Henderson Island

SITE INFORMATION

Country:
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK)
Inscribed in: 1988
Criteria:
(vii) (x)

Site description:

Henderson Island, which lies in the eastern South Pacific, is one of the few atolls in the world whose ecology has been practically untouched by a human presence. Its isolated location provides the ideal context for studying the dynamics of insular evolution and natural selection. It is particularly notable for the 10 plants and four land birds that are endemic to the island. © UNESCO
SUMMARY

2014 Conservation Outlook

Significant concern

The remote and uninhabited Henderson Island has so far been relatively well preserved, primarily because of the limited anthropogenic pressure. However, the biodiversity values of the island remain very highly threatened by rat predation and competition. The impact of rat predation on petrel chick mortality is extremely high. Other endemic land bird populations are also suppressed by rat predation. Rat predation is likely to be responsible for a decrease of petrel abundance from an estimated 5 - 10 million pairs on the island before their arrival to just 40,000 pairs today. This will impact on ecological processes of the island, as previously millions of seabirds would have provided a crucial nutrient source for the island’s ecosystem via their guano. Henderson petrel will also likely go extinct without intervention to eradicate the rats. A rat eradication programme was undertaken in 2011, but unfortunately proved to be unsuccessful. The site is also at risk of potential future invasive alien species introductions, which could occur relatively easily through uncontrolled or poorly managed visitation and have a devastating effect on several key values of the island. The site would benefit from additional efforts to eradicate rats following the unsuccessful 2011 rat eradication programme, as well as efforts to effectively enforce visitor regulations.

Current state and trend of VALUES

High Concern
Trend: Deteriorating

The impact of rat predation on petrel chick mortality on Henderson Island has been estimated at > 99%, and that on Henderson Crake mortality as c.25%. Other endemic land bird populations are also suppressed by rat predation. Rat predation is likely to be responsible for a decrease of petrel abundance from an estimated 5 - 10 million pairs on the island before their arrival to just 40,000 pairs today. This will impact on ecological processes of the island, as previously
millions of seabirds would have provided a crucial nutrient source for the island’s ecosystem via their guano. Henderson petrel will also likely go extinct without intervention to eradicate the rats. Bird monitoring after the 2011 rat eradication attempt demonstrated that the endemic land birds are more impacted by rats than previously thought, as may be other little studied groups such as plants and invertebrates.

**Overall THREATS**

**High Threat**

The key threat to the World Heritage values of Henderson Island continues to be rat predation and competition and its effects on avifauna, invertebrates, sea bird breeding area and the wider ecological processes of the island. Possible future species introductions are also a significant threat. This implies that uncontrolled or poorly managed visitation, as the main invasive alien species invasion vector, remains a potential threat to the site.

**Overall PROTECTION and MANAGEMENT**

**Mostly Effective**

Henderson Island is generally sufficiently well-protected, primarily because of its remoteness, but would benefit from additional efforts to eradicate rats following the unsuccessful 2011 rat eradication programme, as well as efforts to effectively enforce visitor regulations (including the 2007 Code of Conduct), i.e. through the requirement for visitors to be accompanied by a ranger.
FULL ASSESSMENT

Description of values

Values

World Heritage values

► Raised and forested coral atoll of exceptional natural beauty  
Criterion:(vii)

As an extremely remote and near-pristine island, Henderson Island is the world's only forested coral atoll with its landscape and ecology virtually intact, and with ongoing geological and biological processes (IUCN, 1988).

► Exceptionally rich endemic flora  
Criterion:(x)

7 endemic species of flowering plants on a land area of only 43 km² (Florence et al., 1995)

► Exceptionally rich endemic avifauna  
Criterion:(x)


► Exceptionally rich endemic invertebrate fauna  
Criterion:(x)
All the island's 16 species of land snail and about 30% of the 180 insect species may be endemic. Additional groups of invertebrates may comprise a similar level of endemism (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

**Important seabird nesting area (including of globally threatened species)**

Criterion: (x)

ca. 40,000 pairs of breeding seabirds (9 species,) (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

**Other important biodiversity values**

**Rich terrestrial and coastal marine biota**

6 vegetation communities comprising 71 species of vascular plants, 20 of bryophytes and 30 of lichens, 2 native terrestrial reptile species and occasional nesting of Green Turtles Chelonia mydas (EN), regular occurrence of Humpback Whale Megaptera novaeangliae, rich marine invertebrate fauna (including 29 species of coral) and coastal ichthyofauna (190 species) (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

**Assessment information**

**Threats**

**Current Threats**

**High Threat**

In general, the uninhabited Henderson Island is well protected by its remoteness and hostile living conditions. The only exception is the presence of the introduced Polynesian Rat, which has had a major negative impact on ground-breeding petrel species, endemic landbirds and endemic invertebrate
populations..

