IUCN Conservation Outlook Assessment 2017 **(archived)**
Finalised on 10 November 2017

Please note: this is an archived Conservation Outlook Assessment for Archipiélago de Revillagigedo. To access the most up-to-date Conservation Outlook Assessment for this site, please visit https://www.worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org.

Archipiélago de Revillagigedo

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
Mexico
Inscribed in: 2016
Criteria:
(vii) (ix) (x)

Site description:

Located in the eastern Pacific Ocean, this archipelago is made up of four remote islands and their surrounding waters: San Benedicto, Socorro, Roca Partida and Clarión. This archipelago is part of a submerged mountain range, with the four islands representing the peaks of volcanoes emerging above sea level. The islands provide critical habitat for a range of wildlife and are of particular importance for seabirds. The surrounding waters have a remarkable abundance of large pelagic species, such as manta rays, whales, dolphins and sharks. © UNESCO

SUMMARY

2017 Conservation Outlook

Good with some concerns

The geographical isolation of the Property and its effective management make its Conservation Outlook good, even if the situation could change if some of the major threats to its values (in particular the management of invasive species but also the regulation of fishing pressure, both inside and outside the property) are not dealt with in future. Despite all these current or potentially serious threats, management is in place to deal with these threats, with the hope that the invasive species problems will be resolved in the near future.

Current state and trend of VALUES

Good
Trend: Stable

The current state and trend of World Heritage values is good and stable, given that the Property has only just been inscribed. Values actually improved with the eradication of sheep and pigs from the islands prior to inscription. If cats and rabbits are eradicated from Socorro and Clarión respectively, the trends in terrestrial biodiversity should even improve.

Overall THREATS

High Threat

The greatest current threat is the existence of feral cats on Socorro and rabbits on Clarión. Cats on Socorro have now been reduced to very low numbers with possibly eradication in view for 2018, while a project to eliminate rabbits on Clarion failed and needs to be restarted. Other threats include fishing inside and outside the property, diving tourist pressure, and natural events including frequent hurricanes and occasional volcanic eruptions. Potential threats are introduction of invasive species such as rats or increased issues with invasive species such as locusts, and climate change could affect the property in

unexpected ways. Despite all these current or potentially serious threats, management is in place to deal with these threats, with the hope that the invasive species problems will be resolved in the near future.

Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT

Mostly Effective

Overall, protection and management of the Property is effective, particular with regards to the terrestrial component of the property. However, some concerns exist with the regards to the capacity to effectively manage marine areas. Clear management procedures are in place through a comprehensive Management Plan, and implementation is undertaken through a number of government departments as well as other institutions and NGOs. The isolation of the property is probably the most difficult challenge in ensuring comprehensive protection, but its isolation is also the main factor that has contributed to its relatively good conservation status today.

FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

▶ **Exceptional landscape**
Criterion:(vii)

The landscape of the four islands comprising the Archipiélago de Revillagigedo exhibit impressive active volcanos, arches, cliffs, and isolated rock outcrops emerging from the middle of the ocean (SoOUV, 2016).

▶ **Exceptional seascape**
Criterion:(vii)

The crystal clear waters of the property create exceptional scenic vistas with large aggregations of fish gathering around the steep walls and seamounts, as well as large pelagic marine species including Giant Manta Rays, whales, dolphins and sharks (SoOUV, 2016).

▶ **Awe-inspiring underwater experience**
Criterion:(vii)

The property encompasses an underwater seascape with abyssal plains at depths close to 4,000 meters and sheer drops in crystal clear water, all contributing to an awe-inspiring underwater experience. A large population of up to 2,000 Humpback Whales visits the islands. The songs of these majestic cetaceans can be heard during the winter months and while diving, add another sensory dimension to the marine seascape. One of the most remarkable aspects of the property is the concentration the Giant Manta Rays which aggregate around the islands and interact with divers in a special

way that is rarely found anywhere in the world. (SoOUV, 2016).

