



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

FACT-SHEET ON:

**Cahow or Bermuda Petrel *Pterodroma cahow*  
UK Overseas Territory: Bermuda**

The Bermuda petrel is a gadfly petrel. Commonly known in Bermuda as the Cahow, a name derived from its eerie cries, this nocturnal ground-nesting seabird is the national bird of Bermuda and can be found pictured on Bermudian currency.

Successful conservation over 70 years has increased the population of this species, but it remains extremely small and the species consequently qualifies as Endangered.

Cahows once bred abundantly throughout Bermuda but were almost eradicated largely due to human-introduced invasive predators and direct human action soon after settlement in the early 1600s. The problem was realised and protective legislation passed – but too late. It was thought extinct for almost three centuries, until reported (with specimens) during the first half of the 20th century.

In 1951, 18 pairs were rediscovered breeding on suboptimal rocky islets (total area 1 ha) in Castle Harbour. Conservation and recovery management of the breeding population and potential threats began under Dr David Wingate in the early 1960s. By 2000, when Dr Wingate retired and Dr Jeremy Madeiros took over the Recovery Project, the number of breeding pairs had increased to 53-55. 19 years on, the number of established breeding pairs of Cahows has increased to 131.

The tiny nesting islands were rapidly being destroyed by increasingly severe and frequent hurricanes and sea-level rise, all associated with human-induced climate-change, and the previously natural nest-sites required frequent interventions for repair. From 2005 to 2008, 102 chicks translocated in May to nearby to Nonsuch Island, a nature reserve from which most introduced predators had been removed over the years. In 2008, of the 40 chicks on all islands that year, 21 were translocated to Nonsuch. A further 65 chicks were translocated 2013-2017.

14 individuals fledging from Nonsuch Island after translocation in 2005 and 2006 were observed in 2009 returning to the island and entering artificial burrows. One chick was born on the island in 2009. By 2011, 22 translocated birds had returned to Nonsuch, and 8 more translocated birds returned to the original nesting islets. Non-translocated birds have also been recorded on Nonsuch indicating a sufficient nucleus of translocated birds to attract non-translocated individuals into the re-established colony. These projects have been successful, and there are now two breeding colony sites on Nonsuch, supporting a combined total of 22 established breeding pairs in 2019.

With the natural colonisation of nearby Southampton Island, confirmed in 2013, the total breeding habitat has increased from 4 islets totalling 1.4 ha, to 6 islands totalling 9.0 ha.

Tracking tags show that breeding birds feed in fishing grounds up to at least 600 km away toward the New England coast. The breeding season lasts from October to mid-June. In the non-breeding season, birds move into the Atlantic, following the warm waters on the western edges of the Gulf Stream, with birds



*Above: Cahow in nest burrow, © Sir Richard Ground*

*Below: Dr Jeremy Madeiros holds one of the first Bermuda Petrels in over 300 years to be reared naturally on Nonsuch Island. Its parents had been translocated as chicks to the island, and matured at sea before returning to breed. © Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF*

*Bottom: Just off Bermuda, one of the tiny islets in which the Bermuda Petrels continued to return in the night to nest in holes for over 300 years while thought to be extinct, © Dr Mike Pienkowski*



being found in the Gulf Stream, north to the Bay of Fundy, into the Gulf of St. Lawrence and over the Grand Banks, with one individual recorded about 200 km off SW Ireland others in the Azores in November and December.