

## WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION -- IUCN SUMMARY

### 487: HENDERSON ISLAND (UNITED KINGDOM)

Summary prepared by IUCN (April 1988) based on the original nomination and summary submitted by the Government of the United Kingdom. This original and all documents presented 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:

Henderson Island is a raised coral atoll which together with Pitcairn, Ducie and Oeno forms part of the Pitcairn Island Group, a Dependent Territory of the United Kingdom. Situated at 24°22'S, 128°20'W, it is one of the most remote islands in the South Pacific, with only Ducie and the Chilean Easter Island and Sala y Gomez lying further to the east in Polynesia.

#### 2. JURIDICIAL DATA:

Henderson is Crown Land, and a licence issued by the Governor, following approval by the Pitcairn Island Council, is required for access.

#### 3. IDENTIFICATION:

Henderson is a raised limestone atoll, and as such is relatively rich in endemic species compared with lower-lying coral islands. The island is arid with only one fresh water spring known on the island. It has a very rugged topography, with limestone pinnacles and steep-sided pits, beneath the dense tangled vegetation. The coastline is one of steep cliffs with fringing reefs on the north and north-west sides.

Henderson has a rich endemic flora for its small size (37 sq km) with ten endemic flowering plants. Of these the two endemic varieties of the tree Bidens hendersonensis are of particular botanic interest, and the endemic sandalwood Santalum hendersonense is of value to the Pitcairn islanders for carving.

Henderson supports at least 24 species and subspecies of birds, including four endemic landbirds, the Henderson crake Nesophylax (Porzana) ater, Henderson fruit dove Ptilinopus (purpuratus) insularis, Henderson lorikeet Vini stephensi and Henderson warbler Acrocephalus vaughani taiti. Very little is yet known about the ecology and conservation status of these species. As a result of low disturbance, the landbirds and abundant seabirds occurring on the island are still remarkably tame.

The island's invertebrate fauna is also little known, but about one-third of the insects and gastropods so far collected are endemic. It is therefore highly likely that further endemics await discovery in the lesser-known groups. For example, a distinctive and as yet unnamed endemic species of hawk-moth was discovered in 1986, which is remarkably different from any other described hawk-moth species.

#### 4. STATE OF PRESERVATION/CONSERVATION:

Of the Pitcairn group, only Pitcairn Island itself is permanently inhabited today. Henderson was colonised by Polynesians between the 12th and 15th

centuries, but this period of settlement had little ecological impact and the island has remained uninhabited in modern times. A major recent threat was a proposal to build a house, landing facilities and airstrip on the island, which would have led to clearance of the vegetation, disturbance and possible loss of endemic species and to the very real threat of pest species being introduced. The proposal provoked widespread concern from the international scientific community and was turned down by the UK Government.

