

Site accounts

AI004: Sombrero

Ref number	AI004
Admin region	Anguilla
Coordinates	18°36'N 63°25.8'W
Area	38 ha
Altitude	12 m
IBA categories (details below)	A4i
Status	Government owned; proposed Protected Area

Site description

A remote, 38 ha flat-topped rocky outcrop lying 40 miles (65 km) north-west of Anguilla. The cliffs and rocky areas are home to a large seabird colony and an endemic ground lizard. The island is currently stark and bare following damage by Hurricane Luis in 1995 when large areas of cacti and other plants were destroyed. Extensive phosphate deposits were mined in the 19th and early 20th century, leaving the remains of industrial buildings and a surface pitted with craters up to 10 m deep. A manned lighthouse with associated buildings was in use until 2002 when it was replaced with an automated light.

Birds

See the accompanying table for details of key species. At least 32 species are recorded on the island and several North American species of landbird have occurred as vagrants. This remote rocky outpost has long been important for breeding seabirds, with confirmed reports of 14 species (although only seven species currently breed): the Masked Booby (27 pairs), Brown Booby (386 pairs), Brown Noddy (700 pairs), Laughing Gull, Least Tern, Bridled Tern and Sooty Tern. Species reported to have bred in the past 40 years but no longer present are: Red-billed Tropicbird, Magnificent Frigatebird, Gull-billed Tern, Royal Tern, Sandwich Tern, Roseate Tern and Black Noddy. The Audubon's Shearwater is suspected of breeding. Small numbers of shorebirds are found on the island outside the breeding season, when Peregrine Falcons are often present.

Other threatened/endemic wildlife

The island is noted for the endemic Critically Endangered Sombrero Ground Lizard *Ameiva corvina*, a widespread and easily seen species on the island. A recently discovered dwarf gecko *Sphaerodactylus sp.* has been tentatively named the Sombrero Dwarf Gecko. The Tree Lizard *Anolis gingivinus* is also found on the island.

Conservation issues/threats

The island was formerly mined for phosphate, leaving the surface pitted with craters up to 10 m deep. A few stark buildings from the phosphate industry remain alongside those from Sombrero's long-time use as a lighthouse station. Until recently the island was permanently inhabited by a small number of lighthouse staff who were transported by small boat across the 40 miles (65 km) from mainland Anguilla. A new unmanned lighthouse was installed in 2002, limiting visitors to the occasional fisherman and biologists engaged in fieldwork. There is little vegetation on the island following the devastation caused by Hurricane Luis in 1995 when a large area of established cacti was destroyed. The island's vegetation is now in an early stage of recovery. The principal threat to Sombrero's seabirds in recent years was an application in 1999 to build a satellite-launching station; this has since been withdrawn.

Further reading

See full details at end of chapter.

Bryer *et al.* (2000), Hodge *et al.* (2003), Holliday and Hodge (2003). ICF Consulting (1998; 1999).

Key species

Criteria	Key species	Number of breeding pairs (if known)
A4i	Bridled Tern <i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	270 pairs, 540+ individuals

References

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Collier, N. and Brown, A. C. (2004) Anguilla's offshore islands: seabird census and nest monitoring, May–June 2004. *Environmental Protection in the Caribbean report No 22*. Anguilla: Unpublished report to the Ministry of the Environment.

Hilton, G. M., Bowden, C. G. R., Ratcliffe, N., Lucking, V. and Brindley, E. (2001) Bird conservation priorities in the UK Overseas Territories. RSPB Research Report No 1. Sandy, U.K.: Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

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Steve Holliday

Sombrero

Important Bird Areas *in* THE UNITED KINGDOM OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

Priority sites for conservation



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