

CAYMAN ISLANDS

Wildlife Guide



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GRAND CAYMAN | CAYMAN BRAC | LITTLE CAYMAN

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Wildlife Guide



This guide aims to provide you with tools and information to enjoy the incredible wildlife found in the Cayman Islands. From rare orchids and traditional plants, to blue dragons and booby birds, you will find a whole range of flora and fauna across the three islands of Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

This guide was originally produced with the help of wildlife journalist James Fair who visited Cayman in 2012. James has worked as an environmental journalist since the mid-1990s and said about the destination: "What I love about the Cayman Islands is that nothing runs away from you. It's as if you are as much an attraction for the wildlife, as the wildlife is for you." See more of James' work at www.jamesfairwildlife.co.uk or follow him on Twitter @jamesfairwild

Some of the photos in this guide have been provided by professional wildlife photographer Will Burrard-Lucas whose distinctive and innovative approach to wildlife photography has earned him international recognition. Through his work, Will aims to inspire people to celebrate and conserve the natural wonders of our planet. To find out more, visit Will's website www.burrard-lucas.com or follow him on Facebook BLphotography.

"The Cayman Islands teem with wildlife. Wherever you are, you don't have to travel far to escape the areas of human habitation and you will soon find yourself surrounded by a menagerie of birds, butterflies, lizards and other creatures. Most of the animals have no fear of humans which makes for some wonderful, intimate encounters. And that is just the wildlife on land... the underwater world is also breathtakingly beautiful."

Will Burrard-Lucas

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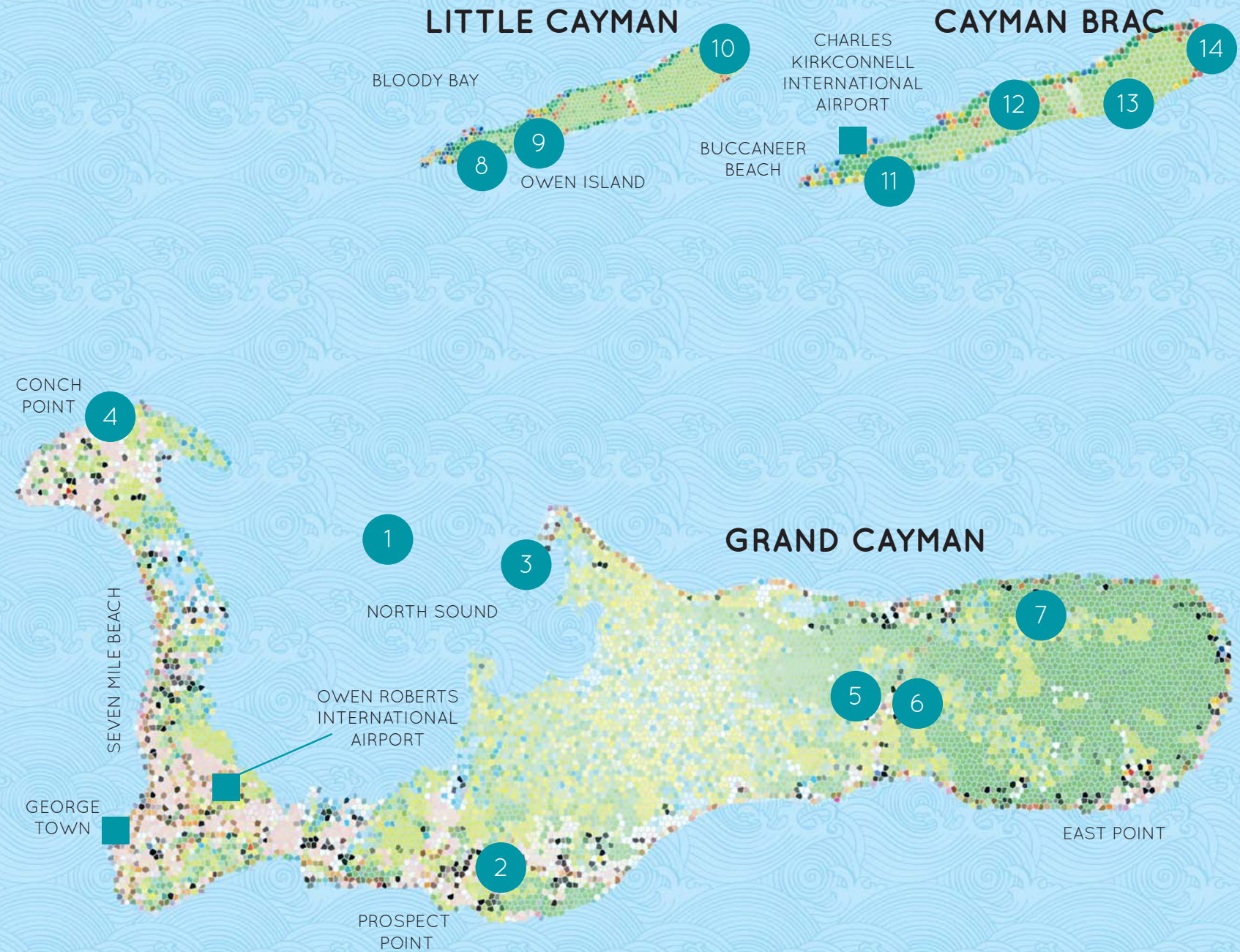
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With special thanks to:

