



# The Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area Annual Review

April 2023 to March 2024



Torika Christian



# THE PITCAIRN ISLANDS MARINE PROTECTED AREA ANNUAL REVIEW

## INTRODUCTION

The Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area (MPA) Management Plan was published in October 2021. It sets out what will be done to effectively manage the MPA over the five-year period between 2021 and 2026. This is the 2nd annual review and summarises what has been achieved during the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

## HIGHLIGHTS

This year, we have continued our efforts to protect the unique marine environment of the Pitcairn Islands. Here are some key highlights:

- **New positions and training:** We invested in new MPA related positions and upskilled our existing staff. We appointed our first Marine Science Base Manager and Marine Permitting Officers. Additionally, we trained our staff in marine management and intelligence reporting.
- **International promotion:** Our MPA Officer attended the Blue Belt Symposium in London, UK, where they promoted our work to an international audience.
- **Combating illegal fishing:** We have continued to protect our MPA from Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing through remote monitoring. We collaborated with the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) and Royal Navy to conduct physical surveillance of key areas.
- **Scientific expeditions:** We conducted a scientific expedition to the outer islands with international experts. We partnered with the Plastic Odyssey to remove 9 tonnes of plastic from Henderson Island.
- **Research collaborations:** Our Marine Science Base hosted international specialists from King's College London and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) to conduct research in our MPA.



Pitcairn Island community and Plastic Odyssey team

**Management Strategy 1:** The appropriate legal, financial and human resource frameworks are in place and fit for purpose to ensure effective management of the MPA

### **Management Objective 1.1: The appropriate legal and policy frameworks are in place to deliver effective management**

Working with Blue Belt staff we conducted our first Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME) review. This highlighted all the good work we are doing on island and with partner organisations to effectively manage our MPA. It also identified actions that we can take to improve management for both people and nature. We are using the results of this review to determine our priorities for the future. They have also informed development of the MPA Annual Operational Plan for this year.

### **Management Objective 1.2: Appropriate long-term financial resources have been secured to deliver effective management**

Working with partners at Finance Earth we have produced a 10-year MPA financial plan. This helps to outline the funding needed to effectively manage our MPA. We have also worked to produce a business plan to support the successful running of our new Marine Science Base.



Melva Evans (MPA Officer) presenting at the Blue Belt Symposium (London)

### Management Objective 1.3: Appropriate human resources have been secured to deliver effective management

In September 2023 our MPA Officer, Melva Evans, received MPA management training from Blue Belt Programme staff.

With funding from the Blue Belt Programme, Melva attended the 2nd Blue Belt Programme Symposium hosted in London, UK. The Symposium allowed Melva to engage with representatives from other UK Overseas Territories and key stakeholders. Melva gave a presentation highlighting all of our achievements over the past few years - [Pitcairn MPA : A Community Project - UK Government x Protect Blue](#).

We have now successfully filled new Government of Pitcairn Islands positions. Charlene Warren and Shawn Christian are now the Marine Permitting Officers and will administer fishing permits and enforce the fisheries legislation set out in our Marine Conservation Regulations. Sue O'Keefe is the Marine Science Base Manager and will oversee the day-to-day running of the Base. Torika Christian is the MPA Communications Officer and will work to raise awareness about our MPA and all the work we are doing via our social media channels.

### Management Objective 1.4: The local community understands and actively participates in MPA management

With assistance from the Blue Belt Programme, we have started to develop 6-monthly community newsletters to share MPA related news. These newsletters are shared with the community via email and posted on the community notice board. In addition, Protect Blue hosts an online notice board which shares MPA related news with stakeholders.

During their September 2023 visit, Blue Belt staff delivered Intelligence reporting training to MPA staff, the island's Police Officer and community members. This enables anyone to effectively report things of concern, such as illegal fishing, directly to the Marine Management Organisation's (MMO) Intelligence Team.

## 2

**Management Strategy 2:** Human activities within the MPA are effectively managed to minimise threats to key species and habitats as far as is reasonably practical

### Management Objective 2.1: Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing within the MPA is minimised

Between April 2023 and March 2024, intelligence analysts from the MMO conducted a total of 252 daily checks of vessels' Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) data. Additionally, out of hours and weekend checks were carried out by the Watchkeepers at the Joint Maritime Security Centre (JMSC).