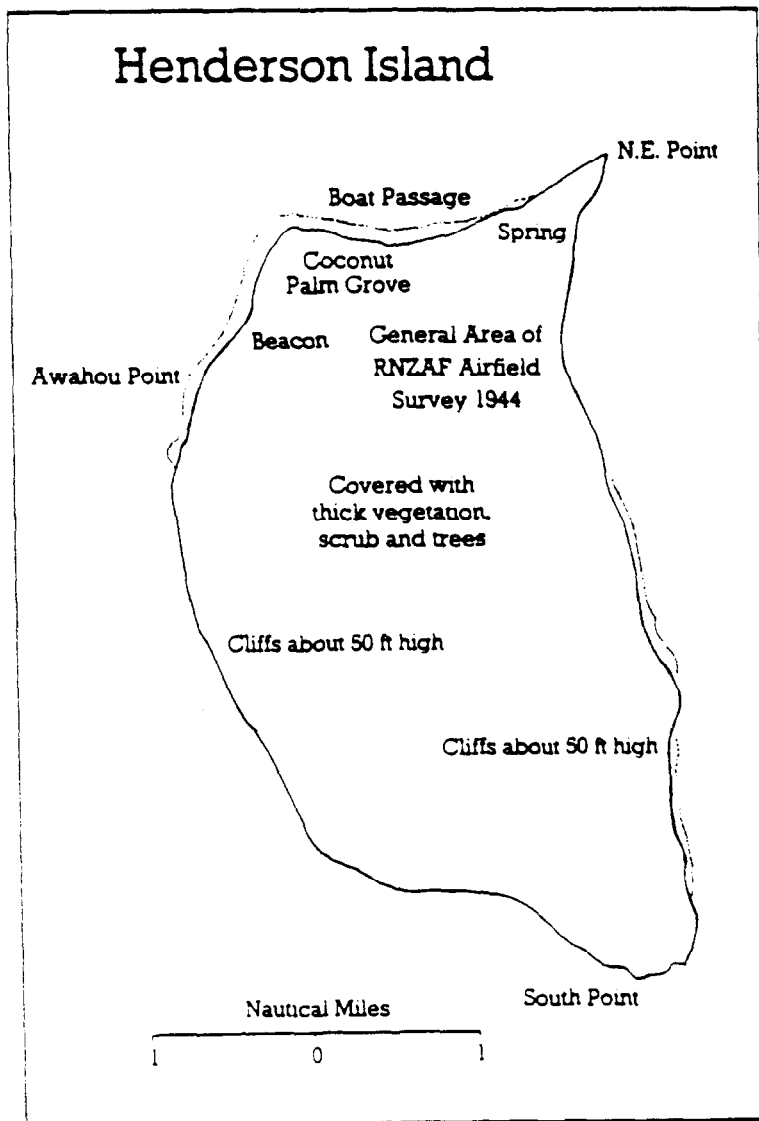
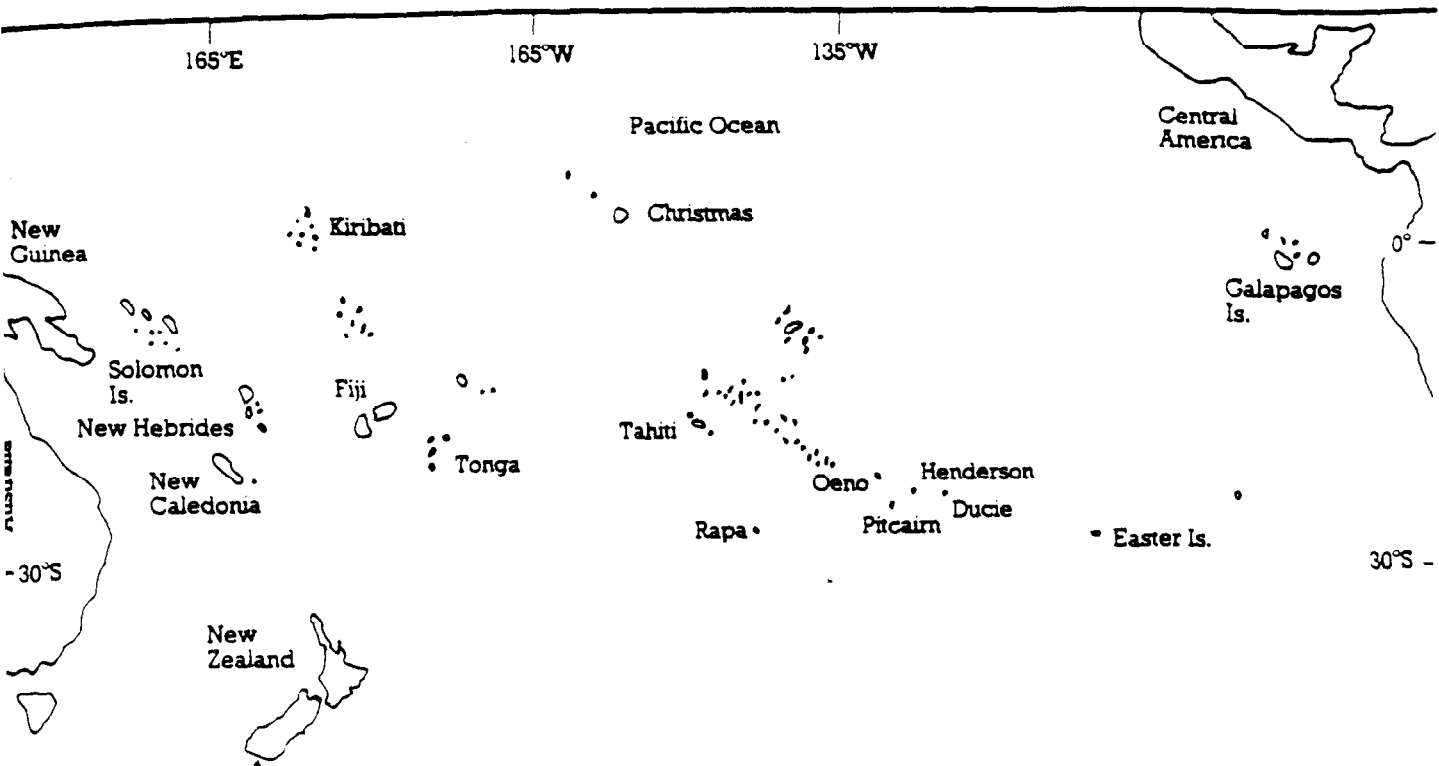
Henderson Island is the world's only raised atoll with its ecology virtually intact, and the island has remained remarkably free from exotic species. As a near pristine island ecosystem, it is of immense value for science, and was recognised as such by the International Biological Programme's survey of undisturbed oceanic islands carried out in the 1960s. The inhospitable nature of the island, together with its remoteness and inaccessibility, have so far effectively ensured its conservation.

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

The Henderson Island nomination, as presented by the Government of the United Kingdom, provides the following justification for designation as a World Heritage property:

##### b) Natural property

- (ii) Ongoing geological/biological processes. As the only raised and forested coral atoll with its ecology virtually intact, Henderson is a unique example of the World's natural heritage, demonstrating the dynamics of island evolution and natural selection.
- (iii) Exceptional natural beauty. Henderson is also an outstanding example of a raised and forested coral atoll ecosystem. There are only about 20 similar islands in the world, all of which have been much more extensively modified than Henderson.
- (iv) Rare or threatened species. Henderson provides habitats both for endemic species, and for more widespread species such as seabirds which are under intense threat at other island sites. Henderson is particularly noteworthy for its ten endemic plants and four endemic landbirds including the very distinct Henderson crane. As the island has never been intensively studied, it seems likely that other as yet unidentified endemics occur.



## WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

487 HENDERSON ISLAND (UNITED KINGDOM)

### 1. DOCUMENTATION

- i) Nomination form and IUCN data sheet
- ii) Literature consulted: IUCN/UNEP, Review of the Protected Areas System in Oceania 1987
- iii) Consultations: A. Dahl, E. L. Towle, L. Hamilton, P. Eaton, P. Thomas, P. Dingwall, R. Fosberg, W. Sykes, J. Warham, J. Carew-Reid, C. Imboden, D. Elder

### 2. COMPARISON WITH OTHER AREAS

Henderson Island is at 22°S latitude, so is on the margin of the tropics. It is one of 25 raised coral atolls in the Pacific which is an unusual geological formation. Other Pacific islands with similar structure include Nuie, Makatea, Mangara, Ngaputoru and several of the Tuamotus. Guam and Rennel Islands are larger and better known raised coral atolls but these are very different from Henderson Island in that both are populated, Guam heavily so, and both are in the western Pacific. IUCN's Oceania Systems Review rates Henderson Island as the most important of all similar Pacific Islands for its nature conservation status. Its real distinction is its uninhabited natural state as compared to others which have been used for phosphate mining, bombing targets, and other human activities. Some of the other limestone islands, such as those of Palau and the Lau Group, show karst features but are not really elevated atolls.