Stuart Mailer
Luke Harding
Patricia Bradley
Will Burrard-Lucas

Fred Burton
Janice Blumenthal
Ann Stafford
Jane Haakonsson

Tanja Laaser
John Bothwell
Peter Hillenbrand
Raybel Robles



WILDLIFE IN THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

1. The Cayman Ridge

The Cayman Islands are part of a mountain range called the Cayman Ridge, which rises more than 7,500m from the ocean floor. The abyss known as the Cayman Trench is very deep and home to the hottest hydrothermal vents in the world. These are cracks in the seabed from which super-heated water up to 450°C emerges. Unique life forms live here, including a species of eyeless shrimp that has a light-sensing organ on its back. The islands themselves are flat, with the highest point above sea level being near the east end of Cayman Brac – and that's just 46.6m.

2. Las Tortugas

Christopher Columbus discovered the Cayman Islands in 1503 and named them Las Tortugas due to the large number of turtles that were found there. By 1530 the name Caymanas was being used to describe the islands, a word derived from the Carib Indian word for the marine crocodile that is now known to have lived there.

3. Rivers

There are no rivers in the Cayman Islands. As the islands are the peaks of a limestone mountain, and limestone is very porous, the water runs through it rather than off it. This lack of 'run-off' means that the visibility in the sea is exceptional and makes Cayman one of the world's top diving locations.

4. Parrotfish

There are many parrotfish in the Cayman Islands. Did you know that as well as being able to change from being male to being female and back again, parrotfish excrete sand? They munch on rock and coral, which comes out as sand. Perhaps that is why there are so many great beaches on the islands...

5. Blue Dragon

Cayman has its very own blue dragon – an iguana found nowhere else in the world which is incredibly rare and really is blue. It was estimated that there were only 25 of these amazing beasts remaining in 2002, making the species 'functionally extinct', but thanks to an extensive breeding programme in Grand Cayman, their numbers are on the rise. 2018 saw a major milestone in the release of the 1,000th blue iguana into the wild. They are now classified as 'Endangered' and are prevalent enough to be spotted. Find out more on page 16.



6. Stingray City

In the middle of North Sound on Grand Cayman, wild Southern stingrays gather in huge numbers at a place called 'Stingray City'. If you stand still in the warm, waist-deep water, they will swim gently around your legs.

7. Bats

The only native land mammals of the Cayman Islands are bats. Some of them only eat fruit, and some only eat insects such as moths, beetles and mosquitoes. There's also the buffy flower bat, which is only found in the Caribbean and drinks nectar from flowers like a hummingbird.

8. Turtles

The Cayman Islands is home to three turtle species: the green, the loggerhead and the hawksbill. Green and loggerhead turtles nest on the beaches all around the Cayman Islands, including Seven Mile Beach. From May to September, females crawl up onto the beach and lay eggs in the sand, and from July to November, the eggs hatch. Each nest produces about 100 baby sea turtles! Hawksbill turtles can be seen in Cayman waters while snorkelling or scuba diving. By the early 20th century, the Cayman turtle nesting population was nearly extinct, but due to conservation efforts, nesting numbers are now increasing each year.

9. Birds

There are 253 bird species in the Cayman Islands, with Little Cayman being home to one of the largest colonies of red-footed boobies in the western hemisphere. A close relative of the Atlantic gannet, these remarkable birds can be away for more than 12 hours, flying up to 125km in a single day on a fishing trip, and then 125km back home again.

10. Bioluminescence

The spectacular phenomenon of bioluminescence can be found in a secret bay on Grand Cayman, one of only a dozen places worldwide. This extraordinary natural light show is caused by a high concentration of a particular species of plankton alongside red mangroves. Minimal light movement in the sheltered water results in a stunning bioluminescent light, best seen on dark nights on a tour with Cayman Kayaks or Cayman Sea Elements.

MARINE *Life*



Everyone should have ‘swimming with stingrays’ on their bucketlist. The name is misleading as these oval-shaped rays with a wingspan of up to 1.8m are gentle with people (if not threatened or stepped on) and are surprisingly enchanting. An unmissable natural wildlife experience, Stingray City was born during the mid-1980s when the rays learned to gather in a particular spot in Grand Cayman’s North Sound to feed on scraps thrown overboard by fishermen.

Take a trip with a licensed boat operator to the sandbar, a shallow area of clear water where the majestic stingrays congregate. Alternatively thrill seekers can dive with these gentle creatures, watching as they swim around their heads.

Snorkelling is a fantastic way to explore the underwater world of the Cayman Islands and can be done easily from the shore. Keep your eyes peeled for brightly coloured fish and coral, queen conch, sponges and maybe even a nurse shark or two.

If you’re looking for real adventure, then the Bloody Bay Marine Park off Little Cayman is the place to be. Renowned as being one of the greatest dive sites in the world, here the ocean plunges vertically to a depth of 1,800m. Here you’ll find eagle rays, sharks and huge Nassau groupers and be amazed by the abundance of coral.

All over the world, coral is under threat from issues as diverse as disease, fishing, pollution and global warming, but on Little Cayman something is being done about this. Founded in 1998, the Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI) is researching the impacts of these threats and what can be done about them. CCMI scientists give talks and welcome visitors to help with data collection of the coral. If you are interested and want to find out more, see www.reefresearch.org

In addition to the CCMI, the Department of Environment (DoE) in the Cayman Islands has set up Marine Parks, Replenishment Zones, Environmental Zones and Animal Sanctuaries to help protect its wildlife and the fragile ecosystem.



Southern stingray

- **Looks like...** A large, diamond-shaped flat fish that can be up to 1.8m wide from one ‘wing’ tip to the other. It has a long, barbed tail and is olive-brown in colour, though the underside is completely white.
- **Eats...** Shellfish, crustaceans and small fish, which they hunt by disturbing them from the sandy seabed.
- **Can be seen at...** Stingray City and Stingray Sandbar in North Sound off Grand Cayman
- **Did you know...** Female southern stingrays grow to more than twice the size of males – while females may grow up to 1.8m, males can only manage 0.75m.



Queen conch

- **Looks like...** A spiky large shell that can grow up to 30cm long. It can weigh more than 2kg.
- **Eats...** Algae and detritus on the seabed.
- **Can be seen at...** Almost anywhere where there are shallow waters with a sandy seabed and seagrass, or among coral reefs. Point of Sand and Owen Island, on Little Cayman, are excellent places to start.
- **Did you know...** A queen conch lives on average for between 20 and 30 years, but can live to be up to 40. And when carrying oxygen, this mollusc's blood appears to be blue, not red!

For more information about Stingray City and the many operators offering tours see www.visitcaymanislands.com

Many operators will also take you snorkelling. There's good snorkelling off Seven Mile Beach on Grand Cayman, and other popular spots include Cemetery Beach, Smith Cove, Eden Rock and Devil's Grotto.

The Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI) offers various courses, talks and information sessions for visitors of all ages. www.reefresearch.org

Lionfish are an invasive species in the Cayman Islands and eat unsustainable numbers of young reef fish. Some dive operators offer 'lionfish safaris' in which you can join a spearfishing expedition. More info: www.ambassadordivers.com, www.oceanfrontiers.com or www.divetech.com



As well as being famous for rum punch and steel bands, the Caribbean is surely the area of the world most closely identified with 'pirates' – at least, if you go back 400 years or so. But the Cayman Islands still have their own pirates, and you can watch them every day at the National Trust Booby Pond Nature Reserve on Little Cayman.

Arrive here an hour or so before sunset and look for the red-footed boobies returning from their day's fishing. Most of them have dark-brown plumage (though some are snowy-white with brown wingtips), but they all have one thing in common: their blood-red feet and dagger-shaped bills.

Now look for the much larger magnificent frigatebirds, iridescent-black beasts with a huge two metre wingspan. These frigatebirds try to force the boobies to regurgitate the meals that they have been out all day catching for their young. These aerial acrobatics are known as 'kleptoparasitism' and can be spectacular to watch. Strangely, once the boobies have landed on their roosting tree, they're safe.

