

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 (1990), as amended by Resolution VIII.13 of the 8th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2002) and Resolutions IX.1 Annex B, IX.6, IX.21 and IX. 22 of the 9th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2005).

Notes for compilers:

1. The RIS should be completed in accordance with the attached *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines for completing the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands*. Compilers are strongly advised to read this guidance before filling in the RIS.
2. Further information and guidance in support of Ramsar site designations are provided in the *Strategic Framework for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 7, 2nd edition, as amended by COP9 Resolution IX.1 Annex B). A 3rd edition of the Handbook, incorporating these amendments, is in preparation and will be available in 2006.
3. Once completed, the RIS (and accompanying map(s)) should be submitted to the Ramsar Secretariat. Compilers should provide an electronic (MS Word) copy of the RIS and, where possible, digital copies of all maps.

1. Name and address of the Official Respondent:

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

Name and address of the compiler of this form:

Updated by UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, 102 Broadway, Peterborough,
PE1 4DG, UK

2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

Designated: 04 July 2001

3. Country:

UK (British Indian Ocean Territory)

4. Name of the Ramsar site:

Diego Garcia

5. Designation of new Ramsar site or update of existing site:

This RIS is for: Updated information on an existing Ramsar site

6. For RIS updates only, changes to the site since its designation or earlier update:

a) Site boundary and area:

** Important note: If the boundary and/or area of the designated site is being restricted/reduced, the Contracting Party should have followed the procedures established by the Conference of the Parties in the Annex to COP9 Resolution IX.6 and provided a report in line with paragraph 28 of that Annex, prior to the submission of an updated RIS.

b) Describe briefly any major changes to the ecological character of the Ramsar site, including in the application of the Criteria, since the previous RIS for the site:

7. Map of site included:

Refer to Annex III of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines*, for detailed guidance on provision of suitable maps, including digital maps.

a) A map of the site, with clearly delineated boundaries, is included as:

- i) **hard copy** (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;
- ii) **an electronic format** (e.g. a JPEG or ArcView image)
- iii) **a GIS file providing geo-referenced site boundary vectors and attribute tables** *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;

b) Describe briefly the type of boundary delineation applied:

e.g. the boundary is the same as an existing protected area (nature reserve, national park etc.), or follows a catchment boundary, or follows a geopolitical boundary such as a local government jurisdiction, follows physical boundaries such as roads, follows the shoreline of a waterbody, etc.

The site boundary is the same as, or falls within, an existing protected area.

For precise boundary details, please refer to paper map provided at designation

8. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude):

07 19 00 S 72 28 00 E

9. General location:

Include in which part of the country and which large administrative region(s), and the location of the nearest large town.

Diego Garcia (outside the specific area)

Nearest Town/City: Diego Garcia.

The Chagos Archipelago is located in the central Indian Ocean

Administrative region: British Indian Ocean Territory

10. Elevation (average and/or max. & min.) (metres): 11. Area (hectares): 35424.05

| | |
|------|--------------------------|
| Min. | No information available |
| Max. | No information available |
| Mean | 2 |

12. General overview of the site:

Provide a short paragraph giving a summary description of the principal ecological characteristics and importance of the wetland.

Diego Garcia is the southernmost atoll of the Laccadive–Maldives–Chagos atoll chain. It is an unusual atoll in having a near-continuous narrow island around some 90% of its atoll rim. This main island of Diego Garcia is the only inhabited island in the Chagos group, with a military base taking up most of the western half of the island. The archipelago possesses an exceptionally low level of pollution, although there is likely to be low levels of pollution in the Diego Garcia lagoon, which provides an anchorage for varying numbers of large military and civilian vessels. The World Heritage quality of the territory as whole is recognised in the BIOT Conservation Policy Statement (October 1997) which specifies that BIOT will be treated in accordance with the requirements of the Convention subject only to defence requirements.

The Ramsar site incorporates most of the eastern half of the main island, as well as three islets that lie in the only channel from the lagoon to the open ocean. These areas coincide with the Diego Garcia Restricted Area, a broad protective framework that also incorporates a Nature Reserve Area and four Special Conservation Areas.

Terrestrial areas include hardwood and coconut forest, and these form the centre of important nesting colonies for a number of seabirds. The lagoon, although impacted by dredging, anchors and the desalination and possible waste associated with vessels, still maintains important coral and seagrass communities. The outer reefs are little known, but probably contain typical fauna from the region.

13. Ramsar Criteria:

Circle or underline each Criterion applied to the designation of the Ramsar site. See Annex II of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines* for the Criteria and guidelines for their application (adopted by Resolution VII.11).

1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

14. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 13 above:

Provide justification for each Criterion in turn, clearly identifying to which Criterion the justification applies (see Annex II for guidance on acceptable forms of justification).

Ramsar Criterion 1.