► Unique set of biological and ecological processes
Criterion:(ix)

The property lies in the northern part of the Tropical East Pacific Province, a transitional zone influenced mainly by the California current but mixed with the warm waters from the North Equatorial Current. This location results in the convergence of a multitude of fauna and flora, and creates a unique set of biological and ecological processes (SoOUV, 2016).

► On-going terrestrial evolution
Criterion:(ix)

The isolation and relatively pristine state of these islands has supported evolutionary processes which result in a high degree of endemicity. Two species of lizards, 2 endemic snakes, 4 endemic birds, at least 33 endemic plant species and unknown numbers of invertebrates are endemic to the islands. In addition, 11 endemic subspecies of birds have evolved, indicating the potential for future evolution on these remote and well protected islands (SoOUV, 2016).

► On-going marine evolution
Criterion:(ix)

The waters surrounding these islands are composed of majestic aggregations of sharks, rays, cetaceans, turtles and fish, a number of which are endemic or near-endemic (SoOUV, 2016).

► Outstanding terrestrial biodiversity
Criterion:(x)

The Archipiélago de Revillagigedo is home to the endemic Socorro Dove (currently Extinct in the Wild), Socorro Mockingbird, Socorro Wren, Clarion Wren (as well as 11 endemic bird subspecies), 2 lizards, 2 snakes and numerous endemic plants and invertebrates (SoOUV, 2016).

► Outstanding marine biodiversity
Criterion:(x)

At least 10 reef fish species have been identified as endemic or near-endemic including the spectacular Clarión Angelfish, which can be observed in ‘cleaning stations’ feeding on the ectoparasites of the Giant Manta Rays and dolphins. These rays, some of them unusually completely black, aggregate in some of the largest numbers known worldwide. The property is a haven for a rich diversity of shark species with up to 20 having been recorded, as well as for the seasonally large population of up to 2,000 Humpback Whales (SoOUV, 2016).

► Significant importance for breeding seabirds

Criterion:(x)

The islands are the only breeding site for the Townsend’s Shearwater, one of the rarest seabirds in the world. They are also of significant importance to other breeding seabirds, notably Masked, Blue-footed, Red-footed and Brown Boobies; Red-billed Tropicbirds; Magnificent Frigatebirds and many other species which can be seen soaring around the rocky outcrops where they nest and fish in the sea (SoOUV, 2016).

Other important biodiversity values

► Green Turtle breeding site

Green Turtles nest on Clarion at Bahia Azufre, the only place where they can lay their eggs. As many as 500 green turtle nests were estimated over a 2-week period, making the site one of the three main breeding grounds for the Green Turtle population in the Pacific Ocean (Nomination, 2015). According to preliminary data, the Green Turtle population may also be nesting in Socorro.

► Humpback Whale breeding site

The islands serve as breeding grounds for the northern Pacific populations of Humpback Whales, which aggregate around the Archipelago’s shallow waters during the winter months to mate and give birth to their young (Nomination, 2015). The archipelago has been a key breeding ground for Humpback whales for over 10,000 years, and nowadays is the most pristine breeding

ground for them in the North Pacific (Nomination, 2015).

Assessment information

Threats

Current Threats

High Threat

The greatest current threat is the existence of feral cats on Socorro and rabbits on Clarion, and there are efforts underway to eliminate both of these pests. Other threats include fishing inside and outside the property, diving tourist pressure, and natural events including frequent hurricanes and occasional volcanic eruptions. Despite potentially high threats, management is in place to deal with these threats, with the hope that the invasive species problems will be resolved in the near future.

▶ **Invasive Non-Native/ Alien Species**

High Threat
Inside site, throughout(>50%)

Cats are the major threat to the breeding Townsend's Shearwater and other endemic birdlife on Socorro. While they were still present when the property was inscribed, active measures were being undertaken to control then with a view to eradication. Mice have also been shown to be detrimental to seabird colonies. The rabbits on Clarion, which are harmful to both native flora and fauna, also cause erosion,detrimental to terrestrial biodiversity as well as the surrounding marine life (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

▶ **Fishing / Harvesting Aquatic Resources**

Low Threat
Inside site, extent of threat not known
Outside site

Commercial industrial fishing (yellowfin tuna, several shark species), fishing bycatch and sportfishing threaten marine values although it is noted that

ecological impacts have not reached serious levels since shark aggregations still occur and in greater numbers than in any other island or archipelago in the region. Bycatch is also another threat that could affect seabirds and giant manta as well as isolated incidents with entangling of dolphins, thresher sharks and other pelagic fauna. Sport fishing is limited and the targeted species are most likely to be also threatened by illegal fishing and poaching activities (Nomination, 2015).

