



The Chagos Anemonefish or Clown fish *Amphiron chagosensis*
only found in the waters of the Chagos Archipelago

The Chagos Conservation Trust

The Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) is a well-established charitable society which promotes conservation and related science and education in respect of the Chagos Archipelago, situated in the centre of the Indian Ocean.

The Chagos Islands have belonged to Britain since 1814 and were constituted as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) in 1965. The area includes 55 tiny and remote islands on 5 coral atolls including the Great Chagos Bank, which is the largest in the world, and numerous other coral reefs. Only one island, Diego Garcia (reserved for the defence purposes of the UK and USA), is inhabited. Although the total area of the islands is only some 50 square kilometres, the total BIOT Environmental Zone, mostly marine, covers over half a million square kilometres.

The Chagos Archipelago is an exceptional natural asset for the planet, as one of the most pristine tropical marine environments still surviving. In our increasingly crowded world it provides a rare refuge for vulnerable wildlife. Its islands are home to the most diverse seabird communities in the Indian Ocean and its waters provide a breeding ground and staging post for marine turtles, whales, sharks, dolphins and over 1,000 species of fish. For corals, the Chagos provides at least 220 species with a stronghold which is vital, given that many scientists fear that half the world's coral reefs could be lost by 2025.

Also, because it still has a mainly unspoilt and healthy environment, the Chagos provides us with a benchmark showing how the web of life functions in its natural state; and this is important in helping us to understand and deal with such problems as pollution, loss of biodiversity and climate change.

The British Government, through the BIOT Administration, is committed to conserving the environment of the Territory and has taken measures to put this into effect. It has designated a first Ramsar site and has agreed in principle on substantial further Ramsar designations, on the basis of proposals from CCT. The Government has also declared a very large Environmental Zone and has undertaken to manage the area "as if" it were a natural World Heritage site.

Clearly, however, there needs to be a means of engaging non-governmental interest and support for this remarkable treasure trove of marine and island nature. This is the function of the Chagos Conservation Trust.

The Trust monitors the status of the environment with the most expert scientific advice and provides a channel for bringing environmental problems to the attention of the British and BIOT Governments. It promotes and supports practical measures such as, in 2006, a major ship-based scientific survey. The Society's publications, including those on the fauna and flora of the Chagos and the book *Peak of Limuria, the Story of Diego Garcia and the Chagos Archipelago*, represent a significant contribution to information on this little-known part of the world.

In face of the longer-term threats and uncertainties facing the Chagos environment, the Trust is concerned to continue to support and to strengthen the national and international framework for its protection, in co-operation and partnership with other organisations.

***The annual membership subscription costs only £20/\$40, or £100/\$200 for six years.
Visit www.chago-trust.org***

If you would like more information on the publications or membership,
please contact the Secretary, simonhughes@hughes-mccormack.co.uk.