In many respects, Henderson Island is similar to the Aldabra World Heritage site in the Indian Ocean which is also an island of this type. Henderson Island, however, has a greater relief, has been much less affected by human activities and has a much different species assemblage. Likewise the Lord Howe World Heritage site is quite different in that it is a volcanic plug, inhabited by people and has many introduced animals.

In conclusion, Henderson Island is unique among islands in that its isolation, hostile terrain and undisturbed status make it a rare and valuable natural resource. Only Rennel Island, in the western Pacific, could rank with Henderson for conservation importance and it faces problems with potential resource exploitation. Henderson Island is additionally important for conservation as an outstanding example of its island type with high endemism, yet easy to protect because of its discreteness and remoteness.

### 3. INTEGRITY

As mentioned in the above section, Henderson Island is one of the few of the world's oceanic islands that has largely escaped the ubiquitous weedy floras and faunas, aggressive introductions, pests and feral animals, found on other islands. In the past, effective management has been achieved mainly through the extreme isolation of the island. This may not be effective in future as World Heritage status may entice cruise ships, which visit nearby Easter Island, to also visit Henderson Island.

The principle management requirement is control of access and entry to the Island. Occasional transitory visitors, such as occur at present from Pitcairn, who collect sandalwood and green turtles, are of minor concern. Precautions to avoid introductions (eg. through rodent and weed-free boats and clothing), are necessary to prevent impacts that would be ecologically catastrophic.

This suggests that there may be a need for some on-site management in future. This could be negotiated with the Pitcairn Islanders who could carry out periodic inspections and who could be appointed honorary wardens for the Island. Monitoring by high resolution remote sensing is another option to observe possible changes in vegetation with no risk to the Island's undisturbed state.

It is doubtful that the existing legislation is sufficient to provide the island with long term protection. To better protect the island's pristine quality and that of the surrounding marine environment, it should have legal status equivalent to a strict nature reserve and be subject to a formal management plan. World Heritage status for the island will hopefully lead to assurances of stability rather than casual or unintentional depredations.

Related to this is the fact that the island countries in the South Pacific region have sought to cooperate on conservation matters with the former colonial powers of the Pacific through the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). SPREP provides the institutional structure within which appropriate protection and management of Henderson Island could be strengthened. The United Kingdom at this time, however, does not contribute to SPREP although it has recently signed the SPREP Convention on the Protection of Natural Resources in the South Pacific, which carries conservation and scientific cooperation obligations (Article 13). IUCN encourages the United Kingdom authorities to contribute to existing conservation structures and instruments to reinforce Henderson Island's integrity. This will also involve consideration of signing and supporting the Convention on Conservation of Nature in the South Pacific which, when in force, will provide added international protection to Henderson Island.

#### 4. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The value of the Island is closely linked with its surrounding nearshore marine environment. The reefs are mentioned in the nomination but there is no firm indication about the extent to which the marine zone is included in the nominated site.

Several reviewers suggested that the Oeno and Ducie atolls also be included in the nominated site. These are some distance away (500 km) and do not appear to be functionally related to Henderson Island, so this suggestion was not furthered.

5. EVALUATION

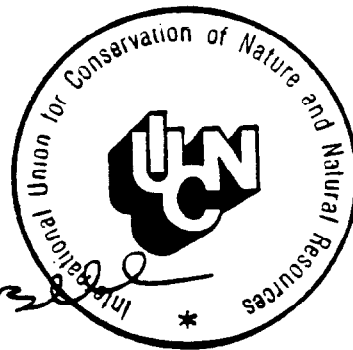
Although every oceanic island is "unique" in some way, Henderson Island is truly outstanding and merits inscription as a natural World Heritage property on two criteria: (iii) superlative natural phenomena, and (iv) significant natural habitat for threatened species. Henderson Island is one of the few raised oceanic coral atoll with its fundamental features intact. It is thus of immense value for biogeographical and biological research on the processes of island conservation. Henderson Island also has a high degree of plant endemism and a unique terrestrial fauna. The island is important for nesting seabirds and supports four endemic land birds. Its marine environment is little known but may be equally important.

The conditions for integrity are largely met except for the need for strengthened legal status and a management plan.

6. RECOMMENDATION

Henderson Island should be inscribed on the World Heritage list. The Government of the United Kingdom should be asked to clarify the marine boundaries of the site and be encouraged to:

- work with the Pitcairn Islanders to ensure on-site conservation;
- review the legal status of the island and consider up-grading it to a nature reserve;
- consider more involvement in the strengthening protection of the site within the framework of SPREP and the two international conventions as discussed above.



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UNITED KINGDOM - Pitcairn Islands

NAME Henderson Island

IUCN MANAGEMENT CATEGORY X (World Heritage)

BIOGEOGRAPHICAL PROVINCE 5.04.13 (Southeastern Polynesian)

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION Henderson Island is the largest island in the Pitcairn Island group, one of the remotest groups of islands in the South Pacific, with no major landmass within a 5,000km radius. The group comprises four islands, with Henderson lying 200km east-north-east of Pitcairn, 200km east of Oeno and 360km west of Ducie. Only Ducie, and the Chilean islands of Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and Sala y Gomez lie further to the east within Polynesia. Approximately 24°22'S, 128°20'W

DATE AND HISTORY OF ESTABLISHMENT Henderson Island has not been declared a protected area as such, although it receives de facto protection from its isolation, and various restrictions on possession, occupation and transference of lands applied under the Lands and Administration of Estates Ordinance. Some wildlife protection is provided by part IV of the Local Government Regulations.