► Volcanoes

Low Threat
Inside site, widespread(15-50%)

Socorro has more than 20 active volcanoes and eruptions during the 17th and 18th centuries have had negative effects in the island's ecosystem. The main volcano on Socorro, Cerro Evermann, is located in the middle of the island. In January 1993 it recorded a high increase in volcanic activity which has caused important changes on the ecosystem, mostly in the surrounding waters, as an increase in temperature and decrease in pH. The consequences for the biota have been extirpation of some algae and seagrass species and a displacement of marine fauna from that particular area. Also, on Isla San Benedicto, its main volcano, Barcena, was born in 1952 with a very violent eruption that caused the complete devastation of flora and fauna on the island and surrounding waters. Some species survived and others colonized or re-colonized the island, so to date this ecosystem is recovering (Nomination, 2015).

► Storms/Flooding, Ocean acidification, Temperature extremes

Low Threat
Inside site, extent of threat not known

Hurricanes are common and strong in the Archipiélago de Revillagigedo. They have a marked seasonality, usually between June and November. While the native fauna and flora should be adapted to hurricanes, climate change could increase the intensity of these events (Nomination, 2015).

► Fire/ Fire Suppression

Low Threat

Inside site, scattered(5-15%)

Infrequent fires, either accidental or caused by tropical storms (lightning) or volcanic activity, have occurred on Socorro and Clarion. They are dispersed mainly through invasive forbs and grasses, thus the eradication of sheep on Socorro has considerably decreased the risk and the removal of rabbits, which is necessary and considered as a priority action for the archipelago, will also diminish the fire risk on Clarión (Nomination, 2015).

▶ Other Activities

Low Threat
Inside site, localised(<5%)

Two small naval bases are located on Socorro and Clarion. As long as biosecurity plans are developed and enforced, these two bases should not pose a great threat to the property and in turn, the military help with the protection of the site (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

▶ Tourism/ visitors/ recreation

Low Threat
Inside site, scattered(5-15%)

The main recreational activity in the property are live-aboard dive boats. Currently, the carrying capacity linked to the diving activity is at its limit (Nomination, 2015), and sometimes, the carrying capacity is exceeded.

Potential Threats

High Threat

The greatest potential threat to the property would be the inadvertent introduction of rats to the islands, and biosecurity plans urgently require strengthening, especially as large naval ships occasionally dock on Socorro. Invasive locusts may also pose problems in the future. Climate change could pose greater threats though increased hurricanes or ocean acidification.

▶ Hyper-Abundant Species

Data Deficient
Inside site, extent of threat not known

The invasion of the Centroamerican locust (Schistocerca piceifrons

Orthoptera: Actididae), apparently self-introduced. The species is sympatric with two other native species. At least from 1993 there have been reports of heavy defoliation on localized areas of Socorro. Considering the potential size of locust populations and the size of the island, they must be doing considerable damage to the native flora. Unfortunately, the extent of damage has never been thoroughly evaluated. It is also not clear how the locusts are affecting the native fauna. The endemic locust seems to be confined to higher elevations, perhaps because of competitive exclusion. It is also obvious from anecdotal evidence that the locust populations have been on the rise for the past few years (Nomination, 2015).

► Invasive Non-Native/ Alien Species

High Threat
Inside site, widespread(15-50%)

Rats have not been introduced to the islands but given that at times large ships dock at the naval base, a biosecurity plan to ensure that rats are never introduced to the island is essential. A plan was under discussion during the time of the evaluation (IUCN, 2016).