In October, a request was submitted to Spain for Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data concerning a fishing vessel that had ceased transmitting its AIS position near the MPA boundary for a period of 10 days. The VMS data confirmed that the vessel had only transited through the MPA without conducting any fishing activity. In November 2023, a woodchip carrier also transited the MPA, coming within 5 NM of Ducie Island. The Government of the Pitcairn Islands raised concerns about the risk of vessels potentially running aground. As a

result, an automated alert system has now been implemented to notify the Government of the Pitcairn Islands whenever a vessel approaches within 12 NM of any of the Pitcairn Islands.

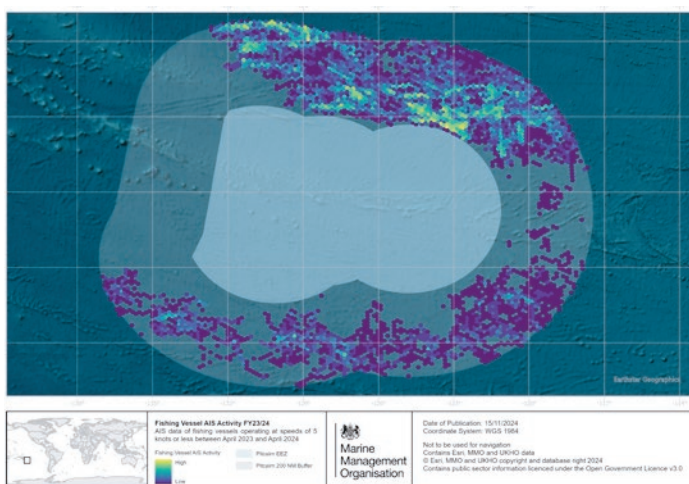
In January, the MMO collaborated with the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) to conduct 10 hours of aerial surveillance over the northern boundary of the MPA. The operation confirmed full compliance, with no vessels sighted within the MPA. Intelligence was collected on the fishing fleet operating around the boundary of the MPA. Additionally, the MMO collaborated with the Royal Navy to carry out direct surveillance within the MPA during HMS Tamar's visit to Pitcairn in January.

### Management Objective 2.2: Impacts to coral reef habitats from anchor damage are reduced

A funding application to the Green Overseas "GO" Programme, funded by the European Union, has been submitted to install mooring points at an optimal location(s) around Pitcairn Island. It is anticipated that experts from the UK's National Oceanography Centre will conduct the mapping and installation work in April 2025.

### Management Objective 2.3: Fishing by the local communities within the Coastal Conservation Areas is sustainable

The local community has continued to collect gonad and otolith samples from key subsistence fisheries species. The gonads are being sent to the University of Auckland for analysis to determine their reproductive cycle and to identify spawning periods. The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) are processing the otoliths to assess the fish age and growth rates. This study will provide evidence to update the Fisheries Management Plan.



Pitcairn Fishing Vessel Activity

St Andrews University are developing a dedicated Pitcairn CatchApp that will be made available to all Island fishers. Mobile phones will be provided with the CatchApp preloaded. The App will capture information on the amount of fish being caught and used for domestic on-island consumption or sold to cruise ships. Where there are restrictions on catch, the App will help to encourage compliance with these regulations. It will provide an indication of when these catch limits may be being breached.

**Management Objective 2.4: Risks from marine pollution incidents are minimised**

A collaborative project between Government of Pitcairn Islands, the Blue Belt Programme, and the Aquawatch Programme is exploring the use of satellite data to monitor water quality around the Pitcairn Islands MPA. In October 2024, staff from the Cefas will conduct fieldwork to validate the models being developed by Aquawatch.

We are also in the initial phases of developing an MPA app to allow visitors to report wildlife sightings, things of concern (such as pollution and plastic), and access information about the MPA.