There's plenty of other birdlife here, including egrets and herons stalking for fish in the shallows, but it's the antics of the boobies and the frigatebirds that make this a must-see location for any visitor to Little Cayman.

There are more booby birds found on Cayman Brac. These are brown boobies – smart, chocolate-brown birds with striking yellow-pink bills and pure-white under bellies – and they nest at the east end of the island. The aerial antics of the juveniles learning how to fly are remarkable.

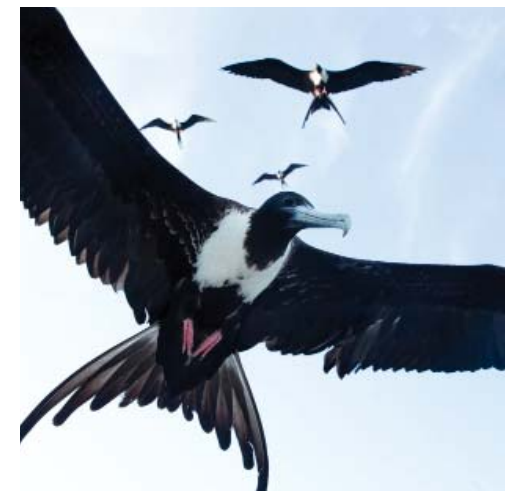


Image credit: Luke Massey



Also on 'the Brac' is a quite different bird: the Cayman Brac parrot. In the dry forest reserve in the middle of the island, listen out for these birds' raucous squabbling and peer into the upper reaches of the canopy. You may only get fleeting glances, as despite recovering from the effects of hurricane Paloma in 2009, there are only around 600 of this unique parrot left in the world.

Also much-loved, but considerably more common, are the tiny bananaquits, which can be seen just about anywhere. They have distinctive yellow breasts and will come and eat sugar and other titbits from garden feeders.

In total, the Cayman Islands have a record of 253 different bird species, though only 50 of these – and all of the birds mentioned – breed there. And all but six of the breeding birds are resident, so they can be seen at any time of year.

Of the rest, 90 are migrants, including such beauties as great and snowy egrets and great blue herons, while more than 80 are irregular or often accidental visitors. Because of Cayman's position between North and South America 80% of the birds found there are migrants.

But because Cayman is relatively unexplored by birders, those who do take the trouble to look are more likely to find surprises. "They can expect the unexpected," notes resident biologist and bird lover Stuart Mailer.



Brac Parrot

- **Looks like...** Medium-sized, green parrot with distinctive rosy-pink on the throat and cheeks, with white on its forehead and around its eyes.
- **Eats...** Fruit and seeds of a wide variety of fruits, including mangos and papayas.
- **Can be seen...** Only on Cayman Brac.
- **Did you know...** The Brac parrot also survived on Little Cayman well into the 20th century – until a hurricane hit the island in 1932. It's thought that the hurricane destroyed too many trees, and the parrot was left with little habitat to cling on to.



Red-footed booby

- **Looks like...** A large brown or white seabird with a long, dagger-like, pale blue bill and bright red legs.
- **Eats...** Fish – mainly flying fish or squid. They forage far out at sea and use spectacular 'plunge-diving' to seize their prey beneath the surface.
- **Can be seen...** At the Booby Pond Nature Reserve on Little Cayman – they return from their fishing expeditions towards the end of the day.
- **Did you know...** They're nimble birds and can even catch flying fish in flight. They often feed in association with predators such as tuna and dolphins, which herd shoals of fish to the surface.

To see the red-footed boobies coming into roost, go to the National Trust House at the Booby Pond Nature Reserve. There's no charge. For more information email: naturecayman@gov.ky

The Cayman Brac Parrot Reserve is also free, and you can visit it on your own or with a free guide. More information at www.naturecayman.com or email naturecayman@gov.ky

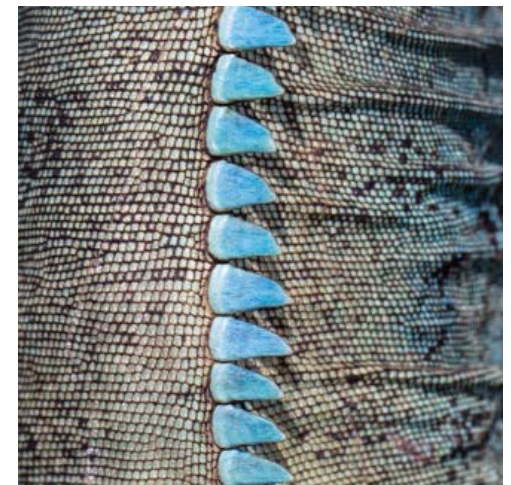
For birding tours on Grand Cayman, contact the National Trust. For more information see www.nationaltrust.org.ky/tours or email tours@nationaltrust.ky



