



THE ASCENSION ISLAND ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH PERMITTING POLICY
A GUIDE FOR RESEARCHERS



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AIMS

Ascension Island has a rich history of scientific exploration, and Ascension Island Government (AIG) is committed to supporting research that informs local environmental decision making, enhances our understanding of the Island's natural and physical environments, and which contributes to broader environmental research objectives. With interest in Ascension Island as a venue for scientific research increasing, AIG is also determined that research should be conducted within a coordinated framework that prevents duplication, minimises environmental impact, and ensures that the knowledge generated is captured for the benefit of the Island, its people and its wildlife. The **Environmental Research Permitting Scheme** aims to provide such a framework.

This guide outlines the process for applying for an Environmental Research Permit, as well as advice on some practical aspects of conducting scientific research on Ascension Island.

SCOPE

The Environmental Research Permitting Scheme covers academic (i.e. not-for-profit) research on all components of the natural and physical environment within the 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone, including biodiversity, geology, atmosphere and oceans, as well as aspects of the human environment such as water and air quality, waste management and pollution. It **does not apply** to prospecting or bioprospecting where the primary aim is to develop commercial opportunities for the researcher or the researcher's organisation. Organisations or researchers intending to engage in prospecting or other commercial research must approach Ascension Island Government outside of this process to discuss terms.

APPLICATION PROCESS

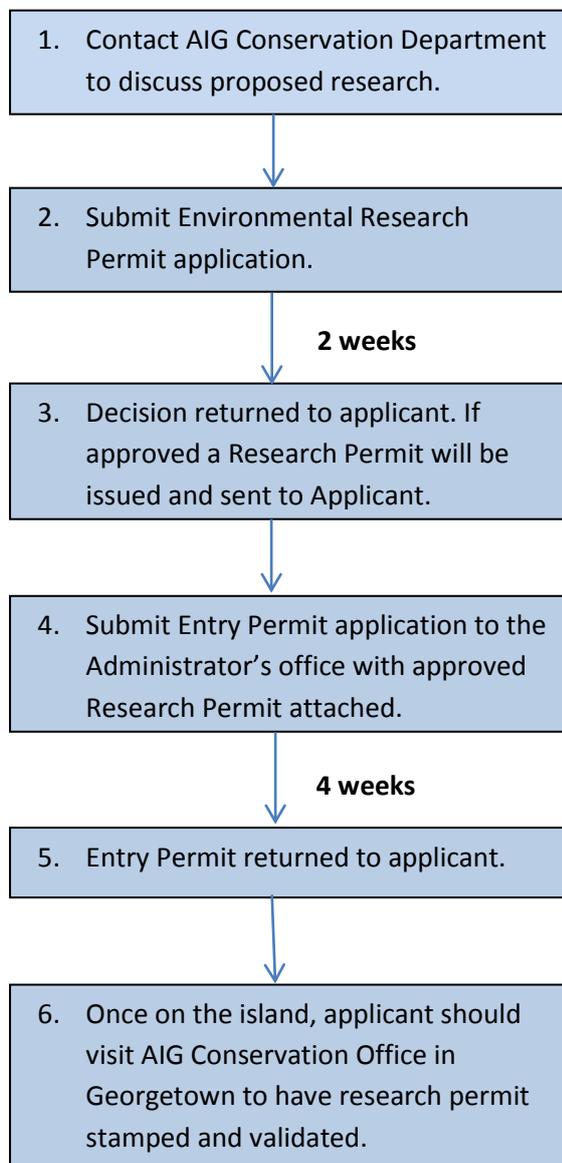
Any individual or organisation wishing to undertake scientific research on the physical, natural or human environment on Ascension Island must obtain an **Environmental Research Permit (ERP)** before travelling to the Island. This is a requirement of entry to Ascension Island under the Entry Control Ordinance and entry permits will only be granted if accompanied by a valid ERP. Research that involves capturing, harming or killing a Protected Species as defined under the Wildlife Protection Ordinance 2013 will also require a **Protected Wildlife Research License** that can be applied for in the same form. Application forms can be obtained from the [AIG website](#) or by emailing (conservationenquiries@ascension.gov.ac).

