 1981–94), Judith Dudley (UN Volunteer, 1996–97), Steve Holliday, Ian Fisher, Melanie Bryer and Julian Hughes, the RSPB, in collaboration with the Anguilla

National Trust (1999–2003), and Natalia Collier and Adam C. Brown, Environmental Protection in the Caribbean (May–June 2004).

There are four further sites that do not meet the global IBA criteria but warrant mention for their regional seabird population significance. These are Anguillita, Little Scrub, Prickly Pear East and Prickly Pear West. The network of ponds on the Anguilla mainland may qualify as a global IBA in the future but further surveys are required.

### Sites of global conservation importance

IBA code	Site name	A1	A2	A4i	A4ii	A4iii
AI001	Anguilla mainland (East End Pond)	X	X			
AI002	Dog Island			X	X	X
AI003	Scrub Island			X		
AI004	Sombrero			X		

## Site accounts

# AI001: Anguilla mainland (East End Pond)

<b>Ref number</b>	AI001
<b>Admin region</b>	Anguilla
<b>Coordinates</b>	18°14.32'N 62°59.99'W
<b>Area</b>	5.25 ha
<b>Altitude</b>	0 m
<b>IBA categories (details below)</b>	A1, A2
<b>Status</b>	Privately owned/government owned

### Site description

A rectangular shallow pond, hemmed in on two sides by an asphalted main road separating the pond from East End village. The northern shore is limestone pavement covered in dense scrub and bushes. The southern shore is bare mud and has been infilled to form a playground for a local school. The pond has the only sizeable area of emergent vegetation and a considerable mat of pond weed, favoured by the Common Moorhen and Caribbean Coot. The pond is supplied by run-off from a large catchment, supplemented by natural springs. It is a shallow pond and at times dries out to around 60% of its full extent, exposing mudflats attractive to shorebirds. The pond suffered major flooding during Hurricane Lenny in 1999. The pond is now a nature reserve; its open southern edge is fenced off and two covered viewing platforms have been provided. The site is used regularly by visiting birdwatchers and for educational purposes by the local school. In 2002, the site was vested to the Anguilla National Trust by the Government of Anguilla.

### Birds

See the accompanying table for details of key species. For its size this shallow pond regularly holds a wide variety of wetland birds, with over 48 species recorded. It is the only current site to hold populations of the Near-Threatened Caribbean Coot, suspected of breeding here in 2000 and

2001. Breeding species include the White-cheeked Pintail, Common Moorhen, Black-necked Stilt and a few pairs of Killdeers. Outside the breeding season, herons and Blue-winged Teals are regular visitors, and Tricoloured Herons and Soras have occurred. Merlins and Peregrine Falcons hunt over the area and six species of landbird include the restricted-range Green-throated Carib. It is thought that the Lesser Antillean Bullfinch and the Pearly-eyed Thrasher may also occur since they are widely dispersed over the island, but records need to be confirmed.

### Other threatened/endemic wildlife

Not known.

### Conservation issues/threats

The pond is bordered on its eastern and southern sides by a road with a village community beyond. The pond suffered major flooding during Hurricane Lenny in 1999, damaging fringe vegetation. The pond has been infilled on its southern side to around 25% of the former pond area to create a play area for an adjoining primary school. Builders' rubble and cut vegetation have been dumped on the western side.

### Further reading

See full details at end of chapter.

Bryer *et al.* (2000), Holliday and Hodge (2003).

### Key species

Criteria	Key species	Number of breeding pairs (if known)
A1	Caribbean Coot <i>Fulica cariba</i>	1–2 individuals
A2	Green-throated Carib <i>Eulampis holosericeus</i>	

## Site accounts

# AI002: Dog Island

<b>Ref number</b>	AI002
<b>Admin region</b>	Anguilla
<b>Coordinates</b>	18°16.94'N 63°15.22'W
<b>Area</b>	207.4 ha
<b>Altitude</b>	0–30 m
<b>IBA categories (details below)</b>	A4i, A4ii, A4iii
<b>Status</b>	Privately owned

### Site description

A low rocky island 8 miles (13 km) north-west of Anguilla, with three smaller cays off the west and north coasts. The cliffs and inland areas of scrub are home to Anguilla's largest seabird colonies. The coastline has low cliffs interspersed with five sandy beaches. Weathered limestone rocks reach sea level on parts of the west and north-east coast. Two large ponds lie inside beaches at Spring Bay and Stoney Bay. The centre of the island is covered in impenetrable, low, thorny scrub and thousands of prickly pear cacti. A small herd of about 30 feral goats is a remnant of former more extensive grazing by livestock.

