

## WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN SUMMARY

### GOUGH ISLAND (UNITED KINGDOM)

Summary prepared by IUCN/WCMC (March 1995) based on the original nomination supplied by the Government of the United Kingdom. This original and all documents in support of this nomination will be available for consultation at the meetings of the Bureau and the Committee.

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#### 1. LOCATION

Located southeast of Tristan da Cunha Island in the south Atlantic Ocean, midway between Africa and South America.

#### 2. JURIDICAL DATA

The island and surrounding territorial waters were designated a wildlife area in 1976 under the Tristan da Cunha Conservation Ordinance.

#### 3. IDENTIFICATION

The island of Gough (6500ha) represents the eroded core of a Late Tertiary volcano. The east side of the island is dissected by a series of deep steep-sided valleys, which are separated by narrow serrated ridges. Along the west side of the island, rounded slopes extend from the central plateau to the western sea cliffs. Many offshore stacks and rocks are present, mostly within 100m of the main island. Vegetation comprises tussock grass around the coast and wet heath with moss and feldmark, and bog and swamp communities at higher elevations.

Knowledge of the flora is incomplete but consists of some 35 native flowering plant and 28 native fern species. Over 30 of Gough's vascular plant taxa are endemic to the Tristan de Cunha islands. A total of 146 bryophytes have been recorded, eight of which are endemic, together with 20 fungi and 24 lichens. Invertebrate fauna also remains poorly known, but comprises 100 species, eight of which are endemic.

Gough is remarkable for providing a breeding place for a large part of the seabirds of both the subtropical and subantarctic South Atlantic Ocean. The avifauna consists of 22 species of breeding sea and landbirds. Both landbird species, namely Gough finch (R) and Gough moorhen (R) are endemic. However, they are not under any threat on Gough at present. Gough is included in the Tristan de Cunha Priority One Endemic Bird Area as defined by BirdLife International.

The native mammal fauna consists of two species: southern elephant seal and subantarctic fur seal, although two other marine mammals occur, namely southern right whale (E) and dusky dolphin (K).

#### 4. STATE OF PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION

Gough Island remains largely undisturbed and modification of the island ecosystem has been minimal. At present, isolation, strict legislation and a comprehensive management plan effectively conserve the island's natural habitats and wildlife. The greatest potential threats to the biota are the risks of introduced species and of fire. However, the management plan sets out measures to minimise these threats.

## 5. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

The Gough Island Wildlife Reserve nomination, as prepared by the Government of the United Kingdom, provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage natural property:

- (ii) **Contains exceptional examples of on-going biological processes** Gough Island is special conservation significance as it is the largest scarcely modified cool-temperate island ecosystem in the South Atlantic Ocean. It is also one of the least disturbed major temperate oceanic islands of its size in the world.
- (iii) **Contains superlative natural phenomena or natural beauty** Gough is an island of outstanding natural beauty with spectacularly precipitous cliffs around much of the coastline and mountains rising to 910m above sea-level.
- (iv) **Contains the most important areas of high biodiversity and significant natural habitats for threatened species** Gough Island is one of the most important seabird colonies of the world and provides a breeding site for 22 species. The island is the breeding site for virtually the entire population of Atlantic petrel, as well as being the main breeding site for the subspecies of yellow-nosed albatross and wandering albatross, half the world's population of northern rockhopper, and large proportions of white faced storm petrel, white bellied storm petrel, races of great or subantarctic skua and Antarctic tern. Endemic terrestrial species include two landbird, eight invertebrates and several vascular plant species. The virtually undisturbed condition of the island lends itself to biological research.