The ERP programme is coordinated by AIG Conservation Department who will review applications and return a decision to the applicant within 2 weeks of submission. The Department may approve, request amendments to, or decline research proposals and must explain the reasons for its decision in its response to the applicant. Reasons for declining an application may include an excessive risk of damage to protected wildlife or habitats, duplication of previous research or the failure of the applicant to adhere to the terms of previous ERPs. Decisions may be appealed with the

Administrator of Ascension Island who holds the final say over access to the Island. However, we recommend that researchers contact AIG Conservation Department (conservationenquiries@ascension.gov.ac) at an early stage in project planning to ensure that there will be no unforeseen problems.

Subject to approval, the applicant must then submit their ERP along with a completed [Business/Scientific/Research Visitor Entry Permit Application](#) through the standard Ascension Island Government entry control system. For more information please visit: <http://www.ascension-island.gov.ac/visiting-the-island/>. Applications that are not accompanied by a valid ERP will not be processed. There is a £25 per person fee for individuals entering Ascension Island under a scientific/research permit that **cannot be waived** other than in exceptional circumstances. Entry Permit Applications must be received at least 4 weeks prior to the proposed arrival date to enable them to be processed and returned to the applicant.

PROCESS FOR APPLYING:



COMPLETING AN ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH PERMIT APPLICATION: GUIDANCE NOTES

B. APPLICANT DETAILS.

Sections 1-4: Please provide the name, position, affiliation and contact details of the lead applicant. This person will be responsible for ensuring that the agreed programme of research is adhered to and that all conditions and reporting obligations of the ERP are met.

Section 5: Please also provide the names and affiliations of any collaborators involved in the proposed research. This should include any members of the research team visiting Ascension Island, any local partners, and key external collaborators involved in processing or analysing samples collected during fieldwork.

C. DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

Section 2: These should be the dates of arrival on and departure from Ascension Island. An ERP is valid for one research visit only (maximum duration of 3 months under a Scientific/Research Visitor Entry Permit, but with possibility for extension). Subsequent visits will each require a new ERP. Applications for multiple or on-going ERPs will not be considered because aims and methodology may change over time.

Section 3: Ascension Island has active military bases and as such there are sensitivities regarding access to some areas. The Island also has nature reserves, national parks and nature sanctuaries with restrictions on the activities that can take place within them. To avoid delays and disappointments, applicants should therefore provide a full list of locations where they intend to work so that access can be cleared with relevant authorities.

Section 4: Applications to conduct research on Ascension Island are assessed based on potential environmental impacts rather than on scientific merit and academic rigour. Research outlines should therefore provide only enough background to explain why the research is needed and what questions will be addressed, and focus more on the methodology that will be used. Proposals that duplicate previous work are unlikely to be approved, particularly where the proposed activities involve harm to protected wildlife or habitats.

Section 5: AIG is committed to ensuring that scientific research contributes to enhanced environmental management on Ascension Island wherever possible. However, the Government recognises that some research may not benefit the Island directly, but may contribute to broader environmental research goals and global datasets. Such research should also be encouraged provided that it is not to the detriment of the Island. Applications will not be rejected based on a lack of local impacts, but we do ask that researchers flag up any practical ways in which the outcomes of their proposed research can benefit the local environment.

Section 6: AIG Conservation Department will make its own assessment of potential environmental impacts of the proposed research based on the details supplied in the project outline. Applicants should use this section to explain what mitigation measures they plan to put in place to minimise

any adverse impacts of their research on wildlife and habitats. The ERP scheme is intended to minimise potential impacts to the environment by working with visiting researchers during the planning process, rather than to screen applications. It is important that applicants do not downplay any potential environmental risks of their work. Misleading statements about proposed methods may result in future applications being rejected.

Section 7: Ascension Island has numerous military and communications installations that operate on radio frequencies and the Island therefore operates a strict policy on RF emissions. Scientific equipment that emits strong RF signals may disrupt Island operations (and vice versa). Researchers wishing to use such equipment should provide a list of frequencies that they intend to use so that these can be cleared with the relevant Island users. Note: this does not include two-way radios or other mobile communication devices.

Section 8: Any scientific samples that are to be exported from Ascension Island must be declared in this section along with an estimate of quantity. If approved, these will be added as endorsements to the ERP which will act as proof of permission to export if questioned by Borders and Customs officials. Attempting to export samples without a valid ERP is a violation of the terms of entry to Ascension Island and may result in future ERPs and/or entry permits being denied.