### Birds

See the accompanying table for details of key species. At least 28 species have been recorded, including 10 species of breeding seabird: the Red-billed Tropicbird, Masked Booby, Brown Booby, Brown Pelican, Magnificent Frigatebird, Laughing Gull, Least Tern, Bridled Tern, Sooty Tern and Brown Noddy. The site holds the only Anguillan breeding population of Magnificent Frigatebirds. Two small ponds

and several beaches attract non-breeding and passage wildfowl and shorebirds including White-cheeked Pintails, Blue-winged Teals and American Oystercatchers. Wilson's Plovers may breed. Both Ospreys and Peregrine Falcons have been recorded outside the breeding season, and Caribbean Elaenias and Black-faced Grassquits are the only landbirds present. The site has been little visited and requires further study.

### Other threatened/endemic wildlife

Dog Island holds populations of several species of reptile: the Ground Lizard *Ameiva plei*, Tree Lizard *Anolis gingivinus*, Little Dwarf Gecko *Sphaerodactylus parvus*, Island Dwarf Gecko *Sphaerodactylus sputator* and a Slippery Back *Mabouya sp.*

### Conservation issues/threats

The large numbers of seabirds on the site benefit from a lack of habitation. At least two development proposals for tourism purposes and a coastguard station have been proposed since the early 1990s and been rejected by the



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Brown Booby

## Key species

Criteria	Key species	Number of breeding pairs (if known)	Notes
A4i	Sooty Tern <i>Sterna fuscata</i>	12,000 –20,000 individuals	A recent count by EPIC suggests a median of 52,000; data need to be verified
A4ii	Brown Booby <i>Sula leucogaster</i>	1,267 pairs	
A4iii	Combined numbers of waterbirds	>20,000	

island's owners. Disturbance is currently minimal and restricted to the west end where about 16% of the Brown Boobies breed and where the Red-billed Tropicbird nests among boulders almost to sea level. The centre of the island is covered in thick, low scrub and cacti. It is not known whether the area of scrub is expanding and the only grazing pressure is from a few small herds of goats remaining from previous periods of livestock farming. The low scrub affords protection to the nests of the large population of Sooty Terns. The populations of boobies nest in a narrow band on

bare cliff tops where encroachment by prickly pear cacti may limit the colony. Rats may be a problem to nesting seabirds so warrant further investigation.

### Further reading

*See full details at end of chapter.*

Bryer *et al.* (2000), Collier and Brown (2004), Hodge *et al.* (2003), Holliday and Hodge (2003), ICF Consulting (1998; 1999).

## Site accounts

### AI003: Scrub Island

<b>Ref number</b>	AI003
<b>Admin region</b>	Anguilla
<b>Coordinates</b>	18°17.59'N 62°56.77'W
<b>Area</b>	342.9 ha
<b>Altitude</b>	0–24 m
<b>IBA categories (details below)</b>	A4i
<b>Status</b>	Privately owned

#### Site description

This is the largest of Anguilla's outer islands and is separated from the mainland at its north-east corner by a channel that measures 500 m across. The island is low-lying with a rocky, fractured limestone coast punctuated by four sandy beaches, the eastern beaches attracting breeding terns. There is a large pond on the west side and a complex of four ponds and lagoons. The ponds are lined in places by mangroves and low trees. The centre of the island is largely scrub stretching to the coastline of heavily fissured limestone and low rocky cliffs.

The island is uninhabited, although the windblown remains of a former tourism development can be seen in the east and a wide, grassy former airstrip in the centre. There are large numbers of goats on the island, part of a project managed by Anguilla's Department of Agriculture.

#### Birds

See the accompanying table for details of key species. At least 34 species have been recorded, including eight species of breeding seabird: the Red-billed Tropicbird, Laughing Gull, Royal Tern (30 pairs), Sandwich Tern (80 pairs), Roseate Tern (420 pairs), Least Tern (65 pairs), Bridled Tern and Brown Noddy. The site holds the only Anguillian breeding population of Roseate Terns. The island is low-lying with breeding seabirds present on low cliffs, bare areas of friable limestone and on sandy beaches and spits. Five small ponds and coastal lagoons attract herons, wildfowl and shorebirds including small breeding populations of White-cheeked Pintails, American Oystercatchers, Black-necked Stilts and

Willetts. Wilson's Plovers may also breed. Only five species of landbird have been recorded, including Common Ground-doves, Caribbean Elaenias and Yellow Warblers.