The Cayman Islands has its very own resident dragons. One – the blue iguana (only found on Grand Cayman) – is bright blue with red eyes, a long, forked tongue and a crest running the length of its back and tail. The other is its close relative, the Sister Islands rock iguana (SIRI) which can only be found on Little Cayman and Cayman Brac. Both species can grow up to 1.5m long and have quite the story to tell.

Once prevalent in the Cayman Islands with numbers in the thousands, the blue iguana has suffered at the hands of increasing threats from people, stray dogs and cats and the invasive green iguana. In 2002 it was estimated that there were less than 25 of these magnificent dragons left in the Cayman Islands, making it one of the rarest reptiles on earth.

But now, thanks to the Blue Iguana Conservation programme (formerly known as the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme), founded by British ecologist Fred Burton, there are estimated to be 1,100 blue iguanas living in the wild. Although still incredibly rare, the species is now considered 'endangered' as opposed to 'functionally extinct.' Blue Iguana Conservation is funded and operated by the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, with its home being at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park in the East End of Grand Cayman.



Visitors to the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park may see the blue iguanas in the park, but a tour of the breeding facility will help you to learn more about how this incredible creature was brought back from the brink. It's even possible to adopt your own blue iguana! Contact bic@nationaltrust.org.ky for more information.



Just as Grand Cayman is the only place in the world where you'll find the blue iguana, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac are the only places you'll find the Sister Islands rock iguana. Also defined as 'critically endangered' the SIRI population is being closely monitored by the Department of Environment (DoE). Both endemic species are under threat from the invasive green iguana (a pest across all three islands), an issue the DoE is also closely monitoring.

Going down in size from the iguanas, you'll find a variety of other terrestrial reptiles. Most spectacular of these is the blue-throated anole,

a small lizard no more than 7cm long, but with a whip-like tail nearly three times that. Males can be bright turquoise or even green and have a stunning pattern of white spots. They are arboreal (i.e. live in trees), and despite their vivid colouring, they can be hard to spot, but a good place to look for them is the Mastic Trail on Grand Cayman.

There are various species of snake, too (none of which are poisonous), and of course, turtles – the huge numbers of which prompted Columbus originally to call these islands Las Tortugas. Green and loggerhead turtles nest on beaches all around the islands and hawksbill turtles can be seen while snorkelling or scuba diving. For more info see point 8 of the '10 Amazing Things' on page 6.



Blue Iguana

- **Looks like...** A large, blue-grey lizard with a crest running down almost the entire length of its back and tail. Turns vivid azure blue depending on mood, temperature and breeding season.
- **Eats...** Mostly plants, though they are opportunistic and will also feed upon fruits, fungi and even crabs, where necessary.
- **Can be seen at...** At the Blue Iguana Conservation facility, located at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, Grand Cayman
- **Did you know...** A blue iguana can live up to 50 years and reach lengths of up to 1.5m.



Blue-throated anole

- **Looks like...** A small blue, turquoise or green lizard with spots on its back. They can also change colour to dark brown, beige or pale grey. And males can puff out their throats, too.
- **Eats...** Insects such as grasshoppers or crickets.
- **Can be seen at...** Anywhere on Grand Cayman where there are trees or shrubs providing cover and habitat.
- **Did you know...** Grand Cayman's blue anole is most closely related to the blue anole of Jamaica. It is believed to have arrived on Grand Cayman 2 to 3 million years ago, but no-one knows how it got there...

Take a Blue Iguana Tour by turning up at the QEII Botanic Park from Monday to Saturday at 10.30am and 11.30am. The tour includes a visit to the breeding facility and a gentle stroll round the park. More information at www.nationaltrust.org.ky/tours or email tours@nationaltrust.org.ky

On Little Cayman, Tanja Laaser (agent for the DoE) offers free tours to see the Sister Island rock iguanas. The tours start at the Little Cayman Museum and Tanja also provides talks at local resorts. For more info email tanja.laaser@gmail.com or doe@gov.ky. Visitors can help by reporting any injured iguanas to the DoE iguana hotline for Little Cayman +1 (345) 925 7625.