AREA Land area 3,700ha

LAND TENURE The Pitcairn Island group is a Dependent Territory of the United Kingdom, and Henderson is Crown Land.

ALTITUDE Up to a maximum of 33m

PHYSICAL FEATURES Henderson is an elevated coralline limestone ("makatea") island which rises as an isolated conical mound from a depth of about 3.5km, and is presumably a reef-capped volcano. The surface of the island is in large part reef-rubble interspersed with areas of dissected limestone, surrounded by steep limestone cliffs undercut on all sides except to the north. There are three main beaches, to the north, north-west and north-east. Tidal range at spring tides is probably about 1m, and tides are semidiurnal. The central depression is considered to be an uplifted lagoon. Freshwater is almost completely absent, only occurring as drippings in caves, and as a spring below high tide level in the north (flow and permanence unknown). The geology of the island is summarised by Fosberg et al. (1983), who conclude that the limestones are of late Tertiary age. It is also suggested that much of the inland topography may be karst features.

There is a fringing reef at least 200m wide to the north, north-west and north-east sides of the island, backed by a wide beach (St John and Philipson, 1962). Reefs off the north and north-east beaches are seawardly sloping reef platforms without reef crests, and are not typical fringing reefs. Coral cover is about 5%, dominated by Pocillopora with Millepora becoming dominant at depths greater than 7m (Paulay, 1987). Submassive Acropora colonies are also present on the buttresses and solid substratum

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(Richmond in litt., 1987). In total, 19 genera and 29 species of coral were collected in 1987 (Paulay, 1987). There are two narrow channels through the reef on the north and north-western coasts (Serpell et al., 1983).

**CLIMATE** Henderson lies in the south-east trades and probably has a mean annual rainfall of around 1500mm. No meteorological records are available.

**VEGETATION** The vegetation of the island has not been modified to any significant extent, and most of the surface of the island is densely vegetated with tangled scrub and scrub forest 5m-10m tall. The central part of the depression is more sparsely covered. The flora is described by St John and Philipson (1962), Fosberg et al. (1983) and Flenley et al. (1987). The island has a high degree of endemism for its size, out of a total of 51 native flowering plant taxa, ten are endemic. The tallest trees are screw-pine Pandanus tectorius, and other trees include the endemics Santalum hendersonense, Myrsine hoskiae, Celtis paniculata var. viridis, and two endemic varieties of Bidens hendersonensis. The last named species, which is listed by IUCN as rare or possibly endangered, is of particular botanical interest as a woody member of a mainly herbaceous genus, and also because of its isolation from related genera within the Compositae.

**FAUNA** Fauna recorded from the island are listed in Fosberg et al. (1983), and variously commented on by other visitors. There are no native species of land mammal. All four of the island's land birds are endemic, flightless Henderson rail Nesophylax ater, Stephen's lorikeet Vini stepheni (R), Henderson fruit dove Ptilinopus insularis, and Henderson warbler Acrocephalus vaughani taiti. Very little information is available on either the ecology or the status of these four birds. Fifteen seabirds have been recorded, at least nine of which are thought to breed on the island (Williams, 1960; Bourne and David, 1983); Murphy's petrel Pterodroma ultima, phoenix petrel P. alba, herald petrel P. arminjoniana, Kermadec petrel P. neglecta, shearwater Puffinus pacificus, masked booby Sula dactylatra, red-tailed tropicbird Phaethon rubicauda, brown noddy Anous stolidus, blue-grey noddy Procelsterna caerulea, and fairy tern Gygis alba. Bourne and David (1983) provide a species list with detailed annotation. Other terrestrial species are also poorly recorded and understood (including lizards and skinks as well as invertebrates), and it is likely that the invertebrate fauna is much larger, including several more endemics. For example, a new species of hawk-moth has recently been identified, which is significantly different from any described hawk-moth.

Various records of the marine and littoral fauna have been made by Paulay (1987), and by Broodbakker (in litt., 1981; 1987) and Richmond (in litt., 1987), and a list of marine molluscs recorded from Henderson is given in Fosberg et al. (1983). Species of particular note include coconut crab Birgus latro (R) (identified from remains collected in 1987), at least two coenobite species (one of which was found to be the commonest crustacean on the island in 1987), and spiny lobster Panulirus penicillatus (CT). Green turtle Chelonia mydas (E) occasionally nests on the island (Fosberg et al., 1983). Collections of marine molluscs and sponges and of as yet



unidentified caridean shrimps (mostly Alpheids, probably comprising 5-8 species), were made in 1987. There is a diverse echinoderm fauna. An unidentified holothurian is common on the northern reef flats, and an echinoid Heterocentrotus sp. (possibly H. trigonarius) is locally abundant on the sloping marginal reefs and shallow reef flat of the northern beach. Fish are sparse, with Caranx lugubris being the most common and obvious species. A more comprehensive account of the corals is given in UNEP/IUCN (1988).

CULTURAL HERITAGE The history of the island, which has been uninhabited apart from occasional visitors, is described in Fosberg et al. (1983). Recently discovered archaeological remains suggest that Henderson was colonised by Polynesians between the 12th and 15th centuries (Sinoto, 1983), but their impact would appear to have been slight, although there is some disagreement over this (Steadman and Olson, 1985; Bourne and David, 1986).

LOCAL HUMAN POPULATION The island is visited by Pitcairn islanders once or twice each year, chiefly to cut "miro" Thespesia populnea and tao from which carvings are made for sale to visitors to Pitcairn, and sandalwood Santalum hendersonense.

VISITORS AND VISITOR FACILITIES Cruise ships visit occasionally (M. de L. Brooke, pers. comm., 1990).

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND FACILITIES Fosberg et al. (1983) summarise scientific expeditions to the island, of which the two most important were the Whitney South Sea Expedition in 1922 and the Mangarevan Expedition of 1934. They also summarise the published information, and provide nearly 100 references. The island was visited by Operation Raleigh in spring 1987 and by an expedition from the Smithsonian Institution in the same year.

