

East Caicos: Our Past, Our Present, Our Future





Environment of East Caicos

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East Caicos is an important place for birds. Over 1,000 flamingos were counted there in early 2024, representing one quarter of all the flamingos in TCI.



There are approximately 11,000 of Reddish Egret birds in the world. This species nests on East Caicos where we found almost 150 individuals in January 2024. That's more than 1% of the world's population just on East Caicos!



East Caicos is dotted with ponds and pools (some of which are known as blue holes). Many are Anchialine ponds or pools. Anchialine means “connected to the sea”. These ponds are connected to the sea through tunnels, cracks or fissures in the limestone even though they may be well inland.





The limestone rock of TCI weathers easily into extensive cave systems. Many of these on East Caicos have been visited rarely. Cave systems are home to troglodytic species – species which rarely if ever see the light of day. They often show adaptations to living in caves such as losing their eyesight. The caves on East Caicos are an amazing resource and importantly, an attraction for visitors in the same way that Conch Bar Caves on Middle Caicos are. They form an important part of the evidence of the earliest Caribbean peoples – the Lucayan and Taino peoples – who settled these islands.

Pool systems in caves are also a particular feature of East Caicos. These may not look like they support much life, tucked away in the dark but there are some species of shrimp and tiny fish (“pupfish”) found in caves elsewhere in TCI that are found no-where else on earth. Others remain to be discovered particularly in East Caicos caves which have been explored only rarely – an exciting prospect for the young TCI scientists of the future.



There are over 500 species of plants in TCI and over half (so far) have been found on East Caicos. Of these eight are endemic to TCI (found nowhere else on earth). All eight endemic plants of TCI are found on East Caicos.



East Caicos also hosts nationally important nesting populations of green and hawksbill turtles. Recent surveys have shown turtle nesting is now happening in areas where it's been historically absent, such as the northern shores of East Caicos.



Mapping Community Values



What we did

- Worked with community members South, Middle and North Caicos who have knowledge of East Caicos
- Community workshops and interviews
- Community members drew on maps to identify areas of importance
- Discussed the value and importance of places generating rich stories on local knowledge, cultural practices, past and present-day use



Cultural Values

The cultural benefits people obtain from the environment and sea around East Caicos

These include cultural, spiritual, heritage and recreational values.



Heritage

- Jacksonville was the economic centre of East Caicos during the 1800s
- **Historical settlements:** Stories surrounding historical colonial buildings, the railway, and springs.
- **Sisal Production:** In the late 1880s, sisal, an Algarve plant was grown on East Caicos for its strong fibres, which was used to produce rope and twine.



Heritage

- The largest caves on the island were mined for bat guano during the 1880s which was used as a fertiliser.
- Paintings from Lucayan civilisations in the cave system.
- In the late 1880s, cattle ranching was prominent on the island to source meat to the surrounding islands.



Recreation

- Discussions highlighted recreational opportunities for locals and tourists including:
 - Camping sites for fish excursions
 - Diving opportunities close to reefs and shipwrecks
 - Recreational fishing particularly, bone fishing for catch and release
 - Picnic areas and sight-seeing close to beaches, vantage points and scenic landscapes
 - Snorkeling sites, areas for beach combing and kayaking.





**Supporting
human life**

The benefits that East Caicos provides directly to humans for meeting basic needs e.g food, water, raw materials.

Fishing

Identified locations for different types of artisanal fisheries:

- Lobster fishing on the northern shores and reefs
- Conch fishing primarily for queen conch detailed descriptions of fishing practices in the inshore banks
- Recreational bone fishing in the shallows and creeks
- Reef fishing
- Game fishing (e.g sail fish, marlin, yellowfin Jacks)





Plant foods and medicines

- Locally named Pear Bush (*Opuntia dillenii*) buds from the tree added with rice to make a traditional dish “Buds and Rice” with fish and coleslaw.
- The sapodilla, or “dilly” is an edible fruit founds on East Caicos and other islands.
- Madeira bark the leaves are boiled to make a purple tea, mixed with honey, cleanses the body, used to support women’s issues.
- Sea Bush Tea drunk for common colds, aches, pains and healing skin rashes and to cleanse the body.



Benefits for the environment

- *The benefits that East Caicos provides to support the environment such as mangroves providing spawning grounds of fish.*

Benefits for the environment

- **Habitats** : For birds, iguanas, plants, turtles, sharks
- **Spawning grounds**: For turtles, lobster, conch and snapper.
- **Coastal Protection**: The role of mangroves and reefs in mitigating damage from hurricanes
- **Soil fertility**: Descriptions of specific areas on East Caicos with high soil fertility



Role of local knowledge gathered from maps

- Communities identified uses and places of ecological and heritage importance on East Caicos
- Identified future livelihood opportunities (e.g ecotourism)
- Potential for documented knowledge to be shared as education resources to preserve and share knowledge



THANK YOU