**Management Objective 2.5: Awareness of the issue of marine litter both within the local community, amongst visitors and internationally is improved**

This year we supported Plastic Odyssey's "Impossible Clean Up" expedition to Henderson Island. This aimed to remove all the plastic pollution collected during the 2019 expedition and any new marine litter. During the expedition they also

conducted plastic monitoring studies on the amount and type of plastic waste, did a brand audit of collected PET bottles (company, country of origin) and some microplastic sampling. While on Henderson Island, they collected almost 4 tonnes of newly accumulated plastic which included 300 fishing buoys. They successfully removed this from Henderson along with a further 5 tonnes collected during a previous beach clean expedition in 2019. During the visit to Oeno, they found almost no plastic on the beaches. Using the plastic collected they made a giant chair which is now on display on Pitcairn Island. The team also made some recommendations for future management of marine plastics in the Pitcairn Islands.

In February 2024, Dr Alex Bond and Dr Jennifer Lavers from the Natural History Museum in the UK took part in Operation Putuputu. While on Henderson and Ducie Islands, they collected blood and feather samples from different seabirds to test for contaminants and parasites as potential indicators of MPA health. They also sampled seabirds' stomach contents to look for ingested marine plastics. Preliminary results found that 69% of Christmas Shearwater on Ducie had plastics in their stomachs.

**Management Objective 2.6: Understanding and awareness of marine invasive species is improved**

Working with the RSPB and the Blue Belt Programme we have produced a biosecurity interpretation board to be displayed in Mangareva. The board will provide information on how to reduce the risk of marine invasive species and key species to be aware of.

## 3

**Management Strategy 3:** Understanding of the marine environment around the Pitcairn Islands is enhanced through a research and monitoring programme

**Management Objective 3.1: A comprehensive research programme has been established to address key evidence gaps**

Since opening our new Marine Science Base last year, it has already supported several visiting researchers. The Base provides a space for scientists to work and stay, accommodating up to 4 people. We will use it to promote the Pitcairn Islands' unique marine environment across the globe. These ambitions were supported by St. Andrew's University who produced an Operational and Governance plan. This aims to support safety, regulatory compliance and operational efficacy of the Marine Science Base and how the facility is used for research.

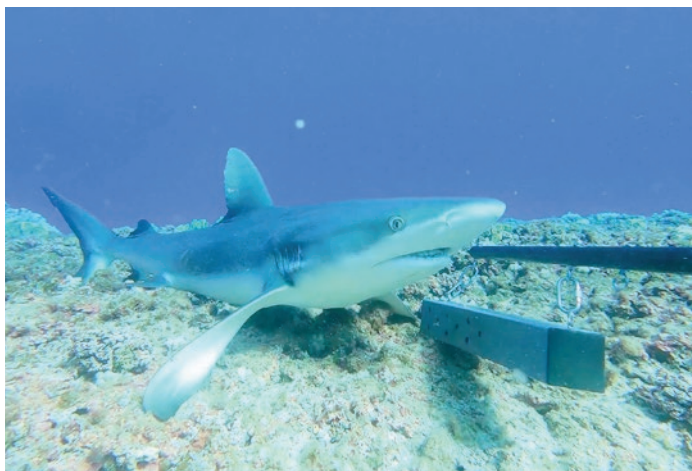
**Management Objective 3.2: Understanding of the impacts of climate change on the Pitcairn Islands is improved**

A coral reef assessment was conducted to understand the resilience of the coral to the potential impacts of climate change. The study looked at the differences in resilience across all four islands. Historical records and future projections were also assessed to further understand resilience and recovery potential of the Pitcairn Islands' reefs.

**Management Objective 3.3: A long-term monitoring programme for key habitats and species has been established around all four islands**

Between June and September 2023, we hosted a team from King's College London (KCL) who, investigated our visiting population of humpback whales (DPLUS177). During their visit they conducted sightings analysis and started to develop a photo ID catalogue to identify species individuals. In addition, they also collected a total of 670 hours of humpback whale song. The team presented the results of the study to the local community, highlighting the importance of the MPA for protecting them.

A second Baited Remote Underwater Video system (BRUVs) survey has been conducted around Henderson, Oeno and 40 Mile Reef as part of the Global Ocean Wildlife Analysis Network (GOWAN). A comparison of the fish diversity, abundance and size showed good consistency and will provide a baseline to support longer term monitoring. Using the 2021 BRUVs data and other scientific literature, a report on the occurrence of sharks of the Pitcairn Islands has been published by Cefas.



