

**The Bahamas High Commission
London**

FACT SHEET # 5



**THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS
FAUNA AND FLORA**

FAUNA

The Bahamas, being a chain of islands with limited large open space, is unable to support animals of great size. However, the fauna remains diverse and unique.

Invertebrates

There is an abundance of invertebrates, including many species of ants and spiders, paper wasps, honey bees, land crabs, some 90 species of butterflies and the giant bat moth. Marine invertebrates include the conch, crawfish, the chalice sponge and numerous other species that depend on coral reefs for support.

Reef and marine life

There are some 900 sq miles of reefs in The Bahamas, including the third-longest barrier reef in the world off the east coast of Andros. The reefs are rich with a diversity of marine life including green moray eels, cinnamon clownfish, queen angelfish, barracudas, the Nassau Grouper, the placid nurse shark and inflatable porcupine fish. Reefs, like rainforests, are important as they help to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide levels implicated in global warming.

Amphibians

There are six species of amphibians including the Cuban tree frog and the free-toed frog.

Reptiles

Some 44 species of reptiles are found in The Bahamas. These include the Cat Island freshwater turtle, Inagua freshwater turtles, green, loggerhead and Hawksbill sea turtles, and the rare leatherback turtle. Several turtle species are now endangered. There are also 10 species of snake, including the Bahamian boa constrictor, pygmy boa and blind worm snake. There are no poisonous snakes in The Bahamas. There are 29 species of lizard, including iguanas and curly tailed lizards. Several iguana species are now rare and endangered.

Birds

About 250 species migrate to, or are vagrants in the Bahama Islands. Some are rare or endangered. They include the Bahama parrot. Now found only in Abaco and Great Inagua, Bahama woodstar hummingbird, Bahama swallow, osprey, Kirtland's warbler, red bellied woodpecker, West Indian flamingo and West Indian tree duck. Other interesting birds include the great blue heron, barn owl, peregrine falcon and Bahama duck. The Bahamas is also home to many species of seabirds, with many found nesting on cays throughout the archipelago.

Mammals

Thirteen species of mammals are native to The Bahamas, of which 12 are bats. The other is the hutia, a rodent-like creature once thought to be extinct. It was rediscovered on East Plane Cay where it is now thriving and has been translocated to two cays in the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park. Several species of whales and dolphins, including the humpback and blue whales and spotted dolphin, are found in seas around the Bahama islands as they migrate to and from their breeding grounds. Population of sheep, goats and pigs are reared for agricultural purposes. There are also populations of wild pigs, donkeys, goats, raccoons and Abaco wild horses that co-exist with local fauna with limited adverse effects.

Invasive fauna

A few introduced or exotic species have become pests in The Bahamas. The ring-necked dove, introduced in 1975, has displaced some native birds.

Extinct species

Extinct species include the New Providence iguana, Caribbean monk seal, paleoprovidence tortoise, chickcharnie owl and Bahamian population of American crocodiles.

Poisonous fauna

The **black widow spider** or bottle spider is possibly the most venomous species in The Bahamas. It's small, jet-black body is characterized by a red hourglass-shaped marking on its underside. The venom of the black widow is a powerful neurotoxin, capable of killing a human but ore likely to cause severe pain followed by weakness, tremors, cramps and aches.

The **centipede**, a caterpillar-like creature that can grow to eight inches long, injects a potent venom into its victim.

The **Cuban tree frog** is covered with a mucus that causes local inflammation and itching when exposed to a cut or abrasion, and can cause excruciating pain, swelling and temporary blindness when brought into contact with the eyes.

Three species of stingray live in Bahamian waters, the **eagle ray**, **southern stingray** and **yellow stingray**. Some stingrays have tail barbs with venom glands. The most common injury results from stepping on barbs of a stingray half-buried in the sand.

The **Portuguese man-of-war** is a coelenterate that appears as a translucent blue float on the ocean surface with hanging tentacles as long as 80 ft. Poisons discharged by the tentacles can be lethal to humans.

Jellyfish and sea lice are common in warm months and can deliver a painful sting that is more irritating than dangerous.

FLORA

Vegetation in The Bahamas is similar to that of Florida and Cuba. However, factors such as rainfall, temperature and local limestone substrate affect differences in appearance. Of the more than 1,200 species of plants, 9% are endemic.

Native species

Of all the species of plants found in The Bahamas, 120 are not found anywhere else in the world.

