

= Ducie Island =

Ducie Island / ˈduːsi / is an uninhabited atoll in the Pitcairn Islands . It lies 535 kilometres (332 mi) east of Pitcairn Island , and 354 kilometres (220 mi) east of Henderson Island , and has a total area of 1 @. @ 5 square miles (3 @. @ 9 km²) , which includes the lagoon . It is 1 @. @ 5 miles (2 @. @ 4 km) long , measured northeast to southwest , and about 1 mile (1 @. @ 6 km) wide . The island is composed of four islets : Acadia , Pandora , Westward and Edwards .

Despite its sparse vegetation , the atoll is known as the breeding ground of a number of bird species . More than 90 % of the world population of Murphy 's petrel nests on Ducie , while pairs of red @-@ tailed tropicbirds and fairy terns make around 1 % of the world population for each species .

Ducie was first discovered in 1606 by Pedro Fernandes de Queirós , who named it Luna Puesta , and rediscovered by Edward Edwards , captain of HMS Pandora , who was sent in 1790 to capture the mutineers of HMS Bounty . He named the island Ducie in honour of Francis Reynolds @-@ Moreton , 3rd Baron Ducie . In 1867 it was claimed by the United States under the Guano Islands Act , but the United Kingdom annexed it on 19 December 1902 as part of the Pitcairn Islands . Due to its inaccessibility and the distance from Pitcairn Island , Ducie is rarely visited today .

= = History = =

The island was discovered by a Spanish expedition led by Portuguese sailor Pedro Fernandes de Queirós on 26 January 1606 , during an expedition that began in Callao , Peru . Supported by Pope Clement VIII and Philip III of Spain , Queirós was given the command of the San Pedro , San Pablo and Zabra . The fleet was nicknamed Los Tres Reyes Magos (" The Three Wise Men ") . The objective of the expedition was to take soldiers , friars and provisions to establish a colony in the Santa Cruz Islands .

Ducie Island was the first of eighteen discoveries on the trip . Queirós named the island Luna Puesta (roughly , " moon that has set ") . On the same day , he also sighted two more islands , one that he named San Juan Bautista (" St John the Baptist ") , and the other La Encarnación (" the Incarnation ") . It is unclear which one was Henderson island and which one Pitcairn . The confusion was later compounded when a chart produced by Admiral José de Espinosa marked Ducie as La Encarnación , rather than as Luna Puesta .

The island was rediscovered and named Ducie Island on 16 March 1791 by Captain Edward Edwards , of HMS Pandora , who had been despatched from Britain in 1790 to arrest the Bounty mutineers . Edwards named it in honour of Francis Reynolds @-@ Moreton , 3rd Baron Ducie , under whom he had served earlier in his career . HMS Pandora turned northwards from Ducie and , because of this change of course , Edwards did not sight the other islands of the group . If HMS Pandora had maintained its course , it would eventually have reached Pitcairn Island and found the Bounty mutineers .

The crew of the whaleship Essex , which a whale had attacked and sunk in November 1820 , mistakenly believed that they had reached Ducie after a month at sea in two whaleboats . In fact they had reached Henderson Island . Captain Thomas Raine of Surrey , who was searching for the survivors of Essex , in 1820 made the first recorded landing on Ducie . Frederick William Beechey , who arrived in HMS Blossom during November 1825 , wrote the first comprehensive description of the island . Beechey 's expedition did not land in the atoll , but members of the crew sailed around it in small boats . Based on Beechey 's survey , the first Admiralty chart of the island was published in 1826 . For nearly a hundred years it was the only available map of the island .

On 5 June 1881 the mail ship Acadia ran aground on the island while returning from San Francisco , Peru after unloading its cargo . On the way to Queenstown or Falmouth for new orders , Master Stephen George calculated a route passing 15 to 20 miles (24 to 32 km) to the east of Ducie . George left the first mate in command at 6 am . Half an hour later , the first mate saw a white line , which he disregarded on the assumption that it was phosphorescence in the water . Later , realising that it was land , he manoeuvred to avoid running aground , but failed . The look @-@ out excused

himself by saying that he thought that the white land was a cloud . The crew made several unsuccessful attempts to re @-@ float the ship , after which the master sailed one of the ship 's boats to Pitcairn Island . He was assisted there by the local inhabitants and returned aboard the Edward O 'Brien , an American boat , to rescue the rest of the crew . The incident was later investigated in a court in Liverpool , where the ultimate cause of the wreck was left undetermined , though possible causes included a calculation error by the master or an unknown current that carried the ship to the island . The court declared the master not guilty of any wrongdoing . A stone marker with a memorial inscription is located at the landing point on Acadia Islet . It was unveiled to commemorate the recovery of the anchor in 1990 . The wreck lies offshore from the memorial stone in about 10 metres of water .

