
WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

Gough Island Wildlife Reserve – Extension (United Kingdom) ID N° 740 bis

Background note: The IUCN technical evaluation of Gough Island Wildlife Reserve (United Kingdom) was presented to the nineteenth session of the World Heritage Committee (Berlin, 1995). Based on IUCN's advice the site was inscribed on the World Heritage List at that time under natural criteria (iii) and (iv). The IUCN report noted that:

“Gough Island is one of the least disturbed major cool-temperate island ecosystems 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 Hough 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...”

IUCN also noted that:

“Although removed by 350km 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 that 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 this site should be registered.”

By letter to the World Heritage Centre dated 20 January 2003, the State Party officially requested that the boundaries of the World Heritage site be extended to include the neighbouring Inaccessible Island. However, there were a number of clarifications sought by IUCN and the World Heritage Centre at that time and the State Party subsequently requested that the nomination not be examined at the 27th session of the World Heritage Committee in order to fully respond to those requests for information.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The World Heritage site currently includes a terrestrial area of 6,500 ha and a marine limit extending to 3 nautical miles. In October 1999 IUCN reported on the state of conservation of the site highlighting concerns relating to illegal fishing in the waters around Gough Island and recommending the expansion of the boundaries to 12 nautical miles. The boundaries of the Reserve were subsequently extended to 12 nautical miles in 2000, as confirmed by the State Party at the 24th extraordinary session of the Bureau (Cairns, 2000), and the name of the site changed to Gough Island Nature Reserve.

On the 27 February 1997, Inaccessible Island and its surrounding waters out to 12 nautical miles (22.2km) were also proclaimed a Nature Reserve in terms of the Tristan da Cunha Conservation Ordinance (Amendment) 1997, and a management plan was finalised in 2001.

By letter to the World Heritage Centre dated 20 January 2003, the State Party officially requested that the boundaries of the World Heritage site be extended to include the neighbouring Inaccessible Island. Following requests for further information, the State Party responded on 5 November 2003 with an official request to also extend the marine area

around Gough Island World Heritage site from 3 nautical miles to 12 nautical miles to bring the boundaries of the World Heritage site in line with those of the Nature Reserve, and to change the name of the site to *Gough and Inaccessible Islands* World Heritage site.

The State Party also provided responses to the following questions asked by IUCN:

- i) *What policies are in place to monitor and ensure the sustainability of the surrounding fisheries?* – The State Party noted that the Fishery at Gough is for lobster only and is controlled by quotas and size limits and monitored by Fishery Observers.
- ii) *What is the current status of the whale population in the marine zone?* – The State Party confirmed that the whole of the Tristan da Cunha group was made a whale sanctuary at the 290th meeting of the Island Council on 28th February 2001.
- iii) *Are albatross populations being monitored?* - The State Party stated that Albatrosses are being monitored by the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town. However, no statistics were provided on their current state of conservation.

The State Party also noted that they hope to submit a revised Management Plan by February 2004, but this has not yet been received.

The United Kingdom recently ratified the *Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels* (ACAP), which seeks, in particular, to reduce the seabird deaths caused by longline fishing, as well as the destruction of their habitat. However, the Tristan da Cunha Archipelago is not yet included under this agreement.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF NOMINATED EXTENSION: INACCESSIBLE ISLAND

Inaccessible Island (37°18'S, 12°41'W), with an area of 14km², is a cool-temperate, uninhabited island of volcanic origin in the central South Atlantic Ocean, midway between the southern tip of Africa and South America. It is one of three main islands forming the United Kingdom Overseas Territory of Tristan da Cunha, and together with Tristan, Gough and Nightingale islands is administered by an Administrator (appointed by the UK Government on a three-year basis) and an elected Island Council. The main island of Tristan lies 40km to the northeast, while Gough Island lies about 400km south-southeast of the Tristan group.

Inaccessible Island is characterised by steep cliffs around the entire coastline, and an undulating plateau that rises from some 100m at the eastern end to over 500m at the western end. The island's plateau is dissected by several watercourses that terminate in spectacular waterfalls down the coastal cliffs. Access is by sea with no wharves or jetties, only mooring buoys for Tristan's fishery patrol vessel.

The island remains in a largely pristine condition and is one of the few temperate oceanic islands free of introduced mammals. It supports 10% of the global population of Northern Rockhopper Penguins and, together with Nightingale Island, is the most important breeding site for Great Shearwaters with a population of at least two million pairs. It is home to some 300 native plants and animals, including 2 birds, 8 plants and at least 10 invertebrates endemic to the island. The island also supports more than 70 other plant and animal species restricted to the Tristan-Gough island group. More than 250 species have been recorded from the marine environment, including 60 species endemic to Tristan-Gough. The island's natural history nonetheless remains little studied due to the difficult access and the lack of systematic research by any single agency.

Waters within 200 nautical miles (370km) of the islands are protected by the Tristan da Cunha Fishery Limits of Ordinance of 1983 (amended 1991, 1992, 1997). This area was declared a whale sanctuary in March 2001. Fishing rights within 50 nautical miles of the coastline currently are restricted to one concession holder, subject to quota controls, a size limit and a closed season for main target species, the Tristan Rock Lobster. The presence of a fisheries

patrol vessel based at Tristan and the initiation of observer programmes aboard licensed vessels help to control fishing practices. However, it is noted that some illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities still take place within the 200 nautical mile zone, as highlighted in the IUCN State of Conservation report in October 1999.

To date no tourists have landed at Inaccessible Island although there are several cruise ships landing at Tristan each year, with an increasing number ever since the first tourists landed at Nightingale Island in 1995. All native animals and plants are protected and the importation of alien species prohibited, as well as any agricultural or horticultural activity. Construction of any infrastructure needs a permit.

RECOMMENDATION

The proposed extension is in line with the recommendation of IUCN and the World Heritage Committee at its 19th session (Berlin, 1995). IUCN, therefore, recommends the World Heritage Committee:

- (i) **to extend** the World Heritage site to include the neighbouring Inaccessible Island and the surrounding marine zone extending out to 12 nautical miles, and
- (ii) **to extend** the marine zone around Gough Island from 3 nautical miles to 12 nautical miles, to bring the boundaries of the World Heritage site in line with those of the Nature Reserve.

The extended World Heritage site would thus include a terrestrial area of 7,900ha and a marine area of 390,000 ha.

IUCN also recommends the World Heritage Committee to approve the proposed name change as proposed by the authorities of the UK; that is to *Gough and Inaccessible Islands World Heritage Site*.

The World Heritage Committee may wish to commend the State Party on its policy of conservation-based fishery management in the waters around Gough Island, invite it to maintain current tight regulations in this respect and endeavour to enforce these over illegal fisheries. The State Party should be:

- encouraged to extend its ratification of the *Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels* to include the Tristan da Cunha Archipelago, and
- invited to draw the Committee's attention to any factors that might affect the World Heritage site in future.