► Storms/Flooding, Ocean acidification, Temperature extremes

Data Deficient
Inside site, throughout(>50%)

Climate change has the potential to affect the property by increasing the intensity of hurricanes, causing temperature extremes and acidification of the ocean (Nomination, 2015).

Protection and management

Assessing Protection and Management

► Relationships with local people

Highly Effective

The islands are uninhabited with no local people (Nomination, 2015).

► Legal framework

Highly Effective

The property is Mexican federal territory and protected under a range of legislation pertinent to different agency jurisdictions with the principle protective legislation being the General Law of Ecological Balance and the Protection of the Environment (LGEEPA). The islands are managed by the Natural Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP) in close collaboration with a number of other government authorities, various NGO and university partners, tourist operators and other stakeholders who are part of, by law, an advisory committee that meets twice yearly (Nomination, 2015).

► Enforcement

Some Concern

While staffing of the property by the management agency CONANP is modest, there is effective collaboration with the Mexican Navy who provide staffing and infrastructure support to patrol the islands and ensure the enforcement of regulations. However, the marine buffer area is large and increased patrolling to ensure enforcement of the regulation is needed (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

► Integration into regional and national planning systems

Highly Effective

The property is included in the "Estrategia Nacional para la Conservación y el Desarrollo Sustentable del Territorio Insular Mexicano" (SEMARNAT, 2012). It forms part of the Mexican Protected Areas network managed by CONANP (Nomination, 2015).

► Management system

Highly Effective

The islands are managed as a natural protected area by the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP) in close collaboration with other government institutions and various NGO and university partners. A comprehensive Management Plan for the property is in place. While the

islands form part of a serial property, they come under a single management system (CONANP, 2004; Nomination, 2015).

► Management effectiveness

Mostly Effective

Management systems, including a broad stakeholder advisory board that meets biannually, are undertaken under the provisions of Mexican law and the Management Plan (CONANP, 2004; Nomination, 2015). Prior to inscription sheep and pigs were eradicated from the Property, and cats from Socorro are well on the way, attesting to good management effectiveness,even if the rabbit problem on Clarión still needs to be resolved (Aguirre et al., 2011).

► Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations

Data Deficient

As the property was only inscribed in 2016, this is not yet applicable. However, the Committee did request increasing legal protection and revising the Management Plan to extend the no-take zone to 12 nautical miles from the islands, strengthening invasive species eradication and biosecurity plans and managing potential increases in recreational diving, to be reported upon by December 2018 (WHC Decision 40 COM 8B.14).

► Boundaries

Mostly Effective

The boundaries are sufficient provided the full 12 mile zone within the property is managed as a no-take fishing zone and that fisheries management in the buffer zone is strengthened (Decision 40 COM 8B.14). The connectivity between these islands is crucial for many elasmobranchs such as Silvertip, Tiger, Silky, Galapagos, and Scalloped Hammerhead Sharks, as they perform long foraging forays (Nomination, 2015).

► Sustainable finance

Mostly Effective

Funding from the federal government covers operational costs and additional funding comes from projects. Although the PA has relatively modest staffing and government financial resources, the cooperation among agencies, in

particular the Navy, is important (Nomination, 2015).

▶ Staff training and development

Some Concern

Six permanent staff with a high level of competency and skills manage the reserve, although they are mostly based in the office in Baja California Sur (Nomination, 2015).

▶ Sustainable use

Some Concern

The level of use in the Property is unknown as fishing is still allowed in part of the core area as well as the buffer zone (Nomination, 2015).

▶ Education and interpretation programs

Mostly Effective

At present there is no infrastructure dedicated to visitors on the islands, as the only visitation to the islands is by naval personnel and scientific researchers. Conservation education is undertaken in the neighbouring States of California Baja Sur and Colima (Nomination, 2015).

▶ Tourism and visitation management

Mostly Effective

At present the only visitation to to the islands is by naval personnel and scientific researchers. The main tourism is through diving companies on live-aboard vessels, which are managed through the Management Plan (CONANP, 2004; Nomination, 2015).

▶ Monitoring

Mostly Effective

Monitoring with clear indicators is undertaken within specific time-frames by CONANP and GECI (Nomination, 2015).