In 1969 the atoll was proposed as an " Island for Science " , and was later recommended as a Ramsar Site . Major expeditions that came to the island to record its biota include the Whitney South Seas Expedition in 1922 , the National Geographic Society @-@ Oceanic Institute Expedition to Southeast Oceania of 1970 ? 71 and the Smithsonian expedition of 1975 . More recent expeditions include a new expedition by the Smithsonian in 1987 , one by Raleigh International in the same year , the Sir Peter Scott Commemorative Expedition of 1990 ? 91 and the Pitcairn Scientific Expedition of 1991 ? 92 . In 2012 , National Geographic Explorer @-@ in @-@ Residence Enric Sala produced *Sharks Of Lost Island* including Ducie and all the Pitcairn Islands . Because of its inaccessibility , Ducie is rarely approached , but cruise ships make one or two landings per year . In addition , unrecorded visits are known to be made by freighters and tankers that dump residues on the island or in the nearby waters .

= = = Sovereignty = = =

Although Captain Edward Edwards discovered the atoll in 1791 , Ducie was not considered a British possession . In 1867 Ducie was claimed by the United States under the Guano Islands Act , which established that an uninhabited territory with guano deposits could be claimed as a US possession , so long as it was unclaimed by any other country . Despite claims on several other territories , based on various documents such as the Guano Islands Act , neither the United States nor the United Kingdom recognised the sovereignty claimed by each other . Neither of the two considered that the mere discovery of an island was sufficient to claim sovereignty over it , and often a formal act of possession was considered the proper procedure to claim rights over a territory . Ultimately , the United States did not assert its sovereignty over most of its claimed territories .

Under the 1893 Pacific Order in Council , Pitcairn Island was governed by the High Commissioner of the British Western Pacific Territories in Fiji . On 19 December 1902 , commissioned by R. T. Simmons , the British Consul in Tahiti , Captain G. F. Jones and a group of Pitcairners visited the nearby islands and annexed them to the United Kingdom . In 1903 Ducie was annexed by the same procedure and placed under the authority of the Western Pacific High Commissioner . R. T. Simmons stated in a dispatch to the Foreign Office that James Russell McCoy had assured him that the islands had always been considered as dependencies of Pitcairn , and that he and other Pitcairners had frequently visited them in the past . This claim is contested by Donald McLoughlin on grounds of the distance between Pitcairn Island and Ducie Island and the lack of a suitable boat to navigate the distance between the two , casting doubt on whether they had ever visited Ducie .

On 4 August 1937 Captain J. W. Rivers @-@ Carnac , commander of HMS Leander , reaffirmed British sovereignty over Ducie by hoisting the Union Flag and placing boards proclaiming the island to be the property of King George VI . Ducie was one of several islands thought valuable for potential seaplane bases , though they did not materialise . In 1953 the Pacific Order in Council ceased to have effect and the British Governor of Fiji was appointed Governor of the Pitcairn Islands , which became a separate British colony . A new constitution for the Pitcairn Islands was enacted on 10 February 2010 , establishing that Ducie and the rest of the islands are ruled by a governor designated by the British monarch , presently (As of 23 July 2016) Elizabeth II . The governor has a duty to enforce the provisions of the constitution .

== Geography ==

Ducie lies 290 miles (470 km) east of Pitcairn Island and is claimed by some to be the southernmost atoll in the world at 24 degrees south latitude . However , Middleton Reef is at 29 degrees south latitude , so the assertion on behalf of Ducie Island is doubtful . Ducie Island 's land area is 170 acres (1 km²) and its maximum elevation , occurring on the Westward islet , is 15 feet (4 @. @ 6 m) .

Ducie is located 620 miles (1 @, @ 000 km) west of the edge of the Easter Plate . It was formed approximately 8 million years ago , after Oeno Island was formed by a hotspot that later caused a magma leak generated in the Oeno lineation . The leak spread over fracture zone FZ2 , which was formed by the third movement of the Pacific Plate . The atoll is part of the Oeno @-@ Henderson @-@ Ducie @-@ Crough seamount , speculated to be part of the southern Tuamotus .

The atoll consists of four islets : Acadia , Pandora , Westward and Edwards . The last three of these can be accessed on foot from Acadia at low tide . The islets were named by Harald Rehder and John Randall , who visited the atoll during an expedition by the Smithsonian Institution in 1975 .

Acadia Islet , along the atoll 's north and east rim , is larger than the other three islets combined , measuring 140 acres (57 ha) . Very long and thin , the islet is largely forested and is composed of ridges of coral rubble . It is named after the Acadia , a ship that was wrecked on Ducie in 1881 .

Pandora Islet , in the south , is the second largest . It is composed of sand and coral rubble that borders the lagoon . It is named after HMS Pandora .

