



*Championing UK's most special species:
the wildlife of UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and
Crown Dependencies (CDs)*

FACT-SHEET ON:

**Ascension Island Parsley Fern *Anogramma ascensionis*
UK Overseas Territory: Ascension Island**

Importance: The Ascension Island Parsley Fern is endemic to Ascension, where it was once abundant within its montane habitat. This diminutive but ecologically fascinating species was believed to have gone extinct by the turn of the millennium, until four plants were rediscovered in 2009. Since then, the species has been found in several other locations on the island, but its existence remains fragile and it is listed as Critically Endangered and featured in the 2015 Ascension Island Biodiversity Action Plan.

Ecosystem: The Ascension Island Parsley Fern is restricted to quite extreme habitats on the rocky slopes of Green Mountain, at the centre of the island. It is found alongside other ferns, lichens and mosses in communities that are well-adapted to challenging conditions. In this harsh montane environment, the Ascension Island Parsley can survive only in humid, shaded microhabitats within crevices, below sheltering shrubs, and close to streamlets.

Threats: Overgrazing by feral mammals has dramatically altered the physical environment in which the Ascension Island Parsley Fern was probably once very common. The pruning and destruction of shrubs that previously provided the sheltered conditions required by the fern has resulted in a widespread loss of suitable habitat. Even where habitat remains, Ascension Island Parsley Fern is now readily outcompeted by the highly invasive Maidenhair Ferns *Adiantum* spp. which have been introduced to the island by humans. The potential impact of climate change on the particular moisture regime needed by the Ascension Island Parsley Fern is not clear, but likely to be negative. The remaining wild plants, being so few, are also highly vulnerable to destruction by the landslides that occur frequently on the upper slopes of Green Mountain.

Needs: Continued support for *ex situ* conservation initiatives, including those underway on Ascension and at the Royal Botanic

Gardens, Kew, in the UK, will be important for maintaining an 'insurance' population of this species. However, since there are many challenges involved in the successful storage of fern spores, efforts to restore appropriate habitat on Ascension as soon as possible will be vital for the long-term survival of the species. This will involve reducing pressure from feral grazing animals, restoring native vegetation, and creating suitable microsites for the reintroduction of colonies of plants. Reintroduction trials at Stedson's Ledge have provided promising results, laying a foundation for future evidence-based interventions.



Above and below: Semi-natural habitats for ferns in the cloud forest near the peak of Green Mountain, Ascension. © Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF



Above: Ascension Island Parsley Fern. CC-BY Ascension Island Government Conservation Department