The site is a particularly good example of a relatively unpolluted coral reef system in a near-natural state which provides a valuable link in the marine ecology of the Indian Ocean.

Ramsar Criterion 3 and 4.

The site is of special value for maintaining the genetic and ecological diversity of the region, especially its marine life. The site provides a habitat for marine flora and fauna at a critical stage of their biological cycle including the endemic coral *Ctenella chagius* and the threatened Hawksbill and Green Turtles, *Eretmochelys imbricata* and *Chelonia mydas*. The site is also important for breeding seabirds.

Ramsar Criterion 6.

The site contains breeding colonies and other components of several species in internationally important numbers. These include the following, as well as several other species for which data on total population size for comparison is still lacking:

| Species | Total | % of population |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| Greater crested tern <i>Sterna bergii thassina</i> | 45 | 3% |
| Black-naped tern <i>Sterna sumatrana mathewsi</i> | 42 | ? |

Ramsar Criterion 7 and 8.

The coral reefs have not received scientific attention, however they are likely to have close affinities to the sites further north. They support a large number of fish species including the Chagos endemic species. Although not observed it is likely that a site of this size will also include one or more spawning aggregation sites (often located in channel mouths or on reef promontories (the site includes both). The lagoon is also likely to provide a valuable nursery for fish stocks.

Ramsar criterion 5

See Sections 21/22 for details of noteworthy species

See Section 22 for details of noteworthy bird species

15. Biogeography (required when Criteria 1 and/or 3 and /or certain applications of Criterion 2 are applied to the designation):

Name the relevant biogeographic region that includes the Ramsar site, and identify the biogeographic regionalisation system that has been applied.

a) biogeographic region:

Indo-Pacific coral reef province

b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme (include reference citation):

n/a

16. Physical features of the site:

Describe, as appropriate, the geology, geomorphology; origins - natural or artificial; hydrology; soil type; water quality; water depth, water permanence; fluctuations in water level; tidal variations; downstream area; general climate, etc.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Soil & geology | sand, biogenic reef |
| Geomorphology and landscape | island, coastal, subtidal rock (including rocky reefs), subtidal sediments (including sandbank/mudbank), lagoon |
| Nutrient status | oligotrophic |
| pH | alkaline |
| Salinity | saline / euhaline |
| Soil | mainly mineral, mainly organic |
| Water permanence | usually seasonal / intermittent |
| Summary of main climatic features | Tropical maritime; hot, humid, moderated by trade winds. |

General description of the Physical Features:

No information available

17. Physical features of the catchment area:

Describe the surface area, general geology and geomorphological features, general soil types, general land use, and climate (including climate type).

Part of an oceanic archipelago. Terrestrial areas are of pure, coralline origin, consisting of coral rock and sand. There is a freshwater lens within the coral rock.

18. Hydrological values:

Describe the functions and values of the wetland in groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping, shoreline stabilization, etc.

No special values known

19. Wetland types:

Marine/coastal wetland

| Code | Name | % Area |
|------|-------------------------------------------|--------|
| C | Coral reefs | 99 |
| P | Freshwater lakes: seasonal / intermittent | 0.5 |
| B | Marine beds (e.g. sea grass beds) | 0.5 |

20. General ecological features:

Provide further description, as appropriate, of the main habitats, vegetation types, plant and animal communities present in the Ramsar site, and the ecosystem services of the site and the benefits derived from them.

Diego Garcia is a mid-ocean coral reef and the south-easternmost atoll of the Chagos Archipelago, which contains about 220 zooxanthellate species of 58 genera and is rich in marine life.

Ecosystem services

21. Noteworthy flora:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

Species at levels of national importance

Sea grass beds

The only known large area of seagrass in the Archipelago is located on the north-eastern side of the lagoon at Diego Garcia. A number of fish species have been recorded in these seagrasses which have not yet been seen anywhere else in the Archipelago. This seagrass may also provide a critical food resource for green turtles.

22. Noteworthy fauna:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc., including count data. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

Species Information

Species occurring at levels of international importance.

Birds

Red-footed boobies *Sula sula*

Greater frigate *Fregata minor*

Invertebrates

Coconut crab *Birgus latro*.

There are doubtless other endemic species, including at least one marine alga (Rhyne 1971), one gastropod mollusc (Taylor 1971).

The coral *Ctenella chagius* is endemic or near-endemic, and is the only species in this family in the Indo-Pacific region.

Species occurring at levels of national importance

Birds

Lesser noddy tern *Anous tenuirostris*, Black-naped tern *Sterna sumatrana* and White (fairy) tern *Gygis alba*.

Fish

At least two species of endemic fish (Winterbottom & Anderson 1999).

23. Social and cultural values:

Describe if the site has any general social and/or cultural values e.g. fisheries production, forestry, religious importance, archaeological sites, social relations with the wetland, etc. Distinguish between historical/archaeological/religious significance and current socio-economic values.