There is a good chance of seeing blue-throated anoles and other reptiles on tours of the Mastic Trail. Email tours@nationaltrust.org.ky



PLANTS & Butterflies

A world away from the bars and restaurants of George Town, and even from the golden sands of Seven Mile Beach, the Mastic Trail is less than an hour's drive from the west side of Grand Cayman and easy to get to. Once inside, you'll be plunged into a tropical forest full of 'shake-hand trees', 'duppy pumpkins' and other weird and wonderful plants.

Depending on the time of year, you'll also see Cayman's national flower, the Banana orchid, which flowers in May and June. The Mastic Trail is a good place to spot reptiles such as the blue-throated anole and birds such as the Cayman parrot. But this is one place where flora really take pride of place, and while you can easily go it alone, it's worth going with a guide. The National Trust for the Cayman Islands Visitors Centre provides information, tours, events, books and souvenirs related to the preservation of natural environments in the Cayman Islands.

Don't forget to visit the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park – and not just for the blue iguanas. There's a special orchid section where you can see the two most famous Cayman species, the banana and the ghost. The ghost orchid is only found on Grand Cayman and flowers between April and June.

If you are on the look-out for butterflies then Cayman's largest butterfly, the Grand Cayman swallowtail, can be seen across Grand Cayman. Its caterpillars only feed on the leaves of citrus trees, which grow naturally but are also cultivated. In contrast, the pygmy blue butterfly is tiny and requires low-lying saline habitat where a plant called glasswort grows. However, this butterfly is incredibly rare in Cayman.

On Cayman Brac, you'll find some completely different habitats, not least the Brac Parrot Reserve. This ancient dry forest is notable for its huge cacti which stand up to 3m high, as well as epiphytes such as orchids and bromeliads. The limestone karst substrate on which everything on all three islands grows is more evident here than anywhere, and you'll be grateful for a stout pair of shoes. Keep alert for hermit crabs under your feet too, they're just about everywhere.



Banana orchid

- **Looks like...** White or pale-yellow petals with purple lips, though it is from the shape of the 'pseudo-bulbs' at the base of the plant that the orchid gets its name – they are a greenish-yellow colour and look like unripe bananas.
- **Can be seen...** In the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park and on the Mastic Trail. Flowers in May and June.
- **Did you know...** Like many orchids, it's an epiphyte, which is Greek for "upon a plant". Epiphytes grow on trees, or occasionally artificial places such as buildings, but – unlike parasites – don't harm their hosts.



Silver thatch palm tree

- **Looks like...** A tall, spindly palm tree with fan-like leaves at the crown. The leaves are green on top but silvery underneath, hence its name.
- **Can be seen...** On all three islands, but one very good place is the east end of Cayman Brac. This is the highest point anywhere on the Cayman Islands, and the trees look spectacular in this wild and often windswept terrain.
- **Did you know...** The leaves of the silver thatch do not rot in saltwater, so they became highly prized by the ropemaking industry. Cayman Islanders therefore established profitable trades with other Caribbean islands such as Cuba and Jamaica.

Within the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, you will find the Heritage Garden, Colour Garden, Woodland Trail and the Children's Garden (due to open in 2021). The park is also a fantastic place for birdwatching. Bird tours cost an additional fee, find out more by emailing info@botanic-park.ky. You can visit the park every day of the year except Christmas Day and Good Friday, entry price \$10. More info at www.facebook.com/QEIIBotanicPark or www.botanic-park.ky

To take a tour of the Mastic Trail or any parts of Grand Cayman contact the National Trust at tours@nationaltrust.org.ky. More info www.caymannature.ky



PETER HILLENBRAND - MARINE LIFE EXPERT

Peter Hillenbrand is a professional diver and Secretary of the National Trust in Little Cayman. He also owns the Southern Cross Club Fish and Dive Resort on Little Cayman.

When did you first visit the Cayman Islands?

In 1973, when I was 11 years old. I visited, and fell in love with, Little Cayman in 1981, and I have lived on there since 1995.

How did you become interested in marine wildlife?

I inherited my passion for diving from my father and was diving in lakes in Indiana when I was just eight.

What is your favourite Cayman Island species?

If I had to pick one, it would be the juvenile spotted drum [a small fish]. No other creature can make black and white look so beautiful and delicate.

What is your favourite place in the Cayman Islands?

Any dive within Bloody Bay Marine Park on Little Cayman.