Trees: The following important native species are protected by law under the Conservation & Protection of the Physical Landscape of The Bahamas Act: Lignum vitae (*Guaiacum sanctum*), Horseflesh (*Lysiloma sabicu*), Mahogany (*Swietenia mahagoni*), Caribbean pine (*Pinus caribaea* var *bahamensis*), Red cedar (*Juniperus bermudiana*), Brasiletto (*Caesalpinia vesicaria*), Candlewood (*Gochnatia ilicifolia*), Rauwolfia (*Rawolfia nitida*), Beefwood (*Guapira discolor*), Bullwood (*Pera bumelifolia*), Silk cotton (*Ceiba pentandra*).

Other important native trees include: Gumelemi (*Bursera simaruba*), Cancer tree (*Jacaranda coerulea*), Five finger (*Tabebuia bahamensis*), Cinnecord (*Acacia choriophylla*), Paradise tree (*Simarouba glauca*), Ram's horn (*Pithecellobium Keyenses*), Princewood (*Exostema caribaeum*), Geiger tree (*Cordia sebestena*), Pigeon plum (*Coccoloba diversifolia*), Mastic (*Mastichodendron foetidissimum*)

Shrubs: Cascarilla (*Croton eleuteria*), Strog back (*Bourreria ovata*), Yellow Elder (*Tecoma stans*), Golden dew drop (*Duranta repens*), Coco plum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*)

Mangroves: Black mangrove (*Avicennia germinas*), White mangrove (*Laguncularia racemosa*), Red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*), Buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*)

Palms: Hog cabbage palm (*Pseudophoenix sargentii*), Silver top palm (*Coccothinox argentata*), pond top palm (*Sabal palmetto*), Buffalo top palm (*Thrinax morrisii*)

Exotic species

Naturalized: Royal Poinciana (*Delonix regia*), African tulip (*Spathodea campanulata*), Poor man's orchid (*Bauhinia purpurea*)

Invasive species: Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), Australian pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), Bottlebrush (*Melaleuca quinquenervia*), Ink berry (*Scaevola plumieri*)

Fruit trees

Native edible wild fruits

Governor's plum (*Flacourtia indica*),
Darling plum (*Reynosa septentrionalis*),
Pigeon plum (*Coccoloba diversifolia*),
Coco plum (*Chrysobalanus icaco*),

Sea grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*),
Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*),
Sapodilla (*Manikara zapota*),
Sugar apple (*Annona squamosa*),
Custard apple (*Annona reticulata*),
Mamey (*Mammea Americana*),
Mamey sapote (*Pouteria campechiana*)
Soursop (*Annona muricata*),
Guava (*Andros*), (*Psidium androsianum*),
Guana berry (*Brysonima lucida*),
Saffron (*Chrysophyllum oliviforme*)

Cultivated backyard fruits:

Mango (*Mangifera indica*),
Banana (*Musa sp*),
Avocado (*Persea americana*),
Indian jujube (*Zizyphus mauritiana*),
Guinep (*Melicoccus bijugatus*),
Pawpaw/papaya (*Carica papaya*),
Breadfruit (*Artocarpus communis*),
Hog plum (*Spondias purpurea*),
Scarlet plum (*Spondias purpurea var lutea*),
Gooseberry (*Phyllanthus acidus*)

Poisonous flora

Poisonwod is a member of the sumac family, which includes mango, cashew and pistachio. Poisonwood contains the poison urushiol, which causes a rash, and in cases of smoke inhalation, lung damage. Most people do not have a reaction to urushiol on first exposure, but most do on further contact.

Manchineel is a highly dangerous tree because of its poisonous green fruit and toxic latex. Rain water or dew from these trees can cause temporary blindness if brought into contact with the eyes.

Protection of flora & fauna

The Bahamas is a signatory to the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the United Nations Climate Change Convention. Several acts directly or indirectly protect native species and ecosystems. These include:

- Agriculture and Fisheries Act
- Wild Bird Protection Act
- Wild Animal Protection Act
- Fisheries Resources (Jurisdiction and Conservation) Act
- Plant Protection Act
- Bahamas National Trust Act
- Conservation and Protection of the Physical Landscape of The Bahamas Act

An extensive network of protected areas has been designated. This includes wild bird reserves managed by the Dept of Agriculture, national parks managed by the Bahamas National Trust (BNT) and marine reserves managed by Dept of Fisheries.

BNT plays an integral role in protecting Bahamian plants and animals primarily through its involvement in protecting threatened habitats. BNT manages a large national park in Inagua that supports the largest breeding colony of West Indian flamingos in the western hemisphere. This colourful and unusual bird is the Bahamian national bird.

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