Grey reef shark *Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*



# 4

**Management Strategy 4:** The local community is obtaining economic benefit from the MPA and these benefits are distributed equitably

## **Management Objective 4.1: New marine eco-tourism activities have been developed and promoted within the MPA**

During September 2023, we supported a Blue Belt team conducting household surveys to understand the islanders' views and understanding of the MPA. The surveys aimed to understand what is important about the marine environment, how the MPA affects the community and the need for future projects to enhance benefits from the MPA. It also aimed to assess the community's understanding of the regulations associated with the MPA's management. A total of 18 interviews were conducted across 16 households. This forms part of the long-term monitoring programme for the MPA. The results will be used to assess achievements of the MPA management objectives over time.

The visitor survey, which is shared with island visitors after departure via email, was updated. This now includes questions that allow us to understand visitor's awareness of the MPA and their interest in marine nature-based tourism activities. The results of this survey are being used to develop a new strategy and action plan for marine nature-based tourism in the Pitcairn Islands.

Dr Georgia Holly, University of Edinburgh, visited the island as part of Operation Putuputu. During her visit she documented the cultural heritage of the Pitcairn Islands, following on from work conducted during the 2023 expedition (Operation Redfish). She held public meetings and interviewed 70% of residents to understand what culture and heritage was important to community members, and how it could be protected for generations to come.

# 5

**Management Strategy 5:** Understanding and appreciation of the MPA by the local community, visitors and the wider international community is enhanced

## **Management Objective 5.1: Understanding of the MPA is improved at a regional and international scale**

Working with the Blue Belt Programme, we have produced an annual communications plan to ensure all MPA related news is shared both locally and internationally. We have also developed our social media presence. Our MPA X account now has 305 followers with many of our posts attracting over 1000 views.

## **Management Objective 5.2: Understanding of the MPA is improved amongst the local community**

During September 2023, we commissioned Protect Blue to facilitate an MPA focused community exhibition and develop an MPA communications strategy. The aim of this was to raise the profile of the MPA both on island and internationally. During their visit, Luke Hosty and Jon Slayer created an MPA media library (accessible to islanders and wider stakeholders) and delivered community training on GoPro use and storytelling. They also gifted two content creator GoPro packs to the island to allow islanders to use their new skills to tell their stories to the world.



Underwater videography workshop hosted by Protect Blue

## **Management Objective 5.3: Understanding of the MPA is improved amongst visitors to the Pitcairn Islands**

To share MPA information with island visitors, we produced an MPA poster that is displayed on the Silver Supporter. The poster highlights the amazing marine life of the Pitcairn Islands. It also shares key information on ways visitors can help protect this marine wildlife.

# 6

**Management Strategy 6:** Understanding and appreciation of the Henderson Island World Heritage Site is enhanced



## **Management Objective 6.3: Non-native invasive rodent eradication and island restoration project supported by the Pitcairn Island community and progressed to a stage of operation for Henderson and Pitcairn Island**

As part of the rodent free Pitcairn Darwin Plus project (DPLUS178), a team from the RSPB and an eradication expert visited the Pitcairn Islands in October. During this visit, they engaged with the Island Council and the wider community to address key issues and concerns. They undertook a 3-day expedition to Henderson Island giving the community a chance to visit the island and discuss operational logistics. The eradication expert provided recommendations which were well received by the community.

RSPB team conducting rat bait preference trial

An underwater photograph of a coral reef. In the foreground, there are large, light-colored, rounded coral structures. Several fish are visible: a dark fish in the upper left, a light-colored fish with a dark stripe in the center, a large dark fish with a light stripe in the lower right, and a small dark fish in the bottom right corner. The water is clear and blue.

## Further information

For further information please contact:

**Michele Christian,**  
*Division Manager,  
Environmental, Conservation & Natural Resources  
Adamstown, Pitcairn Islands*

Email: [dmnature@pitcairn.gov.pn](mailto:dmnature@pitcairn.gov.pn)

Phone: +64 9 984 0153

(office hours Tuesday & Thursday 9am – 1pm)