▶ Research

Mostly Effective

Research in collaboration with numerous institutions is undertaken in the Property (Nomination, 2015).

Overall assessment of protection and management

Mostly Effective

Overall, protection and management of the Property is effective, particular with regards to the terrestrial component of the property. However, some concerns exist with the regards to the capacity to effectively manage marine areas. Clear management procedures are in place through a comprehensive Management Plan, and implementation is undertaken through a number of government departments as well as other institutions and NGOs. The isolation of the property is probably the most difficult challenge in ensuring comprehensive protection, but its isolation is also the main factor that has contributed to its relatively good conservation status today.

▶ Assessment of the effectiveness of protection and management in addressing threats outside the site

Some Concern

The greatest threat from outside the site is unsustainable fishing which could impact the OUV of the Property. While the Mexican Government can manage fishing within its national waters, over-fishing in international waters could have an effect on the Property.

State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

▶ Exceptional landscape

Good
Trend:Stable

The islands' landscape is imposing with majestic cliffs, beaches and volcanoes, some of them very active. The highest volcano in Socorro rises an

imposing 1050 meters above sea level and is very active with vents producing clouds from its boiling waters. The view of guano-covered Roca Partida, arising out of the middle of the ocean, is spectacular (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

► Exceptional seascape

Good
Trend:Stable

The shear drops in crystal clear water and rich and varied marine life provide a superlative underwater seascape. The Property also encompasses abyssal plains with depths down to 4000 meters (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

► Awe-inspiring underwater experience

Good
Trend:Stable

The Property protects some of the richest marine ecosystems in the world with great aggregations of pelagic fauna such as rays, tunas, turtles, whales and sharks. The Giant Manta Rays which aggregate around the islands have a very special interactions with divers like nowhere else in the world. Seasonally the calls of an important population of Humpback Whales provide an awe-inspiring underwater experience (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

► Unique set of biological and ecological processes

Good
Trend:Stable

The unique location of the Property in a transitional zone influenced mainly by the California current which mixes with the warm waters from the North Equatorial Current, result in the convergence of a multitude of fauna and flora. The endemism of the terrestrial and marine fauna, as well as vast congregations of certain species is vivid proof of the important evolutionary process at play in these islands (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

► On-going terrestrial evolution

Good
Trend:Stable

Given the distance to the mainland, strong evolutionary pressure has been

put on the speciation process with a high level of endemism of terestrial taxa (birds, reptiles, insects, plants) at the subspecific, specific and even generic level. Some unique evolutionary processes such as that recorded for the Clarion Burrowing Owl add to the unique processes occurring on the islands (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

► On-going marine evolution

Good
Trend:Stable

The unique combination of ocean currents has produced spectacular endemic species like the Clarion Angelfish, which can be observed in ‘cleaning stations’ eating the ectoparasites of the Giant Manta Rays, some of which are very unusually completely black and which form some of the largest groups known (Nomination, 2015, IUCN, 2016).

► Outstanding terrestrial biodiversity

Low Concern
Trend:Stable

While islands in general have low terrestrial biodiversity, the high level of endemism in the Property's terrestrial flora and fauna make it outstanding. Although one of its flagship species, the Socorro Island Dove, is Extinct in the Wild, it is hoped that once cats are eradicated from the island that a reintroduction of this species may take place (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

► Outstanding marine biodiversity

Good
Trend:Stable

The quantity of a wide diversity of marine species, including cetaceans, sharks, rays and turtles, as well as rather exceptionally a good number of endemic species make this an area of outstanding marine biodiversity (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

► Significant importance for breeding seabirds

Good
Trend:Stable

While the number of seabird species within the Property is relatively low, 46

species have been recorded with 12 breeding, the most important of these being the Townsend's Shearwater, which only breeds on Socorro Island (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

Summary of the Values

▶ **Assessment of the current state and trend of World Heritage values**
Good
Trend: Stable

The current state and trend of World Heritage values is good and stable, given that the Property has only just been inscribed. Values actually improved with the eradication of sheep and pigs from the islands prior to inscription. If cats and rabbits are eradicated from Socorro and Clarión respectively, the trends in terrestrial biodiversity should even improve.