Henderson is the world's best remaining example of an elevated coral atoll ecosystem and is thought to be of outstanding value in this regard (Fosberg and Sachet, 1983). This is particularly so because of the relatively low level of disturbance in comparison with other raised coral atolls. The importance of the island was indicated by the International Biological Programme and by a resolution of the 15th Pacific Science Congress, as well as by individual scientists.

CONSERVATION VALUE Henderson remains in an undisturbed state, largely as a result of its remoteness, and its inhospitable nature. It has suffered little from human modification, and few introduced species exist so the biota has escaped the fate of similar species on other oceanic islands.

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT Access to Henderson requires a licence issued by the Governor following approval by the Pitcairn Island Council (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1988). However, the island has no formal conservation status and there is no specific body charged with conservation. There is no management plan for the island, and no active management, although the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (1988) suggests that little management would be required beyond the possible removal of exotic species.

MANAGEMENT CONSTRAINTS Goats and pigs were introduced to the island early in the century, but have fortunately not survived (and the keeping of goats on Henderson is now prohibited). Introduced rats are still present, although this is Polynesian rat Rattus exulans, rather than black or brown rats. The terrestrial vegetation is still largely pristine, with very few exotics, although there are two substantial coconut groves at the principal landing sites (Paulay, 1987), and Cordyline terminalis and Aleurites moluccana have also been deliberately introduced, and Achyranthes aspera accidentally.

In 1982/1983 the island was potentially under severe threat as a result of a proposal by a wealthy American to build a house, landing facilities and airstrip (Fosberg and Sachet, 1983). A resolution at the 15th Pacific Science Congress in 1983 urged the British Government not to permit the proposed development before a detailed biological survey had been carried out and an assessment of the impacts made. The proposal was opposed by scientific and conservation bodies who petitioned the British Government to deny permission to carry out these plans (Serpell et al., 1983). This they subsequently did. Had such plans gone ahead, the terrestrial fauna and flora would undoubtedly have been severely damaged, with likely resulting impacts on the reefs (Serpell et al., 1983).

STAFF None

BUDGET None

LOCAL ADDRESSES Pitcairn Island Council, although ultimate authority rests with the Governor, c/o British High Commission, PO Box 1812, Wellington, New Zealand

#### REFERENCES

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- Flenley, J., Parkes, A. and Johnson, M. (1987). Vegetation survey of Henderson Island. Unpublished report to Operation Raleigh, London.
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office (1988). Nomination of Henderson Island for inclusion in the World Heritage List. Submitted by The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, United Kingdom. Prepared by S. Oldfield. Produced by the Nature Conservancy Council. 21 pp.
- Fosberg, F.R. (1984). Henderson Island saved. Environmental Conservation 11(2): 183-184.
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2 pp.

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Serpell, J., Collar, N., Davis, S. and Wells, S. (1983). Submission to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the future conservation of Henderson Island in the Pitcairn Group. Unpublished Report, WWF-UK, IUCN, ICBP. This report has 24 letters annexed to it in support of the report's conclusions that settlement on the island would be inappropriate.

Sinoto, Y.S. (1983). Analysis of Polynesian migrations based on archaeological assessments. J. Soc. Océanistes 39: 57-67.

Steadman, D.W. and Olson, S.L. (1985). Bird remains from an archaeological site on Henderson Island, South Pacific: Man-caused extinctions on an "uninhabited" island. Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, USA 82: 6191-6195.

UNEP/IUCN (1988). Coral reefs of the world. Volume 3. Central and Western Pacific. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK/UNEP, Nairobi, Kenya. 329 pp.

Williams, G.R. (1960). The birds of the Pitcairn Islands, Central Pacific Ocean. Ibis 102: 58-70.

DATE Revised April 1988, May 1990

DOCUMENT 0339W

487: ILE D'HENDERSON (ROYAUME-UNI)

Résumé préparé par l'UICN (avril 1988) d'après la désignation d'origine soumise par le gouvernement du Royaume-Uni. L'original et tous les documents présentés à l'appui de cette désignation seront disponibles pour consultation aux réunions du bureau et du comité.

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1. SITUATION:

Atoll coralien soulevé qui, avec Pitcairn, Ducie et Oeno, fait partie de l'archipel de Pitcairn, sous la dépendance du Royaume-Uni. L'une des îles les plus isolées du Pacifique Sud, les seules îles plus orientales étant Ducie et les îles chiliennes de Pâques et de Sala y Gomez, en Polynésie. 24°22'S, 128°20'O.

2. DONNEES JURIDIQUES:

L'île d'Henderson appartient à la Couronne et, pour y pénétrer, il faut un permis délivré par le gouverneur, après approbation du Conseil de l'île de Pitcairn.

3. IDENTIFICATION:

Henderson, atoll calcaire soulevé, est relativement riche en espèces endémiques par rapport aux îles coralliennes plus basses. Cette île est aride, avec une seule source d'eau douce connue. Son relief est accidenté, avec des pics de calcaire et des fosses très escarpées sous une végétation inextricable. La côte est formée de falaises abruptes et des récifs frangeants au nord et au nord-ouest.

L'île d'Henderson possède une flore endémique riche malgré sa superficie réduite (37km<sup>2</sup>), notamment dix plantes à fleurs endémiques. Les deux variétés endémiques de Bidens hendersonensis présentent un intérêt botanique particulier, et le bois de santal endémique Santalum hendersonense est très recherché par les indigènes qui le sculptent.