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

**High Threat**  
**Inside site**

The impact of rat predation on petrel chick mortality on Henderson Island have been estimated at > 99% (RSPB, 2011), and that on Henderson Crake mortality as c.25% (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). Other endemic land bird populations are also suppressed by rat predation. Rat predation is likely to be responsible for a decrease of petrel abundance from an estimated 5 – 10 million pairs on the island before their arrival to just 40,000 pairs today (BirdLife International, 2012). This will impact on ecological processes of the island, as previously millions of seabirds would have provided a crucial nutrient source for the island’s ecosystem via their guano. Henderson petrel will also likely go extinct without intervention to eradicate the rats. The 2011 rat eradication attempt was unsuccessful.

▶ **Logging/ Wood Harvesting**

**Very Low Threat**  
**Inside site**

Very limited impact of reportedly well-regulated miro removal. No visits since 2004 reported in 2012.

▶ **Tourism/ visitors/ recreation**

**Low Threat**  
**Inside site**

Most recent documented example of damage through irresponsible visitation in 1986, when a track was cut and affected plant distribution on the island (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). Generally, island is little visited, due to its extreme remoteness.

**Potential Threats**

**High Threat**

There is a high threat of additional invasive alien species introductions to the
island, which might have adverse effects on all or parts of its biodiversity.

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

**High Threat**

**Inside site**

The example of the rat predation effect on petrel populations shows that any species introduction, which might happen easily through unregulated visitation, may lead to heavy damage of the native flora and fauna, and hence to the island’s ecosystem, landscape and beauty. Its high degree of endemism in all taxonomic groups present makes the island community extremely vulnerable to invasive alien species.

### Protection and management

#### Assessing Protection and Management

► **Management effectiveness**

**Mostly Effective**

5-year management plan 2004 (Brooke et al., 2004), implementation started 2005 and apparently continued since 2010. Since the rat eradication programme was unsuccessful, the plan might need to be updated.

► **Integration into regional and national planning systems**

**Data Deficient**

Site managed by Pitcairn Island Council according to Pitcairn Island OST planning (UNEP-WCMC, 2011), but no information about integration into formal planning available.

► **Relationships with local people**

**Highly Effective**

N. a. - no permanent local population; islands only occasionally visited by Pitcairn Islanders, particularly in the context of the 2009-12 research and eradication programmes.
Legal framework and enforcement
Highly Effective

Local Government Regulations Part IV provide for wildlife protection and fishery management, the Lands and Administration of Estates Ordinance applies restrictions on possession, occupation and transference of land (UNEP-WCMC, 2011). Regime effective but (WHC, 2010) there should be a requirement that all visiting cruise ships have to be accompanied by a ranger. A ranger on the island would pose a risk of further species invasions and would decrease the site’s protection and natural values as an uninhabited island almost untouched by human development.

Management system
Mostly Effective

System generally sufficient. A rat eradication programme was conducted 2011, but was found to be unsuccessful in 2012 (RSPB, 2011). 5-year management plan 2004 (Brooke et al., 2004), implementation started 2005 and apparently continued since 2010. Since the rat eradication programme was unsuccessful, the plan might need to be updated.

Implementation of Committee decisions and recommendations
Mostly Effective

Request at 12.COM to involve Pitcairn Islanders in the management of the site increasingly met over subsequent years.
Request at 12.COM to review legal status of island and upgrade its status to nature reserve or similar not met to date.
Recommendation at 12.COM to include adjacent marine areas in site not followed to date.
Recommendation at 26.COM to urgently implement and improve 1995 management plan followed by 29.COM.
Request at 29.COM to continue updating the WHC about the implementation of the management plan and state of conservation partly met by 32.COM.
Request at 31.COM to report on fundraising progress for rat eradication and bird monitoring partly met by 32.COM.
Request at 32.COM to finalize plans for rat eradication mostly met by 34.COM.
Request at 32.COM to consider establishing a ranger at the site partly met by
34.COM. Request at 32.COM to report on conservation status and efforts met by 34.COM.

- **Boundaries**
  - Mostly Effective

  Appropriate, but no inclusion of adjacent coastal marine areas (IUCN, 1988) as suggested.

- **Sustainable finance**
  - Mostly Effective

  No permanent management on site, no operational budget, but little on-site management needed (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2006).

- **Staff training and development**
  - Mostly Effective

  Only part-time manager off-site currently. Off-site management is appropriate for this site. Manager should accompany visitors.

- **Sustainable use**
  - Highly Effective

  Limited miro harvest considered sustainable, not practiced since 2004. No other use pressure or potential, due to remoteness.

- **Education and interpretation programs**
  - Data Deficient

  N. a. – because of remoteness and limited number of direct stakeholders.

- **Tourism and interpretation**
  - Mostly Effective

  Tourist numbers very limited, visitor guide and code of conduct published in 2007 (WHC, 2008) – remoteness and risk of invasive alien species introduction do not favor large-scale tourism promotion.
**Monitoring**

**Mostly Effective**

No regular systematic monitoring currently but monitoring by miro expeditions from Pitcairn Island suggested, should these resume (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

**Research**

**Highly Effective**

A new research programme on rat eradication is underway. Island has been visited by numerous expeditions since its discovery and is considered sufficiently documented to inform management (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

**Overall assessment of protection and management**

**Mostly Effective**

Henderson Island is generally sufficiently well-protected, primarily because of its remoteness, but would benefit from additional efforts to eradicate rats following the unsuccessful 2011 rat eradication programme, as well as efforts to effectively enforce visitor regulations (including the 2007 Code of Conduct), i.e. through the requirement for visitors to be accompanied by a ranger.

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

**Some Concern**

Aside from the rat predation threat, which is currently being addressed by the United Kingdom, all conceivable potential threats would originate from outside of the island, particularly through uncontrolled visitation and invasive alien species introduction. A permanent ranger presence would likely exacerbate the risk of invasive species as considerable infrastructure would be required to establish adequate habitation on this extremely remote island. To effectively enforce visitor regulations (including the 2007 Code of Conduct), visitors should be required to be accompanied by a ranger.
State and trend of values

Assessing the current state and trend of values

World Heritage values

► Raised and forested coral atoll of exceptional natural beauty
   Good
   Trend: Stable
   Integrity of ecosystem and landscape has been stable and no new threat factors have arisen since inscription (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

► Exceptionally rich endemic flora
   Data Deficient
   Trend: Data Deficient
   No abundance, reduction or loss of endemic flora has been reported and no new threat factors have arisen since inscription. Rats are likely to be affecting relative abundance of endemic flora through consumption of most palatable seeds, but research is required to assess impacts.

► Exceptionally rich endemic avifauna
   High Concern
   Trend: Deteriorating
   Most endemic bird species have been negatively affected by rat predation and competition (WHC, 2008) and a continuous slow decline with a potential to lead to extinction of one species (Henderson Petrel Pterodroma atrata) has been inferred (BirdLife International, 2012). Bird monitoring after the 2011 rat eradication attempt demonstrated that the endemic land birds are more impacted by rats than previously thought.

► Exceptionally rich endemic invertebrate fauna
   Data Deficient
   Trend: Data Deficient
   Invertebrate fauna relatively little studied and may be particularly vulnerable
to invasive alien species, but no abundance reduction or loss of endemic invertebrates has been reported and no new threat factors have arisen since inscription. No research has been carried out but rats are likely to be significantly affecting overall abundance and community structure of endemic invertebrate fauna.

► **Important seabird nesting area (including of globally threatened species)**
  
  **High Concern**
  **Trend:** Deteriorating

Among the nine breeding seabird species, Henderson Petrel Pterodroma atrata and other Pterodroma spp. have been particularly threatened by rat predation, and a continuous slow decline with a potential to lead to extinction has been inferred.

**Other important biodiversity values**

► **Rich terrestrial and coastal marine biota**

6 vegetation communities comprising 71 species of vascular plants, 20 of bryophytes and 30 of lichens, 2 native terrestrial reptile species and occasional nesting of Green Turtles Chelonia mydas (EN), regular occurrence of Humpback Whale Megaptera novaeangliae, rich marine invertebrate fauna (including 29 species of coral) and coastal ichthyofauna (190 species) (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

**Summary of the Values**

► **Assessment of the current state and trend of World Heritage values**
  
  **High Concern**
  **Trend:** Deteriorating

The impact of rat predation on petrel chick mortality on Henderson Island has been estimated at > 99%, and that on Henderson Crake mortality as c.25%. Other endemic land bird populations are also suppressed by rat predation. Rat predation is likely to be responsible for a decrease of petrel abundance from an estimated 5 - 10 million pairs on the island before their arrival to just
40,000 pairs today. This will impact on ecological processes of the island, as previously millions of seabirds would have provided a crucial nutrient source for the island’s ecosystem via their guano. Henderson petrel will also likely go extinct without intervention to eradicate the rats. Bird monitoring after the 2011 rat eradication attempt demonstrated that the endemic land birds are more impacted by rats than previously thought, as may be other little studied groups such as plants and invertebrates.

▶ Assessment of the current state and trend of other important biodiversity values

**Good**

**Trend: Stable**

No deterioration of the other natural values of the site and no emerging factors that would make a negative trend likely have been reported since inscription.

**Additional information**

**Key conservation issues**

▶ **Rat predation of Henderson Petrel Pterodroma atrata and other Pterodroma spp. chicks, as well as Henderson Crake Porzana atra chicks and likely the endemic invertebrates.**

**Local**

Up to > 99% loss of Pterodroma chicks and limited but significant loss of Porzana atra chicks to Polynesian Rat predation reported at Henderson Island. Since the P. atrata population is the largest globally and appears to be unsustainable if rat predation continues, this could lead to the extinction of the species.

▶ **Potential of introduction of new invasive alien species**

**Local**

Additional invasive alien species introductions (microbes, plants, invertebrates or vertebrates) could happen relatively easily by means of uncontrolled
visitation, and could have a devastating effect on several key values of the island. This issue is compounded by the current lack of a ranger accompanying visitors to the island.

► Uncontrolled visitation

Local

Uncontrolled visitation would contribute to the potential introduction of new invasive alien species, but could also have additional negative impacts (littering, disturbance, trail construction, unsustainable resource use etc.). In spite of the remoteness of the island, small boat visitation may increase in the wake of the rise in yachting global tourism.

► Infrastructure development

Local

Plans to develop infrastructure on Henderson Island in 1982/83 were turned down by the British government but might resurface if the general framework affecting the islands changes (UNEP-WCMC, 2011).

Benefits

Understanding Benefits

► Collection of genetic material

The island is used as a reservoir of genetic material of miro and tau stocks for the future (UNEP-WCMC, 2011) and may hold genetic resources of global importance among its endemic biota.

► Is the protected area valued for its nature conservation?

The site supports numerous populations of endemic and globally threatened biota.

► Importance for research

As one of the few nearly pristine coral atolls, the site has generated significant scientific knowledge since discovery (UNEP-WCMC, 2011) and
might turn into a reference for the ecological restoration of other islands in the Pitcairn group and in the wider South Pacific (RSPB, 2011).

Summary of benefits

The nature conservation benefits of this remote and uninhabited site exceed other types of benefits significantly, although there are also additional minor and potential benefits.

Projects

Compilation of active conservation projects

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<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Organization/individuals</th>
<th>Project duration</th>
<th>Brief description of Active Projects</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>RSPB</td>
<td></td>
<td>Henderson Island Restoration Project (rat eradication, aimed at boasting endemic land bird and seabird populations, native flora and invertebrate fauna; participation of Pitcairn Islanders in management of the site).</td>
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Compilation of potential site needs

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<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Site need title</th>
<th>Brief description of potential site needs</th>
<th>Support needed for following years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>UK Government</td>
<td>Deployment of a ranger to accompany visitors to the site, aimed at enforcing the 2007 visitation Code of Conduct, site monitoring and interpretative activities.</td>
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# REFERENCES

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