



South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

Office of the Commissioner
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CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY EXTENDED TO SOUTH GEORGIA AND THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS

The Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) is delighted to announce the declaration of the extension of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.

The Convention on Biological Diversity was signed by the UK in 1992 and ratified in 1994, but that ratification did not include South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI). Following the extension, which was undertaken by the UK Government at the request of GSGSSI, SGSSI has become the fifth UK Overseas Territory to be included in the UK ratification of the Treaty.

The extension is a demonstration of the commitment of the GSGSSI and the UK Government to the conservation of the flora and fauna of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and is a consequence of recent work to protect the biodiversity of the Territory.

Protection of the marine biodiversity of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands has recently been strengthened by the creation of a large (1.07 million km²) sustainable-use Marine Protected Area in the 200-mile Maritime Zone, which includes large areas of coastal no-take zones. The sustainable management of the marine ecosystem is further evidenced by Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification of the fisheries operating within the Maritime Zone.

Recent years have also seen considerable progress in the protection of the native terrestrial biodiversity of South Georgia, with world leading programmes to eradicate introduced reindeer and rodents and a major project to control non-native plants. The benefits of these projects are already apparent on South Georgia, with a rapid recovery of the

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vegetation (following the reindeer eradication) and with rapid recolonisation of previously rat-infested areas by the South Georgia pipit.

Achieving the extension of the CBD to SGSSI has been facilitated by close collaboration between GSGSSI, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

James Duddridge MP, Foreign Officer Minister for the Overseas Territories stated:

“ I am delighted that the Foreign Secretary has agreed to declare extension of the Convention on Biological Diversity to South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands. This demonstrates the UK Government’s commitment to support the Overseas Territories’ environmental ambitions at an international level, by extending key multilateral treaties on environment issues. The extension follows a period of sustained cooperation between the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands and the UK Government to ensure successful implementation. The extension will build on the work undertaken to date by both Governments, including habitat restoration work and designation of a Marine Protected Area, ensuring that the islands continue to achieve the highest possible standards of environmental management ”

Colin Roberts, Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, who formally requested that the UK Government extend its ratification of the CBD to the Territory said:

“The Convention on Biological Diversity is an extremely significant global agreement and I am delighted it will now be extended to South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands”

Dr Martin Collins, Chief Executive of the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, said:

“The extension of the CBD to South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands demonstrates our long-term commitment to protecting the flora, fauna and habitats of the Territory ”

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Dr Jennifer Lee, Environment Officer for the Territory said:

“Protecting biodiversity is central to the management strategy for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. We are delighted to be able to showcase this work on a global stage, and contribute to such an important international agreement ”

For further information or original images please contact Dr Martin Collins (ceo@gov.gs) or Dr Jennifer Lee (env@gov.gs).

Background information on South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

- South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) are a United Kingdom Overseas Territory in the Atlantic Sector of the Southern Ocean. The island of South Georgia is situated approximately 1,350 km south-east of the Falkland Islands and 1,900 km east of the southern tip of South America. Mainland South Georgia and its offshore islands comprise a land area of 3,750 km². The island is mountainous with a substantial amount of land over 1,000 m above sea level. Approximately 60 % of the main island is permanently covered with snow and ice. South Georgia lies 200 km south of the Polar Front and is surrounded by cold water of Antarctic origin. The South Sandwich Islands lie to the south-east of South Georgia and are a chain of eleven volcanically active islands stretching from 56 °S to 59 °S.
- There is no resident population on South Georgia. A small settlement at King Edward Point (KEP) hosts the administration of the island and a scientific base operated by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). Approximately 13 people are resident at KEP in the winter months, but in the summer the number of scientists can double and around 7,000 tourists come to the island for day visits. The former whaling station at nearby Grytviken is home to the South Georgia Museum, which is operated by the South Georgia Heritage Trust. A second BAS base is situated on Bird Island, off the north-western tip of mainland South Georgia. This has a complement of four in the winter and up to 10 in the summer months. The South Sandwich Islands are completely unpopulated and receive infrequent visits from yachts and small cruise ships.
- The islands are a wildlife haven and are home to about five million seals of four different species and 65 million breeding birds of 30 different species. The Territory is also home to the world's most southerly songbird, the endemic South Georgia pipit. The waters surrounding the islands are an important habitat for migrating whales and are host to a vast array of marine benthic fauna. They are also rich in commercially important fish species and are important for krill populations that are a key link in the Southern Ocean food web.
- Past human activities have had profound impacts on the flora and fauna of South Georgia. Sealing began in the late 1700s and by the early 1800s fur seal populations were severely depleted. Then, between 1904 and the 1960s, tens of thousands of whales were killed, with over 1,000 people working on the island at the peak of the whaling industry. With so many visiting people and vessels, and the movement of supplies and equipment, numerous alien species were either accidentally or deliberately introduced, the most devastating being brown rats and reindeer.

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- In recent years GSGSSI have been working to eradicate the introduced reindeer from South Georgia and the South Georgia Heritage Trust have been leading a project to eradicate invasive rodents. Together, these projects will convey significant environmental benefits to the island including the recovery of coastal vegetation, recovery of populations of burrow nesting seabirds and of the iconic South Georgia pipit.
- The main activities within SGSSI are fishing, tourism and science. Within the Maritime Zone fisheries are extremely well managed in one of the worlds largest sustainable use Marine Protected Areas. The South Georgia Patagonian toothfish fishery has been certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) since 2004 and is widely regarded as one of the best managed fisheries in the world. The largest operators in the icefish and krill fisheries have also received certification from the MSC.
- Approximately 7,000 tourists visit SGSSI each year. Cruise ship operators are all members of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO) and landings are limited to designated Visitor Landing Sites. A range of science activities are also routinely carried out on South Georgia. A particular emphasis is placed on monitoring of the abundant and iconic populations of penguins, seals and seabirds. This monitoring is essential to ensure the continued sustainable management of the marine environment.
- GSGSSI is required to maintain a balanced annual budget, with expenditure not exceeding income. The principal source of revenue is from the sale of fishing licences, particularly toothfish. Other sources of income include passenger landing fees from tourists, and the sale of stamps and commemorative coins. Expenditure is primarily on fisheries management (including running costs for the a fisheries patrol vessel), environmental projects and heritage work. Annual turn over in the region of £6 million

Background information on the Convention of Biological Diversity

- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is a multilateral treaty. The Convention aims to:
 - 1) conserve biological diversity
 - 2) promote sustainable use of its components; and
 - 3) ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.
- The Convention was opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro on 5th June 1992 and entered into force on 29 December 1993.

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- In Nagoya, Japan in 2010, at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD, the parties to the convention adopted a revised and updated Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, for the 2011-2020 period.
- There are 20 Aichi targets that cover five strategic areas. These are:
 - Strategic Goal A: Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity conservation across government and society
 - Strategic Goal B: Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use
 - Strategic Goal C: To improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species and genetic diversity
 - Strategic Goal D: Enhance the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services
 - Strategic Goal E: Enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building
- For full details of the Aichi Targets see: <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>



King penguins breed in large numbers on the mountainous island of South Georgia (photo: Martin Collins)



This prickly burr *Aceana* is the only member of the rose family which grows on South Georgia (photo Andy Black)



The endemic South Georgia pipit is becoming an increasingly frequent sight following the removal of rats (photo: Jennifer Lee)



Black-browed albatross forage in the rich waters surrounding South Georgia (photo: Martin Collins).



The endemic crocodile fish is only found in the waters around SGSSI (photo Claire Goodwin / Shallow Marine Survey Group).



The chick of a wandering albatross (Photo: Julie Hunt)