PATRICIA BRADLEY - BIRD LIFE EXPERT

Patricia Bradley is Cayman's foremost expert on the islands' birds, is the author of two editions of 'The Birds of the Cayman Islands' and 'A Photographic Guide to Birds of the Cayman Islands' with photographer Yves-Jacques Rey-Millet.

When did you first visit the Cayman Islands?

In 1982, and I have lived here ever since, apart from a break when my husband was Governor of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

How did you become interested in birds?

It became a passion when we lived in Malawi and Botswana for six years.

What is your favourite bird of the Cayman Islands?

The Cayman bullfinch, Cayman's newest endemic species, confined to Grand Cayman. It is a very self-possessed bird: the males are a dramatic black with a touch of white – while the females are drab olive-grey.

What is your favourite place in the Cayman Islands?

I have a favourite on each of the three islands, including the Booby Pond on Little Cayman, where there is a large red-footed booby rookery.

LUKE HARDING - REPTILE EXPERT

Luke Harding from the National Trust for the Cayman Islands is the Operations Manager for Blue Iguana Conservation, based at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park.



When did you first visit the Cayman Islands?

I arrived in the Cayman Islands in early 2019, when I relocated here from the U.K. to take up the post of Blue Iguana Conservation Operations Manager.

How did you become interested in reptiles?

I saw a Komodo dragon on television and the images really stuck with me. I began keeping reptiles at home when I was ten years old and, through travel and work experience, I became increasingly passionate about reptilian species.

What is your favourite Cayman Island species?

Blue iguanas, of course. They are a majestic reptile and a true example of conservation optimism.

What is your favourite place in the Cayman Islands?

Colliers Wilderness Reserve, which is peaceful, protected land that is representative of how Grand Cayman once used to look.

JOHN LAWBUS - BOTANICAL EXPERT

John Lawrus is General Manager of the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park in Grand Cayman's East End. He holds a diploma from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.



When did you first visit the Cayman Islands?

I first arrived in the Cayman Islands in January 15th, 2000 for a job interview and began working at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park on April 1st, 2000.

What is your favourite plant of the Cayman Islands?

One of my favourite plants of the Cayman Islands is the "Cherry" Myrcianthes fragrans, a beautiful hard wood, which grows relatively slowly and has one of the most beautiful barks you could ever see. It also produces a scent that is close to that of menthol when the leaves are crushed together. It can be found throughout the Cayman Islands and typically grows in woodlands and rocky areas.

What is your favourite place in the Cayman Islands?

My favourite part of the Cayman Islands is the North East coast of Grand Cayman. From the rugged bluffs to the small trails which lead down to the sea, you can always find a place to relax and enjoy the beauty of our coastline.

CAYMAN

Bats



Bats are non-aggressive creatures and provide effective pest control by eating insects. They would not harm a human unless provoked and, despite what people might think, are not blind.

Bats are the Cayman Islands' only native mammals. The most common species of bat is the velvety free-tailed bat, a species that is widespread in the Americas and is found as far south as Argentina. It eats insects and so is a keystone species in natural pest control.

There are nine species in total on the islands, four of which are fruit and nectar eating bats.

One of the most interesting bats is the incredibly rare Antillean nectar bat, which is described as looking like a "tiny flying piglet" and eats nectar and pollen, as well as fruits and insects. Also very rare, the buffy flower bat has a long nose and a long sticky tongue like that of a hummingbird and is an important pollinator of many plants such as night-blooming jasmine and many cactus and agave plants, including the large cactus and agave so noticeable on the Bluff on Cayman Brac.

Bats can be seen in caves, especially on Cayman Brac. Avoid entering caves between June and November when newborn pups are around. Panicked mother bats may abandon their roost, leaving the pups to die.

The National Trust erects bat boxes all over the islands, which look like miniature houses set on top of utility poles.

Cayman is one of only two countries in the world to attract Velvety Free-tailed Bats to bat houses. The programme is proving highly successful and has become a model for the rest of the Caribbean. See www.nationaltrust.org.ky for more information.

EXPLORING

Wildlife



Marine Parks, Replenishment Zones, Environmental Zones and Animal Sanctuaries have been set up on the islands to ensure that Cayman's treasures will be preserved for future generations to enjoy. At the time of print, a full review of the Marine Parks was being conducted. For up to date information contact the Cayman Islands Department of Environment at doe@gov.ky or visit www.doe.ky

Ethical Stingray interaction

The Cayman Islands Wildlife Interaction Zones' regulations make it an offence to lift rays from the water. This is because rays are marine creatures which, like fish, breathe with the aid of gills while in the water. Therefore, if they are out of the water, they cannot breathe. Your tour operator should give you a 'safety and good conduct' briefing before you get into the water. Swimmers should remove any sharp pieces of equipment or jewellery that might damage the rays' mucous coating, which provides protection from parasites and other infections.