Edwards Islet lies immediately to the east of Pandora Islet and has the same characteristics . It is named after Edward Edwards , captain of HMS Pandora .

Westward Islet , west of Pandora Islet , is the smallest . It appears sandy from a distance , but the soil is composed of coral rubble and dead shells . Its highest point rises 15 feet (4 @. @ 6 m) above average sea level . It is named after the Westward , the ship that carried the members of the National Geographic Society and the Oceanic Institute during their 1970 ? 71 expedition .

The atoll has a central lagoon , accessible by boat only by way of a channel 100 yards (91 m) wide located in the southwest , between Pandora and Westward Islets . It has a maximum depth of 52 feet (16 m) and its bottom consists of sand and coral . Whirlpools in the lagoon are common , caused by tunnels that drain the water from the lagoon into the ocean .

== Flora ==

The vegetation in the atoll is sparse , because of the lack of fresh water . Only two species of vascular plant are currently known to grow there ? one of the smallest such floras on any island . Acadia , Pandora and Edwards Islets are forested with *Heliotropium foertherianum* , but Westward Islet is not . *Pemphis acidula* has also been recorded on Ducie ; specimens were found during an expedition in 1991 .

During the expedition of Hugh Cuming in 1827 and the 1922 Whitney South Sea Expedition , *Lepturus* grass was found on Acadia Islet . However , it disappeared when storm waves deforested the island some time before the Smithsonian expedition of 1975 . Thus *H. foertherianum* now dominates the vegetation of the islets . Additionally , there are a number of species of coralline algae , including *Porolithon onkodes* , *Porolithon gardineri* , and *Caulerpa racemosa* .

== Fauna ==

The atoll is populated by several species of birds , fish and reptiles . In the lagoon , sparse living coral still can be found ; the dominant species is *Montipora bilaminata* (family *Acroporidae*) . Most of the coral in the lagoon is dead , presumed to have been killed by influxes of cold water .

== Birds ==

Though no terrestrial birds are found on the atoll , Ducie Island is well known for the seabirds that

breed there . Birds that have been recorded nesting on the atoll include the red @-@ billed tropicbird , red @-@ tailed tropicbird , fairy tern , great frigatebird , bristle @-@ thighed curlew , masked booby and red @-@ footed booby . A number of gull species , including the sooty tern , blue noddy , brown noddy , lesser noddy and white tern , have been recorded , as have several members of the Procellariidae family : Kermadec petrel , Trindade petrel , Murphy 's petrel and Christmas shearwater .

The island is particularly important for Murphy 's petrel , as more than 90 % of its world population breeds on Ducie . Around 3000 pairs of Christmas shearwaters , about 5 % of the world 's total population , can be found on the island too . Meanwhile , the red @-@ tailed tropicbirds and fairy terns that breed on Ducie are around 1 % of the world population of each species . Phoenix petrels , which previously inhabited the atoll , apparently disappeared between the Whitney expedition in 1922 and the 1991 ? 92 Pitcairn Scientific Expedition . The island has been identified by BirdLife International as an Important Bird Area (IBA) principally for its colonies of Murphy 's , herald and Kermadec petrels , and Christmas shearwaters .

= = = Fish = = =

In the lagoon there are around 138 fish species , which also inhabit southeastern Oceania , the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean . The lagoon is noted for its poisonous fishes and dangerous sharks . The yellow @-@ edged lyretail , the blacktip grouper , and the greasy grouper are known to cause ciguatera poisoning . The lagoon is also inhabited by Galápagos sharks and the whitetip reef shark . The Galápagos shark is dangerous to humans , while the whitetips are seldom aggressive unless provoked . Five species are found exclusively around the Pitcairn Islands : Sargocentron megalops (a species of squirrelfish) , the spiny butterflyfish , the Henderson triplefin (a species of threefin blenny) , an unnamed species of Alticus (a genus of combtooth blenny) and an unnamed species of Ammodytes (a genus of sand lance) .

= = = Terrestrial vertebrates = = =

Lizards that inhabit the island include the white @-@ bellied skink (Emoia cyanura) , photographed by E. H. Quayle during an expedition in 1922 , and a lizard reported in the journal of an expedition in 1935 by James Chapin . The species of the latter was uncertain , but it was thought to be a gecko , possibly either an oceanic gecko (Gehyra oceanica) or a mourning gecko (Lepidodactylus lugubris) . The 1991 ? 92 Pitcairn Scientific Expedition found specimens of both the mourning gecko and the white @-@ bellied skink . The only mammal known to inhabit Ducie is the Polynesian rat ; there has been a successful programme to eradicate these , to aid the conservation of bird species threatened by the increasing rat population . Green sea turtles feed on Ducie , but have not been seen to breed there .