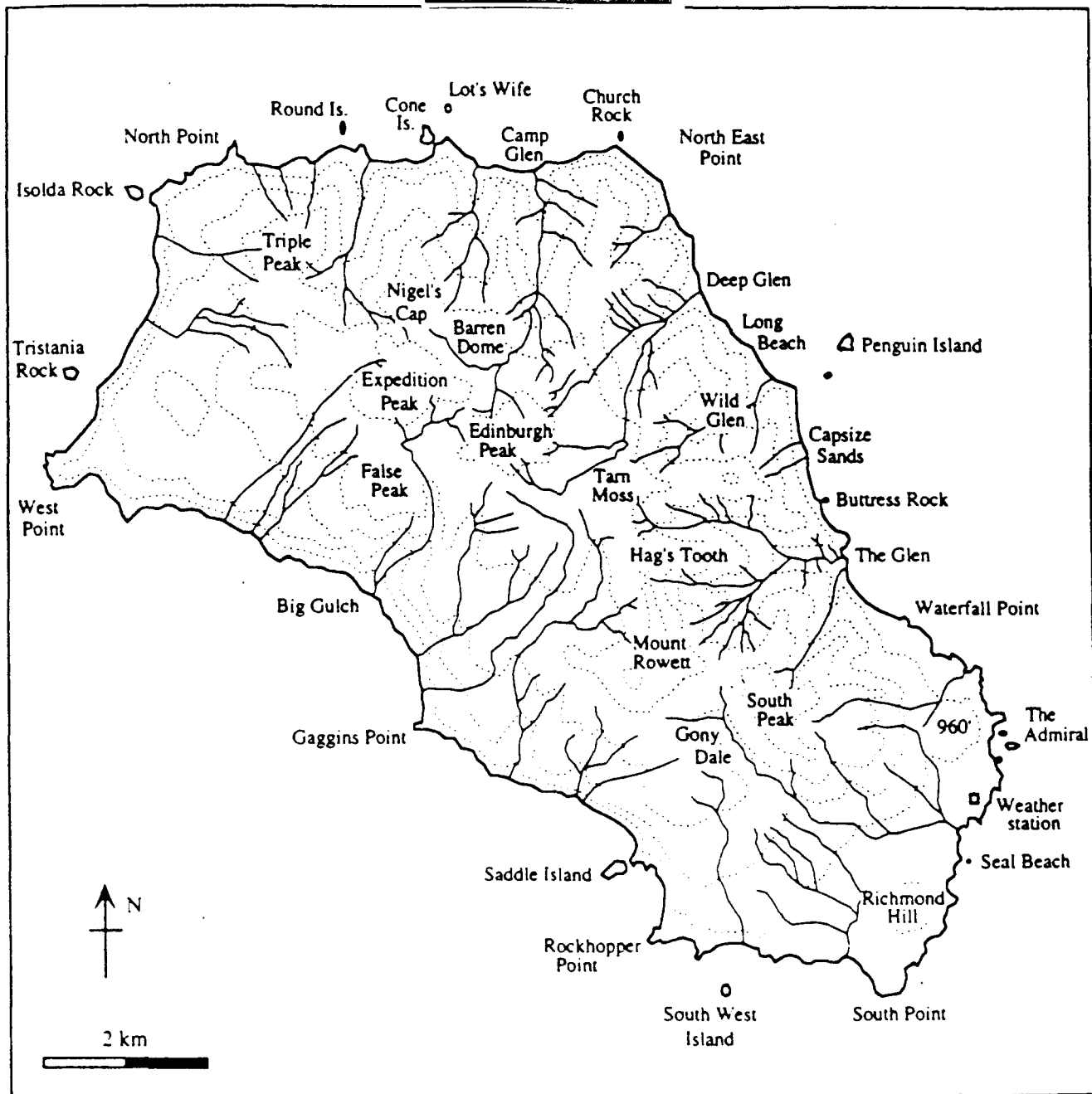
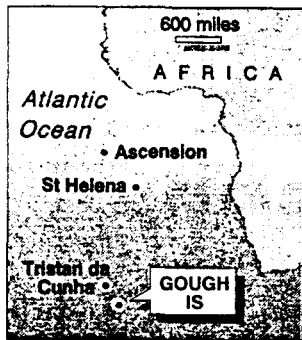


Figure 1

The Gough Island Wildlife Reserve, redrawn from Holdgate 1958. Contour interval = 150 m

**WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION**  
**GOUGH ISLAND (UNITED KINGDOM)**

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**1. DOCUMENTATION**

- i) IUCN/WCMC Data Sheet (17 references)
- ii) Additional Literature Consulted: J. Croxall ed. 1984. Seabirds and Conservation. ICBP. IUCN/SCAR. 1994. **Developing the Antarctic Protected Area System**. 137p.; Birdlife International. in press. Directory of Endemic Birds; Clarke MR and P. Dingwall. 1985. **Conservation of Islands in the Southern Ocean**. IUCN. 180p.; Thorsell, J. 1993. Which Islands Merit World Heritage Status? *Insula* No.2. Dingwall, P. 1995. Ranking the World Heritage Values of Islands in the Southern Ocean. Report to IUCN 8p.
- iii) Consultations: Two external reviewers, four member "delphi" panel.
- iv) Field Visit: Not undertaken

**2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS**

Inasmuch as all oceanic islands have some unique or distinguishing feature, comparisons are difficult to make. The 22 islands (or island groups) in the Insulantarctic Biogeographic Province have been a special challenge in this regard. Since 1986 several working groups have been convened by IUCN to provide an empirical rationale for assessing the comparative importance of each. In the meantime, no World Heritage site has been inscribed in this region although the two island nominations received have been deferred.

The Gough Island nomination gave new impetus to review the findings of the working group and to extend its work. This was done through the conduct of a "delphi" panel of experts who independently rated all the islands on four attributes:

- landscape features (criterion *iii*)
- geological character (criterion *i*)
- biodiversity (criterion *iv*)
- absence of human impact

Full details of the method and scoring are provided in the working group's report (see Dingwall, 1995) which divides the islands into two groups - cool-temperate and sub-antarctic. For the cool-temperate group (which includes Gough Island) a summary of the results are:

**Landscape:** The highest ranked islands for their scenic landscape values are Gough Island, the Auckland Islands and the Tristan Group.

**Geological features:** The most significant islands geologically are the Auckland Islands, Gough Island and Campbell Island.

**Biodiversity:** Outstanding among the islands from a biological viewpoint are the Tristan Island Group, Gough Island and the Auckland Islands.

**Human impact:** Gough Island, The Snares Islands and the Bounty Islands are the least affected by human modification.

Gough Island thus is scored high on all four of the attributes and, in fact, received the highest total score of all the 22 islands in the region. This is a strong reflection of the importance of Gough at least within Insulantarctica.

In terms of its value as a natural site the rating scheme indicates that Gough has been relatively free from human disturbance. Although exploited by whalers and sealers in the past, the island is one of the three least modified in the cool-temperate group. It thus is of comparatively greater scientific and conservation interest as islands which have retained their original biological condition are globally rare.

The above comparative assessment largely confirms the section in the nomination document which does an excellent job in providing comparative data. In summary, Gough Island stands out as one of the most important islands for nature conservation in the Southern Ocean on the following bases:

- it is one of the least disturbed temperate oceanic islands in the world;
- it has a relatively high number of endemic plant taxa;
- it is particularly important for its avifauna, and is one of the most important three islands in the region for seabirds and one of the top ranked in the world;
- it is one of the more dramatic southern ocean islands in terms of its scenic beauty.

### **3. INTEGRITY**

Gough Island, like other sub-antarctic islands, is not subject to much in the way of anthropogenic pressures except for the largely unknown impact of commercial fisheries on the marine ecosystem. Visitation to the island is prohibited except under permit. Biological research and monitoring is regularly carried out and a once per year site inspection is made by a member of the Tristan da Cunha Wildlife Reserve Advisory Committee. The founding legislation provides secure protection and a comprehensive management plan exists.

As the island's fauna is dependent on the marine environment the reserve includes the adjacent ocean up to three nautical miles. Although many species feed beyond this limit the area of most intensive use is included as part of the reserve. The extension to 12nm is currently being considered and this is to be encouraged.

Related to this is the need to confirm that the boundaries of the site include the full Gough Island Wildlife Reserve. The descriptive section of the nomination makes no mention of the marine zone and the title of the site is only Gough Island with the land area of 6500 ha given.

### **4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

Although removed by 350 km from Inaccessible Island in the Tristan da Cunha island group, Gough's values are in many ways complemented by those of this island. Inaccessible is also largely undisturbed and has a large seabird population. The prospect of considering an extension of the site to also include Inaccessible was thus a logical suggestion made by reviewers. However, IUCN feels that it is not opportune to seriously propose this at this time as the reserve was only created in 1994 and there is no management plan as yet. Gough Island can stand on its own but the long-term prospects of adding Inaccessible to the site should be registered.

## 5. EVALUATION

Gough Island is one of the least disturbed major cool-temperate island ecosystem in the South Atlantic Ocean, and is also one of the most important seabird colonies of the world (criterion *iv*). The island has high scenic qualities with spectacular sea-cliffs around much of the coastline (criterion *iii*). Two endemic land birds are found at Gough, the Gough moorhen and the Gough finch. Gough is included in the Tristan da Cunha Priority One Endemic Bird Area, as defined by BirdLife International. The island is home to 12 endemic plant species in addition to other threatened species. Gough's undisturbed nature makes it particularly valuable for biological research, with weather monitoring being the only other activity permitted on the island. The nomination meets all conditions of integrity (assuming that the adjacent marine area is included in the site) and should thus be inscribed on the World Heritage List under natural criteria *iii* and *iv*.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Bureau recommended Gough Island for inscription on the World Heritage List pending confirmation that the marine area is included as part of the nomination and the name of the site should then read Gough Island Wildlife Reserve. This confirmation was received on 31 August from the British authorities. The Committee then could now agree to inscribe the Gough Island Wildlife Reserve on the World Heritage List and invite the Government of UK to inform them when the extension of the marine area from 3 nm to 12 nm is finalised.

DELPHI SCORES FOR ATTRIBUTES OF COOL-TEMPERATE AND SUB-ANTARCTIC ISLANDS

ISLAND	'LANDSCAPE				GEOLOGY				BIODIVERSITY				IMPACT				TOTAL SCORE
	C	H	D	T	C	H	D	T	C	H	D	T	C	H	D	T	
<b>COOL-TEMPERATE</b>																	
Tristan	1	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	2	-	3	-	1	-	1	-	-
Nightingale	2	-	2	-	1	-	3	-	3	-	3	-	2	-	2	-	-
Inaccessible	3	-	3	-	2	-	2	-	5	-	4	-	3	-	3	-	-
Combined TNI	3	2	3	8	2	2	3	7	4	5	4	13	2	3	2	7	35
Gough	5	3	4	12	3	2	3	8	4	4	4	12	4	4	4	12	44
St Paul	2	1	3	6	2	1	3	6	1	1	2	4	1	1	1	3	19
Amsterdam	2	1	3	6	2	1	2	5	1	1	2	4	1	1	1	3	18
Auckland	3	3	5	11	2	2	5	9	2	3	4	9	1	2	3	6	35
Campbell	2	2	3	7	2	2	3	7	2	2	3	7	1	2	2	5	26
Snarcs	2	2	2	6	2	1	2	5	2	2	3	7	4	3	5	12	30
Antipodes	2	1	3	6	2	1	3	6	2	1	2	5	2	2	3	7	25
Bounty	2	1	1	4	2	1	1	4	2	1	1	4	5	2	5	12	24
<b>SUB-ANTARCTIC</b>																	
S. Georgia	4	5	5	14	3	3	3	9	3	2	3	8	2	3	3	8	39
S. Sandwich	3	3	3	9	3	2	2	7	2	1	2	5	5	4	5	14	35
Bouvetoya	3	1	3	7	3	1	3	7	2	1	2	5	5	4	5	14	33
Marion	3	1	3	7	3	1	3	7	3	2	3	8	2	2	2	6	28
Prince Edward	3	1	3	7	3	1	3	7	3	3	3	9	5	4	5	14	37
Crozet	1	3	3	7	1	2	3	6	5	3	4	12	2	2	2	6	31
Kerguelen	3	4	4	11	4	3	4	11	3	3	4	10	1	2	1	4	36
Macquarie	3	2	3	8	5	5	5	15	3	2	3	8	1	2	2	5	36
Heard	5	3	4	12	3	1	3	7	3	1	2	6	4	4	5	13	38
McDonald	2	1	1	4	2	1	1	4	1	1	1	3	5	5	5	15	26

Notes:

- 1 Landscape features; geological character; biodiversity; absence of human impact  
 2 C = Cooper; H = Holdgate; D = Dingwall; T = totals