▶ **Assessment of the current state and trend of other important biodiversity values**
Good
Trend: Stable

It would appear that the current trend of the Green Turtle nesting populaton on Clarion is good and stable, but it should be noted that the IUCN evaluation mission of 2015 was not able to visit this part of the property due to logistical reasons. Humpback Whales were also not observed during the mission as it was during the wrong season.

Additional information

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

▶ **Outdoor recreation and tourism, Natural beauty and scenery**

The main benefit to tourists in the property is recreational diving, where people can admire the exceptional scenery and underwater events (Nomination, 2015; IUCN, 2016).

Diving tourism is limited through the Management Plan thus pollution and disturbance is limited. A recommendation to install permanent diving buoys to avoid anchor damage has been made (WHC Decision 40 COM 8B.14).

► Importance for research

Revillagigedo has been called the "Galapagos of Mexico", and numerous studies on the ecology and evolution of its isolated flora and fauna as well as its marine life have been and continue to be undertaken (Nomination, 2015).

► Tourism-related income, Provision of jobs

Diving operations in the Property contribute to the Mexican (as well as American) economy. A small number of jobs are created through Park management and diving operators pay visitor fees (Nomination, 2015; CONANP, 2004).

Diving will create a small amount of pollution and disturbance but in this site it is minimal.

► Fishing areas and conservation of fish stocks

The property provides breeding grounds for fish used commercially, such as the Clarion Angelfish which is used in the aquarium trade, and other commercial fish species.

The sustainability of fishing within the buffer zone of the property requires further study.

Summary of benefits

This unique site benefits science as well as limited tourism (principally diving). To a lesser extent it provides jobs, through park management as well as the naval base. It also provides breeding grounds for fish used commercially, such as the Clarion Angelfish which is used in the aquarium trade, and other

commercial fish species.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

№	Organization/ individuals	Project duration	Brief description of Active Projects
1	GECI; CONANP	From: 2011	The Grupo de Ecología y Conservacion de Islas, A. C. (GECI) started a feral cat control program on Socorro in 2011 which scaled up into an eradication campaign. Cats are now absent in many sectors of the island with the hope that they will be eradicated in 2017.
2	Mexico Pacific Project		The Pacific Manta Research Group has been studying the population of oceanic mantas who seasonally frequent Mexico's Revillagigedos Islands for over 30 years
3	CONANP, Conservacion des Islas, GEF		"Aumentar las capacidades de México para manejar especies exóticas invasoras a través de la implementación de la Estrategia Nacional de Especies Invasoras". GEF Project 0081866
4	CONANP, UNDP, GEF	From: 2014 To: 2020	Optimizar la efectividad de las Áreas Naturales Protegidas en México para contribuir a la conservación de especies en riesgo.
5	CONANP, Mohamed bin Zayed Foundation		Socorro Island Dove project. Reintroduction of this species to Socorro.
6	Pelagios-Kakunjá		Study of telemetry, census and genetics of sharks to determine patterns of movement, connectivity and residence, size and population structure of species.
7	SCRIPPS. Institute of Oceanography.		Study of telemetry in manta rays to determine patterns of movement and population structure of individuals.
8	Whale Shark Mexico.com/ ConCiencia México A.C.		A telemetry project to evaluate migratory patterns of whale sharks in the Gulf of California and surrounding areas.

Compilation of potential site needs

№	Site need title	Brief description of potential site needs	Support needed for following years
1	Migratory species and corridors between Clipperton Atoll		
2	Studies on oceanographic effects on the distribution patterns of species.		
3	Systems with more adequate technology and advice of other sites that have this type of surveillance	Systems with more adequate technology and advice of other sites that have this type of surveillance i.e Galapagos Marine Reserve: http://www.homepages.ucl.ac.uk/~ucfwpej/pdf/MPAGGMR.pdf https://www.nationalgeographic.org/news/case-study-galapagos-marine-reserve/	
4	Surveillance within 6 miles of ANP legal fishing.		

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