



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

FACT-SHEET ON:

***Yellow Fatu* *Abutilon pitcairnense*  
UK Overseas Territory: Pitcairn Islands**

**Importance:** Yellow Fatu is an iconic, attractive, cream-flowered species, belonging to the mallow family. It is endemic to Pitcairn Island and for twenty years was thought to be extinct until a single plant was discovered in 2003. Sadly, this plant was killed in a landslide in 2005, and no further wild individuals have been found. The species is therefore classified on the IUCN Red List as Extinct in the Wild. However, seeds and cuttings were taken from the 2003 plant, and these materials have been used to establish an active *ex situ* conservation programme. There are hopes that it may be possible to reintroduce the species to Pitcairn in the future.

**Ecosystem:** Yellow Fatu is known to have been restricted to forests dominated by the tree species *Homalium taypau* (itself endemic to Pitcairn) and *Metrosideros collina*. Some of the remaining areas of pure, even-aged *H. taypau* forest are thought to have a history of management for timber production, and tend to display little structural diversity and an impoverished native ground flora. The small areas of mixed forest still in existence where *H. taypau* and *M. collina* intergrade are thought to be the best examples of historical Yellow Fatu habitat.

**Threats:** The unique forest habitat in which Yellow Fatu historically occurred has faced severe pressures over long periods of time. Deforestation for agriculture and settlement has had a major impact on the total area of the forest, with less than 30% of Pitcairn Island now under native forest cover. The quality of the remaining forest has also been undermined by the spread of invasive non-native plants such as Rose-apple *Syzygium jambos* and Common Lantana *Lantana camara*. These fast-growing invasive species are outcompeting the native tree species and transforming the forest into a dense, shady thicket that is unsuitable for plants such as Yellow Fatu.

**Needs:** Cuttings and seeds were collected from the last known wild plant, and plants derived from these have been successfully cultivated on Pitcairn as well as in living collections in the UK (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew), Ireland (National Botanic Gardens, Dublin) and elsewhere. Seed is also stored at the Millennium Seed Bank in the UK. Continued preservation of these resources will be vital to guaranteeing the long-term survival of the species. Further surveys on Pitcairn are needed to identify any remaining wild plants that have gone undetected, in order both to protect any such remaining wild plants and to increase the genetic diversity of the plants in cultivation.

Efforts will also have to be made to protect and restore suitable habitat on Pitcairn for reintroduction of a self-sustaining population of Yellow Fatu plants. This will involve clearance of large areas of invasive plant growth and re-establishment of native woody vegetation. Additional research into the specific ecological requirements for successful establishment of Yellow Fatu is also needed.



*Yellow Fatu:* above: © Pitcairn Islands Council; below: CC-BY Salix (Wikimedia)



*Tedside, Pitcairn Island, where the last plant of this species in the wild was found. © Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF*