



# World Environment Day 2020

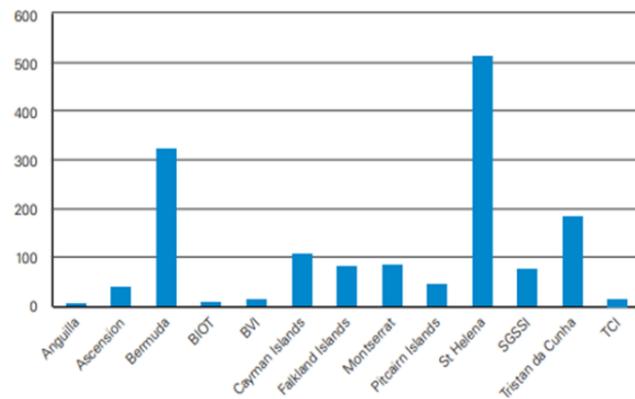
**T**oday, Friday 5 June 2020, is World Environment Day - a day used to generate awareness and call for action for the protection of our environment. This year's theme is 'Biodiversity'.

In recognition of the day we take a look at St Helena's Biodiversity, with particular focus on our 'biodiversity hotspot' - The Peaks National Park.

## BIODIVERSITY ON ST HELENA

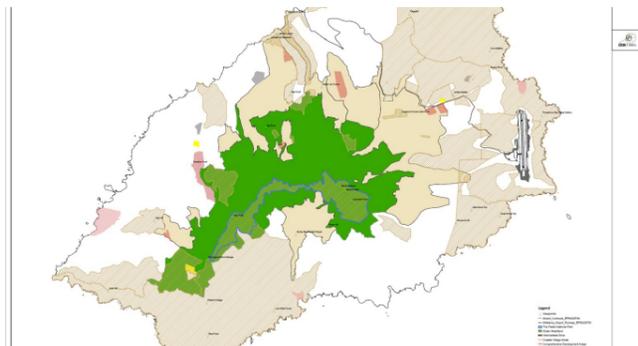
St Helena holds over 30% (502 known endemics) of the total endemic diversity of the UK and its Overseas Territories. Biodiversity loss through habitat destruction is a big threat globally and on St Helena.

The Invasive Species Project (Lambdon & Darlow 2008) identified that approximately 99% of the Island's vegetation cover is non-native, with the remaining 1% highly fragmented in small pockets across the Island. Considerable effort is required to ensure that we conserve what remains and work towards restoring native habitats.



The number of endemic species on each Overseas Territory (UKOTs Stock-take, 2014)

The Peaks National Park is a much loved wildlife hotspot that lies at the heart of St Helena and is home to over 250 of St Helena's endemic species. The boundary of the National Park spans from



Mount Actaeon, Diana's Peak and Cuckold's Point across to High Peak and the Depot.

Human history over five centuries has significantly altered the Peaks; evidence of astronomical, military, agricultural and plantation activities dominate but there also remain small fragments where it is possible to appreciate the nature of St Helena before human discovery.

Recognising the importance of the Peaks, St Helena Government has undertaken a collaborative process to develop the Island's collective vision for its management.

A three-day stakeholders' workshop held in December 2018 provided the starting point for the development of the Peaks National Park Conservation Management Plan 2019-2024.

Following a formal public consultation this was signed off by the Environment & Natural Resources Committee (ENRC).

The Management Plan comprises of three key objective areas:

**Biodiversity:** the Peaks can be considered as a biodiversity hotspot supporting a high proportion of the Island's endemics including flowering plants, ferns and invertebrates.

**Water security and climate change resilience:** assessment of two of the Peaks sub-catchments reveals that they provide 38% of the Island's water supply, mainly derived from the low forming cloud, hence the Peaks being described as a Cloud Forest.

**Socio-economic:** voted as one of the 'Seven Wonders of St Helena' for the second time, the Peaks is a popular destination for visitors and locals, providing the opportunity to view endemics in their natural environment as well as admire panoramic landscape views.



A Peaks Management Plan Project Development Group was set up in December 2019 to develop a costed implementation plan to deliver the 2019-2023 Peaks Management Plan.

The group is made up of representatives from the key stakeholder organisations: Environmental Management Division, Education Directorate, Saint Helena National Trust, St Helena Tourism and Connect Saint Helena Ltd. The group has been supported by the Royal Society for the Protection

of Birds (RSPB) who are providing invaluable assistance in putting the plan together. Further technical input has also been provided by specialists both on and off-Island. Other stakeholders including landowners have also been invited to input into the plan. The plan is now almost finalised and once this is done and endorsed by ENRC, it will be used as the basis to seek and secure funding to take the plan forward.

## MEET THE TEAM

The existing Peaks team comprises of 15 staff members (recurrent, partner and Darwin Funded), 14 of which are dedicated to field work.

The Peaks has a dedicated nursery where staff undertake propagation of endemic plants and ferns for utilisation in restoration plantings.

Invasive clearance following best practice protocols is undertaken in field locations (of the main footpaths) in preparation for endemic restoration plantings.

This process is labour intensive, with the removal of invasives being completed with a machete. Staff are also responsible for the maintenance of boardwalks (installed for improved visitor access) as well as the footpaths.