L'île d'Henderson abrite non moins de 24 espèces et sous-espèces d'oiseaux, notamment quatre oiseaux terrestres endémiques, le râle d'Henderson Nesophylax (Porzana) ater, la colombe porphyre d'Henderson Ptilinopus (purpuratus) insularis, le loriquet d'Henderson Vini stepheni et le pouillot d'Henderson Acrocephalus vaughani taiti. L'écologie et l'état de préservation de ces espèces sont encore très mal connus. Ayant été très peu perturbés, les oiseaux terrestres et les nombreux oiseaux de mer que l'on y trouve sont demeurés remarquablement familiers.

La faune invertébrée est, elle aussi, mal connue; près d'un tiers des insectes et gastropodes observés à ce jour sont endémiques. C'est pourquoi il est très probable que l'on découvre encore de nouvelles espèces endémiques dans les groupes les moins connus. Par exemple une espèce distinctive de sphingidé, non encore baptisée, a été découverte en 1986, différente de toutes connues jusque-là.

4. ETAT DE PRESEVATION/CONSERVATION:

La seule île de l'archipel de Pitcairn habitée en permanence aujourd'hui est Pitcairn. Henderson a été colonisée par les Polynésiens entre le 12e et le 15e siècle; cette période d'occupation n'a cependant eu qu'un impact écologique négligeable et l'île n'a jamais été habitée à l'époque moderne. Récemment, une menace sérieuse a pesé sur Henderson: le projet de construction d'une piste d'atterrissage, qui aurait entraîné des perturbations, la disparition de la végétation et peut-être, la perte d'espèces endémiques, sans oublier l'introduction de ravageurs. Ce projet a suscité une grande consternation au sein de la communauté scientifique internationale et a été rejeté par le gouvernement du Royaume-Uni.

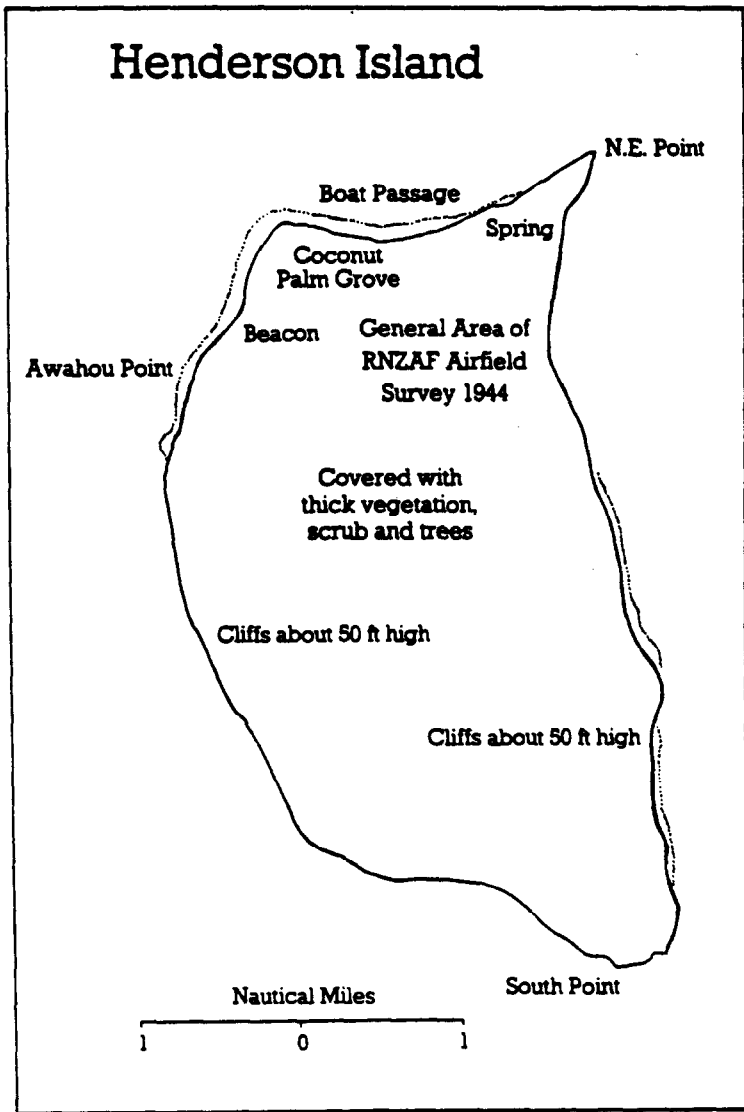
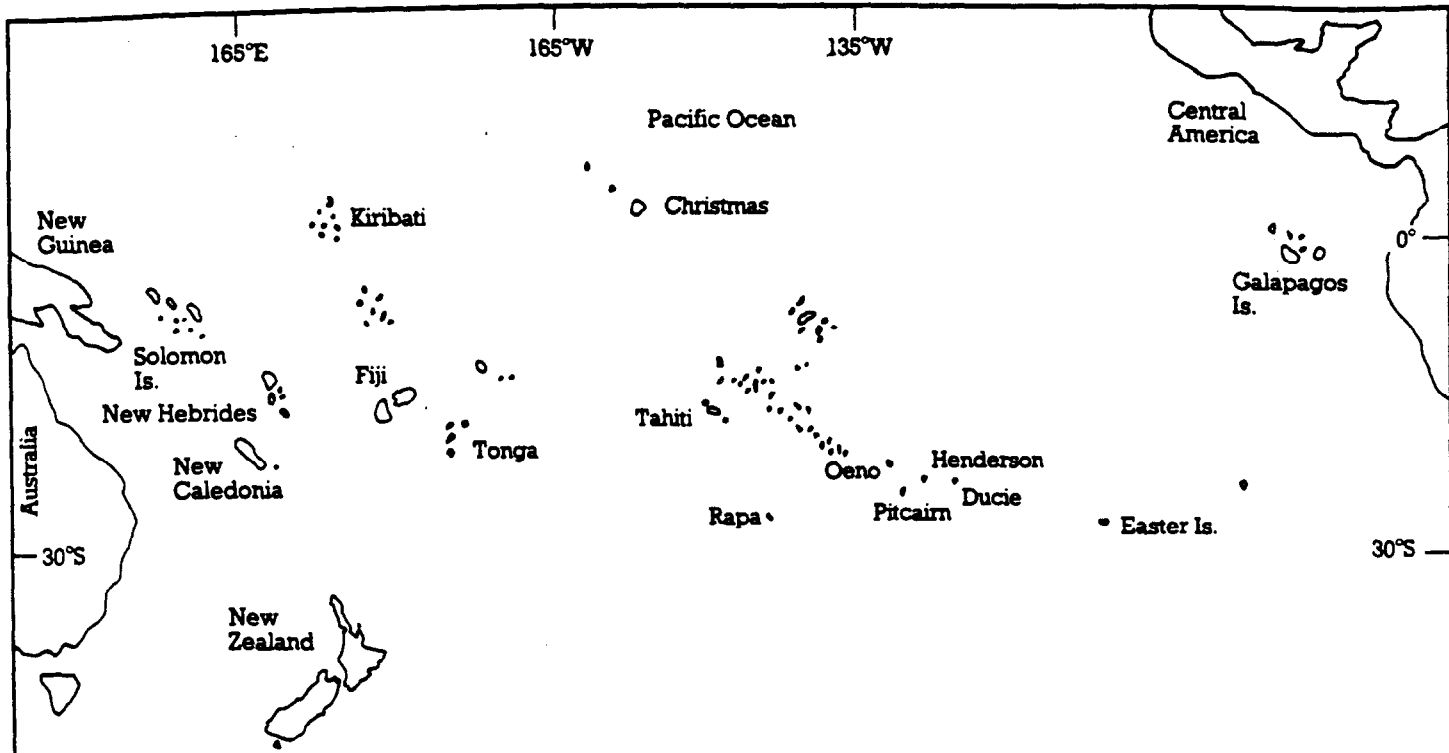
L'île d'Henderson est le seul atoll soulevé du monde à avoir conservé une écologie pratiquement intacte; de plus, il n'abrite pour ainsi dire aucune espèce exotique. Grâce à son écosystème insulaire quasi primitif, il est extrêmement précieux pour la science, et a été reconnu comme tel par une étude sur les îles océaniques non perturbées, réalisée en 1980 par le Programme biologique international. La nature inhospitalière de l'île, son isolement et son inaccessibilité ont, jusqu'à présent, suffi à assurer une protection efficace.

