

Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value Henderson Island, UK (N487)

Date Inscribed 1988

Criteria vii and x

Date of Draft SOUV 2011

Brief synthesis

Henderson Island is an uninhabited raised reef island in the Pitcairn Island group, a Dependent Territory of the United Kingdom of the SE Pacific. Henderson Island is the largest island in the group, one of the remotest groups of islands in the South Pacific, with no major land mass within a 5,000km radius. The group comprises four islands, with Henderson lying 200km east-north-east of Pitcairn.

Henderson Island is the world's best remaining example of an elevated coral atoll ecosystem and is of outstanding value because of the comparatively low level of disturbance which provides a key for baseline information on similar atolls. Its isolation makes it ideal for studying the dynamics of island evolution and natural selection.

Henderson Island has a high degree of plant endemism and a unique terrestrial fauna.

Justification for criteria

Criterion vii

Contain superlative natural phenomena, formations or features, for instance, outstanding examples of the most important ecosystems, areas of exceptional natural beauty or exceptional combinations of natural and cultural elements

The superlative natural phenomena and area of exceptional natural beauty represented by Henderson Island makes it one of the few remaining raised oceanic coral atolls with its fundamental features intact. It is thus of immense value for biogeographical and biological research on the processes of island conservation and the last near-pristine limestone island of significant size in the world.

Criterion x

Contain the most important and significant natural habitats where threatened species of animals or plants of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation still survive

Henderson Island has a high degree of plant endemism. The terrestrial vegetation of the island is rich and almost undisturbed. Due to its relative freedom from man and cyclonic inundations the flora and fauna are unique relicts of the

original undegraded condition. There are 71 recorded species of vascular plants, ten of which are endemic to the island and ten introduced, with some 20 bryophytes and 30 lichens.

Henderson Island has a unique terrestrial fauna including nesting seabirds and endemic land birds. It is home to over 55 unique species. All four of the island's land birds are endemic: the flightless Henderson rail *Porzana atra*, Stephen's lorikeet *Vini stepheni*, Henderson fruit dove *Ptilinopus insularis* and Henderson warbler *Acrocephalus vaughani taiti*. It is the only known breeding site of the endangered Henderson petrel.

The island's invertebrate fauna is also little known but about one-third of the insects and gastropods so far collected are endemic.

Statement of integrity

Henderson was colonized 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. Henderson Island is the world's only forested atoll with its ecology virtually intact, with ongoing geological and biological processes. As a near pristine island ecosystem, it is of immense value for science. The inhospitable nature of the island, together with its remoteness and inaccessibility, has so far effectively ensured its conservation.

Invasive alien species pose the greatest threat to the integrity of Henderson Island and a rat eradication programme was initiated in the second half of 2011. The programme involves experienced eradication experts using GPS-guided helicopters to drop poison bait across the island. Bird populations are expected to recover after rat eradication with Henderson petrel numbers projected to increase from 16,000 pairs pre-eradication up to 1.6 million pairs within 70-100 years. The potential impact on non-target species has been carefully assessed and no other species are expected to be significantly affected.

Protection and management requirements

Henderson Island is Crown Land within the Pitcairn Islands group, an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom. It is subject to the Lands Court Ordinance (Revised Edition of the Laws 2001), Part VII of which gives to the Governor responsibility for possession, occupation and transference of the lands of the islands. The Wellington-based British High Commissioner to New Zealand holds the office of Governor of Pitcairn.

While the Governor holds most formal powers, much day-to-day administration of the islands' affairs is devolved to a Commissioner based at the Pitcairn Islands Administration office in Auckland. The Island Council is responsible for the local government and administration of internal affairs within the Pitcairn Islands, including decisions on when to visit any of the other islands in the Pitcairn group. The Council comprises the Island Mayor (elected every three years), the Island Secretary, Chairman of Internal Affairs Committee, four elected officers (elected annually), and

two advisers - one of whom is appointed by the Governor and one by the elected members. There is also a Conservation and Quarantine Officer whose remit includes Henderson Island. Access to Henderson requires a licence issued by the Governor (through the Pitcairn Island Administration office) in consultation with the Island Council.

The following international conventions relevant to nature conservation and environmental protection have been extended to the Pitcairn Islands.

- Vienna Convention on Substances that deplete the Ozone Layer
- Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter
- Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar)
- Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage)
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention)

The Henderson Island Management Plan describes the management measures available for the island. The principal management goals are:

- a) to protect the intact status of the island's geology and ecology and of its component flora and fauna - in particular threatened and endemic species, thus conserving the genetic differences between island populations, and the unique genetic contribution of Henderson Island to global diversity.
- b) to ensure that stocks of the timber species (miro and tou) are adequate to meet the needs of Pitcairners on a sustainable basis.
- c) to minimise interference with natural processes and the destruction or degradation of natural and archaeological features through human actions.
- d) to prevent the further introduction of non-native species and to control or eradicate those alien species established on the island which pose a threat to native wildlife.
- e) to ensure the island's archaeological features are preserved for scientific study and for viewing by visitors.
- f) to ensure tourist visits to the island cause no damage and are beneficial to the Pitcairn Islanders.
- g) to promote an awareness, through education and research, of the intrinsic value and significance of Henderson Island and its biota.