#### Other threatened/endemic wildlife

Scrub Island has populations of five terrestrial reptiles: the Ground Lizard *Ameiva plei*; Tree Lizard *Anolis gingivinus*; Little Dwarf Gecko *Sphaerodactylus parvus*; Island Dwarf Gecko *Sphaerodactylus sputator*; and Anguilla's only native snake, the Anguillian Racer *Alsophis rijgersmaeri*. There are reports of both the Endangered Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas* and the Critically Endangered Leatherback Turtle *Dermochelys coriacea* nesting on the beaches, although there are no recent data.

#### Conservation issues/threats

The only current land use is for grazing by goats – a project running in conjunction with Anguilla's Department of Agriculture. There are occasional proposals for hotel or resort development, ventures that have been tried before without success, as the remains on the south-east of the island testify. An unsurfaced aircraft landing strip remains in the centre of the island, although scrub is slowly encroaching on this area. Rats are present.

#### Further reading

See full details at end of chapter.

Bryer *et al.* (2000), Hodge *et al.* (2003), Holliday and Hodge (2003).

#### Key species

Criteria	Key species	Number of breeding pairs (if known)
A4i	Roseate Tern <i>Sterna dougallii</i>	>420 individuals



# Site accounts

## AI004: Sombrero

<b>Ref number</b>	<b>AI004</b>
<b>Admin region</b>	<b>Anguilla</b>
<b>Coordinates</b>	<b>18°36'N 63°25.8'W</b>
<b>Area</b>	<b>38 ha</b>
<b>Altitude</b>	<b>12 m</b>
<b>IBA categories (details below)</b>	<b>A4i</b>
<b>Status</b>	<b>Government owned; proposed Protected Area</b>

### Site description

A remote, 38 ha flat-topped rocky outcrop lying 40 miles (65 km) north-west of Anguilla. The cliffs and rocky areas are home to a large seabird colony and an endemic ground lizard. The island is currently stark and bare following damage by Hurricane Luis in 1995 when large areas of cacti and other plants were destroyed. Extensive phosphate deposits were mined in the 19th and early 20th century, leaving the remains of industrial buildings and a surface pitted with craters up to 10 m deep. A manned lighthouse with associated buildings was in use until 2002 when it was replaced with an automated light.

### Birds

See the accompanying table for details of key species. At least 32 species are recorded on the island and several North American species of landbird have occurred as vagrants. This remote rocky outpost has long been important for breeding seabirds, with confirmed reports of 14 species (although only seven species currently breed): the Masked Booby (27 pairs), Brown Booby (386 pairs), Brown Noddy (700 pairs), Laughing Gull, Least Tern, Bridled Tern and Sooty Tern. Species reported to have bred in the past 40 years but no longer present are: Red-billed Tropicbird, Magnificent Frigatebird, Gull-billed Tern, Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern, Roseate Tern and Black Noddy. The Audubon's Shearwater is suspected of breeding. Small numbers of shorebirds are found on the island outside the breeding season, when Peregrine Falcons are often present.

### Other threatened/endemic wildlife

The island is noted for the endemic Critically Endangered Sombrero Ground Lizard *Ameiva corvina*, a widespread and easily seen species on the island. A recently discovered dwarf gecko *Sphaerodactylus sp.* has been tentatively named the Sombrero Dwarf Gecko. The Tree Lizard *Anolis gingivinus* is also found on the island.

### Conservation issues/threats

The island was formerly mined for phosphate, leaving the surface pitted with craters up to 10 m deep. A few stark buildings from the phosphate industry remain alongside those from Sombrero's long-time use as a lighthouse station. Until recently the island was permanently inhabited by a small number of lighthouse staff who were transported by small boat across the 40 miles (65 km) from mainland Anguilla. A new unmanned lighthouse was installed in 2002, limiting visitors to the occasional fisherman and biologists engaged in fieldwork. There is little vegetation on the island following the devastation caused by Hurricane Luis in 1995 when a large area of established cacti was destroyed. The island's vegetation is now in an early stage of recovery. The principal threat to Sombrero's seabirds in recent years was an application in 1999 to build a satellite-launching station; this has since been withdrawn.

### Further reading

See full details at end of chapter.

Bryer *et al.* (2000), Hodge *et al.* (2003), Holliday and Hodge (2003). ICF Consulting (1998; 1999).

### Key species

Criteria	Key species	Number of breeding pairs (if known)
A4i	Bridled Tern <i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	270 pairs, 540+ individuals

## References

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**Sombrero**