

Protecting Marine Life

Protecting the marine life of the BIOT MPA

In 2010 the UK Government created one of the world's largest no-take marine protected areas (MPA), in the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). The MPA covers 640,000 km², including 54 of the archipelago's islands and covers vast coral reefs, including the mostly submerged Great Chagos Bank, which at 13,000 km² is the largest coral atoll in the world. As BIOT is not a tourist destination, the near-pristine reefs of the BIOT MPA are rarely visited, and are protected from commercial fishing, mining and any direct sources of pollution. Even so, whilst many of the human pressures which may damage coral reefs are absent, this ecosystem may still be damaged by people, so please help the BIOT Administration manage these incredible islands and reefs – take nothing but photographs and leave nothing but footprints!

One of the biggest risks of people visiting the islands of BIOT is the introduction of non-native or invasive species. The most straightforward way of managing this risk, is simply to prohibit landings onto the islands, and a number of islands are designated as Strict Nature Reserves, which are in fact completely closed to landings. For the other islands, for example Boddam or the islands on the west side of the Peros Banhos atoll, extreme care should still be taken: prior to landing everything should be inspected to ensure that there are no seeds, insects or other small creatures on boats, clothing or any kit.

Litter is another problem – many beaches are beset by waste that has washed in from far away, and this poses a threat to wildlife, including birds and nesting turtles. There is no recycling or waste disposal facility in the outer islands of BIOT. Anything brought in must be taken out – leaving litter is an offence, but also a threat to wildlife. Please take yours with you, and if you have the time and capacity to do any further litter removal, please do.

Limited fishing is permitted here, but only for subsistence: the rule is that only enough for 3 days personal consumption may be taken. Please fill in the catch returns, so BIOTA know how which type of species are taken from the ecosystem and may account for this in our scientific work. BIOTA also welcomes any observations on wildlife or environmental conditions and any commentary on species identified or unusual environmental occurrences is always incredibly helpful. To report this, please record and email any observations to the BIOT Administration. BIOTA will be able to share these with the wide range of scientific institutions which undertake monitoring and research in BIOT. Summaries and details of the scientists' latest studies may be found on the BIOT website at: <http://biot.io/environment/science-expeds>



Great crested tern - *Sterna bergii*

Horned ghost crab - *Ocypode ceratophthalma*

Green turtle hatchlings - *Chelonia mydas*

BIOT Patrol Vessel



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