

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

Another green world

Rising like an emerald from the turquoise waves of the Indian Ocean, Christmas Island is a place of unique natural wonder and incredible biodiversity, from the famed Red Crab migration to the hundreds of birds, fish, reptiles, insects and plants found only on or around this tiny, isolated landmass. This steep, rainforest-covered, 135,000-hectare island has been declared a Key Biodiversity Area to protect these marvels, and is home to five endemic bird species, including the Critically Endangered Abbott's Booby. An ancient species that nests high in the treetops, the booby, along with the Christmas Island Frigatebird and White-tailed Tropicbird, relies on large stands of intact forest to breed.

Sadly though, this spectacular place has suffered from a high-rate of extinctions, with four of the five endemic Christmas Island land mammals now believed to have been wiped out, along with at least three reptiles, and many other creatures teetering on the edge. Introduced species, such as Yellow Crazy Ants, cats and rats are some of the main culprits, and though over 60 per cent of the island has been declared a National Park, the impact of historical habitat clearance and phosphate mining is so severe and the revegetation process so difficult, that it also continues to affect the local flora and fauna.

But despite the obvious impact on Christmas Island's magnificent biodiversity and the threats to its fledgling eco-tourism industry, the spectre of mining has again raised its ugly head. With the demand for fertiliser in South East Asia increasing, the interest in Christmas Island's rich phosphate deposits has been reinvigorated. Without improved control of invasive pests, and a federal government commitment to end all mining, the future of this unique KBA's plants and animals—the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean—is in peril.

Where is it?

A tiny dot in the tropical waters off Western Australia, Christmas Island pokes out of the vast depths of the Indian Ocean, 2,600 kilometre north-west of Perth and 360 kilometres south of its closest neighbour—Java, in Indonesia.



Main image: The mass migration of Christmas Island Red Crabs is one of the most striking natural phenomena in the world. Photo by Stephen Belcher/Minden Pictures



From top: A subspecies found only on this tiny speck of land, the Christmas Island Thrush is a common sight throughout the forests and settled areas. Photo by Gerard Satherley

The world's rarest frigatebird, with only around 1,200 breeding pairs, the endemic Christmas Island Frigatebird nests in trees, high in the canopy. Photo by Chris Surman

Feeding Whalesharks are a common sight off the coast of Christmas Island. Photo by Rob Hughe

The beautiful Christmas Island Emperor Butterfly can occasionally be seen floating over the trees along the roads and tracks of the island. Photo courtesy Parks Australia

HIGHLIGHTS



- Get your hands dirty at the Christmas Island Bird'n'Nature week, held annually in September, and join scientists in bird-banding and monitoring some of the island's rarest species.
- Twitch a vagrant! Christmas Island's close proximity to South East Asia and the Equator makes it a hotspot for rarities.
- Experience the thrill of mass migration. An estimated 40-50 million bright red land crabs live on the island, travelling from the forest to the coast at the beginning of the wet season to release their eggs into the ocean.
- Get your feet wet! The deep waters off Christmas Island are a mecca for scuba diving and snorkelling enthusiasts, with rare corals, masses of tropical fish, whalesharks and dolphins creating a dazzling underwater wonderland.
- Venture along one of Christmas Island's many scenic bushwalks—the best way to boost your life list! With hundreds of birds calling the island home, you're sure to see something new—from the world's rarest frigatebird to the melodious local thrush species.
- Get snap happy at some of the most scenic bird photography spots on the island—including Martin Point for spectacular seabirds and sunsets.

On the ground

BirdLife Australia is actively campaigning for the preservation of Christmas Island at both a state and federal level—and there are many ways you can lend your support:

- Make your voice heard. Sign BirdLife's petition to Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to campaign against the destruction of pristine rainforest for the sake of a mine at <http://bit.ly/2hm3TBY> or sign and mark the 'pit or paradise' postcard included with this issue
- One of the best ways to protect Christmas Island is by visiting—ecotourism provides a vital lifeline for local businesses and a strong economic argument against mining
- Help us tell the story. Let your friends and family know about Christmas Island and how important it is for our unique wildlife
- Talk to your local MP—make protecting places like Christmas Island an election issue at all levels of government