

Christmas Island

1 Description

Christmas I., Indian Ocean. Most of the original vegetation was rainforest. The island is surrounded by relatively warm, low salinity waters, which provide ample food for seabirds. About a third of the rainforest was cleared for mining but most of the remainder is now protected in Christmas Island National Park.

Christmas I. has a unique, endemic avifauna of seabirds and rainforest species.

2 IBRA Regions

Not applicable.

3 Core taxa

Critically Endangered

Abbott's Booby

White-tailed Tropicbird (Christmas Island)

Christmas Island Frigatebird

Brown Goshawk (Christmas Island)

Christmas Island Imperial-Pigeon

Emerald Dove (Christmas Island)

Christmas Island Hawk-Owl

Glossy Swiftlet (Christmas Island)

Island Thrush (Christmas Island)

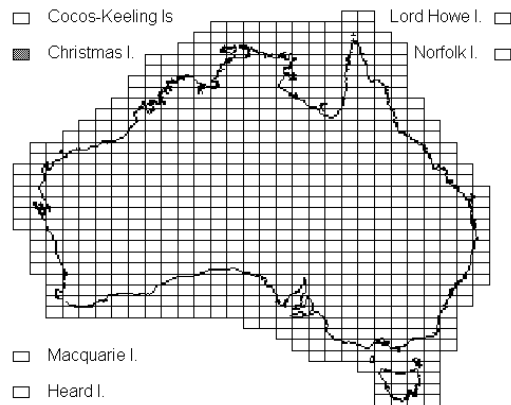
Christmas Island White-eye

Near Threatened

Red-tailed Tropicbird

4 Conservation issues

The island's avifauna was greatly depleted by destruction of about a third of the rainforest from 1965 to 1987 to mine phosphate. The population of Abbott's Booby may still be decreasing as a consequence of this habitat loss. A far greater threat, however, is the rapid spread of the introduced Yellow Crazy Ant *Anoplolepis gracilipes*. Super-colonies of this introduced species now occupy an estimated 15-18% of the island and are still spreading rapidly. The ants have the potential to alter the whole ecology of the island by killing the super-numerous Red Crab *Gecaroidea natalis* and by farming scale insects, which damage the trees. Flow on effects could include the spread of introduced Black Rats *Rattus rattus* into areas formerly occupied by crabs. All endemic birds are threatened by the spread of the ant. Seabirds also face an additional, if unquantified, threat from long-line fishing.



5 Recommended management

- 5.1 Develop techniques for controlling Yellow Crazy Ants.
- 5.2 Control abundance and spread of the Yellow Crazy Ant.
- 5.3 Pending control, establish captive populations of at least the land birds with the aim of reintroduction once ant control has been achieved.
- 5.4 Negotiate with all landowners to ensure protection of primary forests outside the national park.
- 5.5 Review the Christmas Island Quarantine Service.
- 5.6 Continue rainforest rehabilitation of priority minefields.
- 5.7 Assess impacts of longline fishing on endemic seabirds.
- 5.8 Form an Island Recovery Team, and develop and implement island-wide conservation management and recovery plans.

6 Organisations responsible for conservation

Environment Australia (including Wildlife Australia Branch; Parks Australia North; Christmas Island Rainforest Rehabilitation Program).

7 Other organisations involved

Birds Australia, Christmas Island Phosphates Pty. Ltd., Christmas Island Shire Council, Monash University, Australian zoos, Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA).

8 References

- Dunn, A. and Hill, F. A. R. 1997. Abbott's Booby Recovery Plan. Environment Australia, Canberra.
- Dunn, A. and Hill, F. A. R. 1997. The Christmas Island Frigatebird Recovery Plan. Birds Australia, Melbourne.
- Hill, F. A. R. 1997. The Christmas Island Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus natalis* Recovery Plan. Birds Australia, Melbourne.
- Hill, F. A. R. 1997. The Christmas Island Hawk-Owl *Ninox natalis* Recovery Plan. Birds Australia, Melbourne.
- Nelson, J. B. 1972. The biology of seabirds of the Indian Ocean Christmas Island. *J. Mar. Biol. Assoc. India* 14:643-662.
- O'Dowd, D. J., Green, P. T. and Lake, P. S. A. 1999. Status, impact and recommendations for research and management of exotic invasive ants in Christmas Island National Park. Report to Environment Australia.
- Stokes, T. 1988. A review of the birds of Christmas Island, Indian Ocean. *Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service Occasional Paper* 16.