5. RAISONS JUSTIFIANT LA DESIGNATION POUR LA LISTE DU PATRIMOINE MONDIAL:

Pour justifier la désignation du parc national en tant que bien du patrimoine mondial, le gouvernement du Royaume-Uni a donné les raisons suivantes:

b) Bien naturel

- (ii) Processus géologiques/biologiques en cours. Etant le seul atoll corallien soulevé et boisé, dont l'écologie est pratiquement intacte, Henderson constitue un exemple unique de bien naturel, démontrant la dynamique de l'évolution insulaire et de la sélection naturelle.
- (iii) Nature d'une beauté exceptionnelle. Exemple remarquable d'écosystème d'atoll corallien soulevé et boisé. Il n'existe qu'une vingtaine d'îles similaires dans le monde, qui ont cependant toutes subi des modifications nettement plus importantes.
- (iv) Espèces rares ou menacées. Habitat d'espèces endémiques et d'autres, plus répandues comme certains oiseaux de mer gravement menacés dans d'autres îles. Particulièrement remarquable pour ses dix plantes et ses quatre oiseaux terrestres endémiques, dont le crake d'Henderson, très particulier. L'île n'ayant jamais fait l'objet d'une étude systématique, il est probable qu'elle abrite des espèces endémiques non encore identifiées.



1. DOCUMENTATION:

- i) Formulaire de proposition d'inscription et fiche de données de l'UICN
- ii) Littérature consultée: UICN/PNUE, Review of the Protected Areas System in Oceania, 1987
- iii) Consultations: A. Dahl, E.L. Towle, L. Hamilton, P. Eaton, P. Thomas, P. Dingwall, R. Fosberg, W. Sykes, J. Warham, J. Carew-Reid, C. Imboden, D. Elder

2. COMPARAISON AVEC D'AUTRES AIRES:

Située par 22° de latitude sud, l'île d'Henderson se trouve à la limite des tropiques. Sa formation géologique est inhabituelle: elle est l'un des 25 atolls coralliens soulevés du Pacifique. Parmi les autres îles du Pacifique présentant une structure similaire figurent: Nuie, Makatea, Mangara, Ngaputuru et plusieurs îles Tuamotou. Guam et Rennel sont des atolls coralliens soulevés plus grands et mieux connus, mais très différents de l'île d'Henderson étant peuplés tous les deux, Guam même densément, et étant situés dans le Pacifique occidental. L'étude entreprise par l'UICN sur les réseaux d'aires protégées d'Océanie indique Henderson comme la plus importante de toutes les îles similaires du Pacifique, en raison de l'état de préservation de sa nature. Si elle se distingue véritablement des autres îles, c'est parce qu'elle est restée à l'état sauvage, dépourvue de peuplement humain, alors que les autres sont exploitées: mines de phosphate, essais atomiques et autres activités humaines. Certaines des autres îles calcaires, notamment Palau et l'archipel de Lau, présentent des éléments karstiques mais ne sont pas véritablement des atolls soulevés.

A de nombreux égards, l'île d'Henderson est similaire à celle d'Aldabra, bien du patrimoine mondial situé dans l'océan Indien, du même type. L'île d'Henderson est cependant plus accidentée, nettement moins perturbée par les activités humaines et présente une mosaïque d'espèces très différente. De même, le bien du patrimoine mondial de Lord Howe est particulier, car formé par le culot d'une cheminée volcanique, peuplé et possède de nombreuses espèces animales introduites.