Ethical Snorkelling and Diving Tips

The rule of thumb for snorkelling or diving on or around coral reefs is don't touch anything. It could bite or it could be poisonous – or worse, you could harm the creature. So that means don't touch the coral – and don't stand on it and don't stir up sediment near it, either. Coral is very sensitive and is easily damaged – it takes most coral species between 1 and 10 years to grow a single inch.

Don't harass or chase marine creatures. Molestation of marine turtles is illegal, and the feeding of sharks is also banned. There are some species, such as lobsters, conch and whelks for which limited fishing is permitted, and then only at certain times of year. Our advice is to make sure you fully understand the regulations if you would like to do this. More info: www.doe.ky

Ethical Iguana Watching

Never feed the iguanas. This makes them more vulnerable to threats as they're less afraid, which can in turn lead to attacks by other iguanas (notably the greens).



Iguanas have sharp teeth and a very powerful bite. They are wild animals and people should not interact in any way with them other than to admire and take photographs from afar. These species are protected by law.

Ethical Bat Watching

To protect the Cayman Islands valuable native bat populations please remember:

Avoid visiting caves in the spring and summer when newborn pups are present. Due to ingrained survival mechanisms, panicked mother bats may abandon a cave that is too often disturbed, leaving helpless pups behind. No flash cameras inside bat caves and do not

shine any lights directly on the bats.

Minimise disturbance of the bats by passing through their roosting areas as quickly and quietly as possible. Do not shout or squeal. Bats will not remain long in a cave that is frequently disturbed. Because habitat is becoming increasingly scarce, any additional hardship, like changing a roosting site due to disturbance, impacts the overall survival of the population.

Summary of Cayman Islands Marine Conservation Laws

Lobsters

- Closed season: 1 March until 30 November. No-one may take lobster from Cayman waters during these months. No one may purchase, receive or possess lobster taken from Cayman waters during these months
- Open season catch limit: Three per person or six per boat per day, whichever is less
- Size limit: minimum size, six-inch tail
- Only spiny lobster (*P. argus*) may be taken



Conch

- Closed season: 1 May until 31 October. No one may take conch from Cayman waters during these months. No one may purchase, receive or possess conch taken from Cayman waters during these months
- Open season catch limit: five per person or ten per boat, whichever is less
- No one may purchase or receive more than five conch from Cayman waters in any one day

Whelks

- Closed season: 1 May until 31 October. No one may take whelk from Cayman waters during these months. No one may purchase, receive or possess whelk taken from Cayman waters during these months
- Open season catch limit: 2.5 gallons in the shell and 2.5 pounds of processed whelks per person per day
- No one may purchase or receive more than 2.5 gallons in the shell or 2.5 pounds of processed whelks from Cayman waters in any one day
- Chitons, periwinkles and bleeding teeth may not be taken from Cayman waters at any time



Turtles

- No one may disturb, mistreat or take turtles in Cayman waters
- Possession of turtle eggs is prohibited

Sharks

- No one may feed, attempt to feed or provide or use food to attract any shark in Cayman waters

Nassau Groupers

- Size limit: 30cm minimum size limit applies throughout Cayman waters year round
- Designated Grouper Spawning Areas are protected
- No one may take Nassau grouper from the Designated Grouper Spawning Areas from 1 November until 31 March
- No one may spearfish or set a net within a one-mile radius of any Designated Grouper Spawning Areas from 1 November until 31 March
- No one may use a speargun to take Nassau Grouper

General Rules

- Damaging coral by anchor, chains or any other means ANYWHERE in Cayman waters is prohibited
- No taking of ANY marine life, alive or dead, while scuba diving
- No taking of any coral, sponges etc. from Cayman waters
- Wearing gloves while diving or snorkelling in Cayman waters is prohibited
- Export of live fish or other marine life is prohibited
- Fishing with gill nets, poison or other noxious substances is prohibited
- Dumping ANYTHING in Cayman waters is prohibited
- The export of more than three conch shells and/or any black coral requires a CITES permit, issued through the DOE



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GRAND CAYMAN | CAYMAN BRAC | LITTLE CAYMAN

+44 (0) 207 491 7771 • info-uk@caymanislands.ky • www.visitcaymanislands.com

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