Section 9: Ascension Island is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and AIG is committed to enforcing this agreement. Researchers wishing to export samples from species listed under Appendix 1 or 2 of CITES are therefore required to obtain the relevant import and export permits before applying for an ERP and must submit copies of the approved permits along with their application. Further details on applying for CITES permits can be obtained by emailing conservationenquiries@ascension.gov.ac.

Section 10: The [Wildlife Protection Ordinance 2013](#) is the primary legislation protecting native and endemic species on Ascension Island. Under Article 4 of the Ordinance, any person wishing to carry out scientific research that involves the capture, harming or killing of a protected species is required to obtain a Protected Wildlife Research License. For ease, this license is incorporated into the ERP application process. Researchers should refer to the [Schedule](#) of the Ordinance to check whether their proposed research requires a license and complete section D if necessary.

D. PROTECTED WILDLIFE RESEARCH LICENSE

The vast majority of researchers are committed to minimising any undue harm, stress or suffering to the species that they work with. The Protected Wildlife Research License aims to ensure that these principles are adhered to and that the benefits of scientific research outweigh its potential impacts. Under Article 4 of the Wildlife Protection Ordinance, Protected Wildlife Research Licenses are issued subject to the Administrator or his appointed representative being satisfied that the purpose of the proposed research is to advance the conservation of protected species. **Applications to carry out research that is excessively invasive and purely academic in nature (i.e. has no applied benefits for species conservation) are unlikely to be approved.**

Section 2. Applicants should describe in detail any invasive procedures that will be applied to protected species, including capture techniques, sampling procedures and/or methods for

euthanasia, and indicate the number of individuals that will be affected. Applicants are required to justify the use of any invasive or destructive methods, both in terms of potential outcomes and lack of non-invasive alternatives, and keep sample sizes to the minimum needed to achieve the stated aims of the research.

Section 3. Applicants should name the individuals who will be responsible for carrying out the invasive procedures described in Section 2 and outline their level of competency. This includes any professional qualifications (e.g. bird ringing permits), training courses attended and/or the number of years' experience carrying out similar procedures.

Section 4. Applicants should demonstrate that all reasonable precautions to minimise disturbance, harm or suffering to protected species have been taken in the study design, both at an individual and population level.

E. CAPACITY BUILDING, DATA SHARING AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Knowledge transfer and benefit sharing are key themes of the Convention on Biological Diversity, to which Ascension Island is a signatory, and it is the policy of AIG that the benefits of scientific research should accrue to all stakeholders in a fair and equitable manner. These include benefits to the researcher and their institutions through academic recognition, career advancement and the furthering of institutional goals; benefits to local environmental agencies through training opportunities and gathering of the evidence base to support local decision making; and benefits to the local community through exposure to scientific research and an enhanced understanding of their environment. The Environmental Research Permitting Policy provides the formal structure to enable this benefit sharing.

Section 1. AIG recognises that not all research projects will present opportunities for local capacity building. Nevertheless, visiting researchers are encouraged to consider ways in which local environmental workers can be exposed to their work and develop skills and experience. AIG Conservation Department has developed long-standing collaborations with a number of external researchers through such initiatives to the benefit of all involved.

Section 2. Details of how the results of the proposed research will be disseminated. We particularly encourage researchers to consider how their research can be communicated to the local community on Ascension Island and to other non-specialist audiences. For example, in the past many researchers have contributed short articles to AIG Conservation Department's 'Conservation Quarterly' newsletter or to the local Islander newspaper.

In addition, ERPs are issued under the condition that researchers provide AIG with:

- A completed research reporting form within 1 month of the end of each visit to Ascension Island as stated in Section B2. This allows AIG to follow the progress of scientific work being conducted on the Island and to benefit from any preliminary findings prior to publication of the data in other forums.

- Copies of all publications, articles and academic theses arising from research on Ascension Island in a timely manner. These should be in English and ideally provided in an electronic format. Published materials will be archived in the Ascension Island Natural Sciences Library as a resource for the Government, community and other visiting scientists and researchers.
- Copies of original datasets collected during the research when requested (see below for data access and management policy).