En conclusion, Henderson est une île unique, une ressource naturelle rare et précieuse grâce à son isolement, son terrain hostile et son état de préservation. Seule l'île de Rennel, dans le Pacifique occidental, pourrait rivaliser avec elle par son état de préservation., mais elle se heurte à des problèmes liés à l'exploitation potentielle de ses ressources. De plus, l'île d'Henderson est importante pour la conservation en raison de son endémisme élevé, et constitue un exemple exceptionnel de ce type d'île, tout en étant facile à protéger grâce à son isolement et sa discrétion.

3. INTEGRITE:

Comme nous l'avons mentionné plus haut, l'île d'Henderson est l'une des rares îles océaniques mondiales à avoir en grande partie échappé à l'invasion de plantes et d'animaux parasites, omniprésents ailleurs, à l'introduction massive d'espèces, aux pestes et aux animaux retournés à l'état sauvage. Une gestion efficace a été possible jusqu'à maintenant grâce, surtout, à l'isolement extrême de l'île. Les choses risquent cependant de changer avec son inscription sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial, qui incitera les bateaux de plaisance venant visiter l'île de Pâques, non loin, à s'y arrêter.

Pour assurer une gestion efficace de l'île, il est essentiel d'en contrôler l'accès. Les visiteurs qui, comme sur l'île de Pitcairn, viennent occasionnellement ramasser du bois de santal et des tortues vertes, sont une préoccupation mineure. Il s'impose de prendre des précautions pour éviter que des espèces exotiques, notamment de rongeurs et de mauvaises herbes, ne soient introduites par les bateaux et les visiteurs, ce qui risquerait d'avoir un impact écologique catastrophique sur l'île.

Il pourrait s'avérer nécessaire d'instaurer un système de gestion local, négociable avec les habitants de l'île de Pitcairn, que l'on pourrait charger d'effectuer des inspections périodiques de l'île d'Henderson et qui pourrait nommer des gardes honoraires pour l'île. Une autre solution sans risque pour l'île serait de recourir à la télédétection à haute résolution pour observer les changements éventuels de la végétation.

Il est peu probable que la législation actuelle suffise pour assurer à l'île une protection à long terme. Pour renforcer la protection de l'état primitif de l'île et du milieu marin environnant, il importe que ce site bénéficie d'un statut juridique équivalent à celui de réserve naturelle intégrale et fasse l'objet d'un plan de gestion officiel. Il est à espérer que le statut de bien du patrimoine mondial assurera la stabilité de l'île sans entraîner de déprédations occasionnelles ou involontaires.

A cet égard, il faut signaler que les pays insulaire de la région du Pacifique Sud ont demandé aux anciennes puissances coloniales du Pacifique de coopérer avec elles en matière de conservation, par le biais du Programme régional pour l'environnement du Pacifique Sud (SPREP). Celui-ci offre en effet une structure institutionnelle idéale pour renforcer la protection et la gestion de l'île d'Henderson. Toutefois, le Royaume-Uni ne contribue pas à ce programme, bien qu'il ait signé récemment la Convention du SPREP sur la protection des ressources naturelles du Pacifique Sud, qui comporte des obligations en matière de conservation et de coopération scientifique (Article 13). L'UICN encourage les autorités du Royaume-Uni à contribuer aux structures et aux instruments de conservation existants, afin de renforcer l'intégrité de l'île d'Henderson. Il conviendra, à cet effet, d'envisager la signature et l'application de la Convention sur la conservation de la nature dans le Pacifique Sud qui, une fois en vigueur, garantira une protection internationale supplémentaire à l'île.

#### 4. COMMENTAIRES ADDITIONNELS:

L'intérêt de l'île d'Henderson est étroitement lié au milieu marin environnant. Les récifs sont mentionnés dans la désignation mais rien n'indique clairement la mesure dans laquelle l'aire marine fait partie du site désigné.

Il a été suggéré que les atolls d'Oeno et de Ducie soient aussi inclus dans le site désigné. Ils se trouvent à environ 500km d'Henderson et ne semblent pas être reliés fonctionnellement à cette île, c'est pourquoi il n'a pas été donné suite à cette suggestion.

Les critères d'intégrité sont largement satisfaits, mis à part la nécessité de renforcer le statut juridique et d'établir un plan de gestion.



5. EVALUATION:

Bien que chaque île océanique soit d'une manière ou d'une autre "unique", celle d'Henderson est réellement exceptionnelle et mérite d'être inscrite sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial sur la base de deux critères: (iii) phénomènes naturels remarquables, et (i) habitat d'espèces menacées. L'île d'Henderson est l'un des rares atolls coralliens océaniques soulevés dont les éléments fondamentaux soient restés intacts. C'est pourquoi elle présente un intérêt considérable pour l'étude biogéographique et biologique de la conservation insulaire. L'île d'Henderson possède, en outre, de nombreuses plantes endémiques et une faune terrestre unique. Elle est un lieu de nidification pour les oiseaux d'eau et abrite quatre espèces endémiques d'oiseaux terrestres. Son milieu marin est mal connu mais tout aussi important.

Ce site satisfait largement aux critères d'intégrité, si ce n'est la nécessité de renforcer son statut juridique et d'établir un plan de gestion.

6. RECOMMANDATION:

L'île d'Henderson devrait être inscrite sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial. Le comité pourra alors envisager de recommander au gouvernement du Royaume-Uni de préciser les limites marines du site et l'encourager à:

- collaborer avec les habitants de l'île de Pitcairn pour assurer la conservation in situ;
- réévaluer le statut juridique de l'île afin qu'elle accède au statut de réserve naturelle;
- envisager une plus grande participation au renforcement de la protection du site, dans le cadre du SPREP et des deux conventions internationales mentionnées plus haut.