Aesthetic

Fisheries production

Non-consumptive recreation

Scientific research

b) Is the site considered of international importance for holding, in addition to relevant ecological values, examples of significant cultural values, whether material or non-material, linked to its origin, conservation and/or ecological functioning? **No**

If Yes, describe this importance under one or more of the following categories:

- i) sites which provide a model of wetland wise use, demonstrating the application of traditional knowledge and methods of management and use that maintain the ecological character of the wetland:
- ii) sites which have exceptional cultural traditions or records of former civilizations that have influenced the ecological character of the wetland:
- iii) sites where the ecological character of the wetland depends on the interaction with local communities or indigenous peoples:
- iv) sites where relevant non-material values such as sacred sites are present and their existence is strongly linked with the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland:

24. Land tenure/ownership:

| Ownership category | On-site | Off-site |
|-----------------------|---------|----------|
| National/Crown Estate | + | + |

25. Current land (including water) use:

| Activity | On-site | Off-site |
|-----------------------------|---------|----------|
| Nature conservation | + | + |
| Current scientific research | + | + |
| Fishing: recreational/sport | + | + |
| Harbour/port | + | + |
| Military activities | + | + |

26. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site’s ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:

Explanation of reporting category:

1. Those factors that are still operating, but it is unclear if they are under control, as there is a lag in showing the management or regulatory regime to be successful.
2. Those factors that are not currently being managed, or where the regulatory regime appears to have been ineffective so far.

NA = Not Applicable because no factors have been reported.

| Adverse Factor Category | Reporting Category | Description of the problem (Newly reported Factors only) | On-Site | Off-Site | Major Impact? |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------|----------|---------------|
| No factors reported | NA | | | | |
| | | | | | |

What measures have been taken / are planned / regulatory processes invoked, to mitigate the effect of these factors?

Is the site subject to adverse ecological change? NO

27. Conservation measures taken:

List national category and legal status of protected areas, including boundary relationships with the Ramsar site; management practices; whether an officially approved management plan exists and whether it is being implemented.

| Conservation measure | On-site | Off-site |
|--------------------------------|---------|----------|
| National Nature Reserve (NNR) | + | |
| Management plan in preparation | + | |

b) Describe any other current management practices:

28. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

e.g. management plan in preparation; official proposal as a legally protected area, etc.

Management plan in preparation - The Chagos Conservation Management Plan (Sheppard & Spalding 2004) has been accepted in principle by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but has yet to be implemented.

29. Current scientific research and facilities:

e.g. details of current research projects, including biodiversity monitoring; existence of a field research station, etc.

Scientific expeditions and visits were conducted in 1967, 1973, 1975 1978/9, 1996, 1999 and 2001. Surveys of recreational fishing are regularly conducted. The BIOT Conservation Consultant has visited annually for about one month from 1993 onwards and reports to the Commissioner.

30. Current communications, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities related to or benefiting the site:

e.g. visitor centre, observation hides and nature trails, information booklets, facilities for school visits, etc.

The Friends of Chagos is a registered charity whose objectives are to promote conservation, scientific and historical research and to advance education concerning the Chagos Archipelago. The Friends have produced four booklets on *Sea Shores of Chagos*, the *Reef Fishes of Chagos*, the *Plants of Chagos* and the *Birds of Chagos*. They have also produced CDs with several hundred photographs about the nature of the Chagos Archipelago past and present. Most recently, in association with the FCO, they have prepared a leaflet for distribution to personnel and yacht-based visitors to Chagos informing them of the importance of the natural environment and briefing them on key regulations.

There is turtle recording and awareness activity and recording of red-footed boobies. The NRMPDG contains measures to protect wildlife and efforts are made with local television and a locally produced news sheet to make the community interested in nature and aware of the need to protect the environment.

31. Current recreation and tourism:

State if the wetland is used for recreation/tourism; indicate type(s) and their frequency/intensity.

Tourism is not permitted, however the large numbers of military and civilian personnel undertake of recreational activities within the atoll including sailing, fishing and camping (the latter allowed within the southern Nature Reserve portion of the Ramsar Site).

32. Jurisdiction:

Include territorial, e.g. state/region, and functional/sectoral, e.g. Dept. of Agriculture/Dept. of Environment, etc.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office,

Overseas Territories Department, King Charles Street, London, SW1A 2AH, UK

33. Management authority:

Provide the name and address of the local office(s) of the agency(ies) or organisation(s) directly responsible for managing the wetland. Wherever possible provide also the title and/or name of the person or persons in this office with responsibility for the wetland.

BIOT Administrator, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Overseas Territories Department, King Charles Street, London, SW1A 2AH, UK

34. Bibliographical references:

Scientific/technical references only. If biogeographic regionalisation scheme applied (see 15 above), list full reference citation for the scheme.

Site-relevant references

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