DATA ACCESS AND MANAGEMENT

AIG recognises that access to data is a sensitive issue and is committed to protecting the intellectual property rights of researchers. However, access to raw datasets is also essential to ensure that local stakeholders benefit fully from research carried out on the Island, as well as avoiding duplication and highlighting potential collaborations. Datasets that are gathered and never published, or which are published in a heavily summarised form are effectively lost from the Island. If underpinned by clear access management agreements, storing datasets within a central repository can be of mutual benefit to all stakeholders, revealing potential synergies between projects and enabling multidisciplinary and meta-analytical research that is beyond the scope of individual projects. Indeed, many academic journals now require that original datasets are deposited in open access repositories and data-sharing requirements are currently being rolled out across the South Atlantic UK Overseas Territories (SAOTs).

The Falkland Islands-based South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI) has recently launched the South Atlantic Information Management System (SAIMS) which will act as a hub for archiving environmental data collected within the South Atlantic UK Overseas Territories (SAOTs). Environmental datasets collected on Ascension Island are stored on a secure server along with a metadata catalogue that records the name and contact details of the dataset owner, access restrictions and details of where, when and how the data was collected. **Datasets deposited by visiting researchers will never be published (either in full or summarised form) or released to third parties.** Instead, the SAIMS system will make metadata catalogues available through an internet portal allowing viewers to view the range of environmental data that has been collected and directing enquiries to the intellectual property right holder.

Exemptions: AIG recognises that because of their size or nature some datasets will not be appropriate for archiving on-island (e.g. large atmospheric datasets). However, metadata for inclusion into SAIMS should still be provided. Some datasets may also need post-processing to contextualise them. Researchers should agree terms and a timeline for depositing datasets with AIG Conservation Department before leaving the Island. Failure to honour any reasonable requests for data may result in future Environmental Research Permits being declined.

PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF CARRYING OUT RESEARCH ON ASCENSION ISLAND

ANIMAL TAGGING AND BIRD RINGING

Where animals are to be fitted with unique identifying marks or tags it is particularly important that researchers lodge copies of tagging inventories and accompanying datasets with AIG Conservation Department so that recaptures can be assigned to the correct individuals and researchers.

Although Ascension Island is a UK Overseas Territory, it is not governed by UK law regarding animal marking. Nevertheless, AIG would prefer that all animal tagging is carried out in accordance with relevant UK standards. As such, AIG Conservation Department require that all bird ringing be conducted using rings issued by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) so that records are held within a single, centralised repository. The BTO has clear licensing regulations on who can fit these rings. For more information please <http://www.bto.org/>.

IMPORT OF EQUIPMENT, CHEMICALS AND BIOLOGICAL MATERIAL

BIOSECURITY. AIG is increasingly concerned about biosecurity on Ascension Island and is working towards closing potential routes for further species introductions. Researchers that work with similar species or in similar environments around the world are potential vectors for biological invasions and should be particularly vigilant. We ask that all field equipment and clothing (including boots) should be thoroughly cleaned before visiting Ascension Island to minimise this risk. The import of biological specimens and growing media (e.g. soil) is not permitted without the written permission of AIG.

CHEMICALS, REAGENTS AND EQUIPMENT. Ascension Island is remote and no chemicals or reagents can be acquired locally. Spare parts for equipment may also be impossible to source. Noxious, flammable or explosive chemicals that qualify as Dangerous Air Cargo cannot be transported on RAF flights to Ascension Island and must be shipped to Ascension Island well in advance. Ships from the UK depart approximately monthly and take approximately 4 weeks. However, not all sailings will accept Class 1 hazardous materials and special arrangements may need to be made. We suggest that researchers wishing to ship potentially hazardous cargo contact AIG's shipping agent, [Richard James International](#), for further advice.

LOCAL LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

AIG Conservation Department is happy to offer advice on appropriate timings and locations for research and study design, both during pre-planning phases and while on island. However, the Department has limited resources with which to meet a considerable and increasing workload. As such the Department will not always be able to provide local logistical support in terms of vehicles or use of office space, unless these have been arranged in advance through the development of collaborative research projects. Government accommodation and vehicles are reserved for AIG staff

only and will not be available to visiting researchers, unless with specific prior agreement. Accommodation, rental cars and internet access can all be arranged through the Obsidian Hotel (<http://www.obsidian.co.ac/hotel.html>), although we advise reserving vehicles well in advance as they are often booked up.