

Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value Gough and Inaccessible Islands, UK (N740bis)

Date Inscribed **1995, 2009 extended to include Inaccessible Island**

Criteria vii and x

Date of Draft SOUV **2011**

Brief synthesis

Uninhabited oceanic islands are one of the few habitats in the world that remain relatively undisturbed and are therefore of special conservation significance. Gough and Inaccessible represent the largest scarcely modified cool-temperate island ecosystem in the South Atlantic Ocean. Gough is the least disturbed major temperate oceanic island of its size in the world and compares favourably with more southerly islands of the Southern Ocean with which it shares certain faunistic characteristics and with which it is generally compared.

The islands host one of the most important seabird colonies in the world (Criterion x). The island has high scenic qualities with spectacular sea-cliffs around much of the coastline (Criterion vii). Two endemic land birds are found at Gough and 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.

Justification for criteria

Criterion vii

Contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance

Gough and Inaccessible Islands display outstanding natural beauty. The islands represent eroded remnants with spectacular precipitous cliffs around much of the coastline.

Criterion x

Contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation

Gough supports two endemic landbirds, a flightless rail, the Gough Moorhen *Gallinula comeri*, and the Gough Bunting *Rowettia goughensis* in the monotypic genus *Rowettia*. Gough is included in the Tristan da Cunha Priority One Endemic Bird Area as defined by ICBP. Eight invertebrate species are known to be endemic to the island. Gough also supports over 30 plant species which are endemic to the Tristan da Cunha island group. Several vascular plant species are unique to Gough,

together with eight species of bryophytes.

Gough hosts one of the most important seabird colonies of the world. The Tristan da Cunha group as a whole provides the only breeding place for the seabirds of a much wider range of climatic zones in the South Atlantic than is found with comparable islands in other oceans. The range of species includes the Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*, which breeds all around the Antarctic continent to the pantropical Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*. Following the extensive habitat modification on Tristan da Cunha island, Gough is now the largest undisturbed island in the group. Twenty seabird species breed on the island. The Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta* is endemic to the Tristan da Cunha and Gough Islands and virtually the entire population breeds at Gough. Gough is the main breeding station for a subspecies of Yellow-nosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos chlororhynchos*, and subspecies of Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans dabbenena*. About half the world's total population of the Sooty Albatross *Phoebastria fusca* breeds at the Tristan da Cunha and Gough Islands, with around one quarter on Gough. Almost half the global population of the Northern Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome moseleyi* breeds on the island. Gough also supports a large proportion of the Petrel *Pelagodroma marina*, White-bellied Storm Petrel *Fregeta grallaria* and races of Great or Subantarctic Skua *Catharacta antarctica* and Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata*.

Statement of integrity

The Gough and Inaccessible Islands are one of the most pristine environments left on earth. These remote South Atlantic islands with their surrounding sub-marine areas are home to unique assemblages of plants and animals effectively isolated from the rest of the world by 2,000 miles of open ocean and some of the world's fiercest weather.

The virtually undisturbed condition of Gough and Inaccessible makes them particularly valuable for biological research. The islands are strictly managed as a Wildlife Reserve, with research and weather monitoring the only activities permitted.

Protection and management requirements

Tristan da Cunha (including Gough Island and Inaccessible) is a United Kingdom Overseas Territory forming part of the UK Overseas Territory of St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, and is administered by a UK-appointed representative, with support from an elected Island Council.

The Tristan da Cunha Government has recently (2008) established a Conservation Department. The Tristan Conservation Department employs permanent staff members supported by casual workers and the Tristan "Darwin team". The Tristan da Cunha Environment Charter was signed jointly by the Government of Tristan da Cunha and the UK Minister for Overseas Territories in September 2001. The Environment Charter outlines the environmental management commitments of the UK Government and the Government of Tristan da Cunha, and serves as a

framework policy to guide the development of management policies and plans.

The Conservation of Native Organisms and Natural Habitats (Tristan da Cunha) Ordinance 2006 gives statutory force to the general protection of the WHS. In it, the Tristan Island Council declared the WHS a Nature Reserve. Strict protection is given to all native organisms. The Ordinance makes it an offence to transport any native organisms between islands or to introduce any non-native organisms. In parallel to this, the Tristan da Cunha Fisheries Limits Ordinance 1983 provision for the control of commercial fishing activity within the Tristan da Cunha exclusive economic zone, up to 200nm offshore from the islands.

A detailed operating/conduct code developed by the Tristan Government provides guidelines on best practice to be observed by visitors and managers of the two islands. Separate zoning strategies for Gough and Inaccessible islands have been developed. On Gough, there are Logistic, Marine, Scientific research and Conservation zones; on Inaccessible there are Accommodation, Natural, Wilderness and Marine zones. Within these various areas, defined in detail in the respective management plans, certain activities are constrained or allowed. A single zoning strategy is needed covering the whole WHS, including the marine area.

The UK is a State Party to the Ramsar and Bonn Conventions; the UN Convention on Biological Diversity; and the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP). These conventions provide international obligations to take conservation action for albatrosses and petrels as well as to take broader measures for the protection of important habitats and species. By agreement with the Tristan da Cunha government, the conventions mentioned above have been extended to cover Tristan da Cunha, and therefore the Tristan Government is obliged to fulfil their requirements locally.

A Gough and Inaccessible Islands World Heritage Site Management Plan for the period April 2010 – March 2015 is now in place. The Tristan da Cunha government has already developed a Biodiversity Action Plan that relates closely to the World Heritage site management plan but covers the entire island group and its seas.

In common with many island ecosystems around the world, non-native invasive species are the most important immediate threat to the ecology of Gough and Inaccessible Islands WHS.

House mice *Mus musculus* were introduced to Gough Island some time in the 19th century, and are known to have adverse impacts on both terrestrial and marine birds on Gough. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has commissioned a feasibility study to eradicate mice from the 6,500 ha island, mouse susceptibility to poison bait has now been established and an eradication programme is in the final planning stage.