

# WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES

AND OTHER PROTECTED AREAS IN THE  
US VIRGIN ISLANDS



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PRIOR TO 1975, LITTLE WAS KNOWN ABOUT THE ECOLOGY OF THE MORE THAN 50 ISLANDS AND CAYS DOTTING THE PERIMETER OF THE USVI.

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But with the help of the Division of Fish and Wildlife's wildlife survey, these cays have come to be known as virtual incubators of ecological activity, providing prime nesting habitat for 99% of the islands' seabird population. As a result, all 33 territorially owned offshore cays have been designated as wildlife sanctuaries to protect the beauty of these islands and the nesting habitat for generations to come.

Other islands, cays and coastal areas in the USVI are also recognized for their ecological importance as habitat for sea turtles, the endangered St. Croix ground lizard, elkhorn and staghorn corals, seabirds, and spawning habitat for scores of coral reef organisms. While some of these islands and cays are privately owned and threatened by development, many are under federal government ownership and protection.

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PHOTO: SEAN LINEHAN, NOAA

^ AERIAL VIEW OF BUCK ISLAND REEF NATIONAL MONUMENT



PHOTO: JUDY PIERCE, DFW

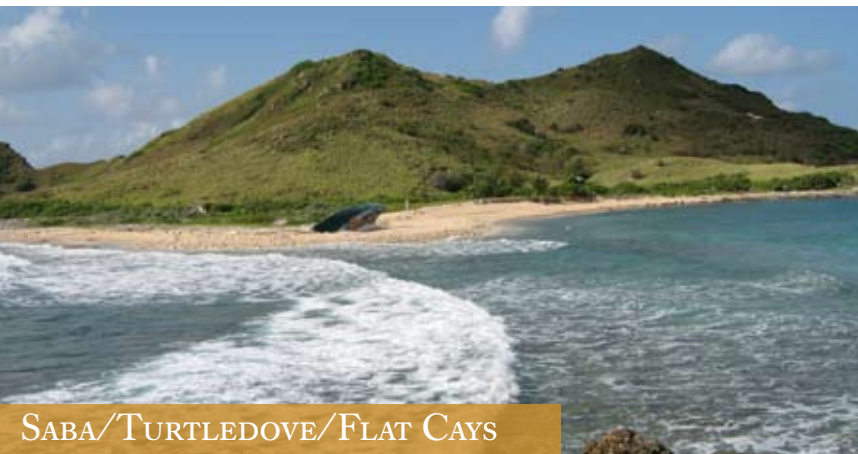
^ MASKED BOOBY AND CHICK ON COCKROACH CAY



^ MANGROVE LAGOON MARINE RESERVE AND WILDLIFE SANCTUARY  
CAPELLA AND BUCK ISLAND OFF THE SOUTH SIDE OF ST. THOMAS ▾



PHOTO: JUDY PIERCE, DFW



## SABA/TURTLEDOVE/FLAT CAYS

Saba Island is located off the south central coast of St. Thomas and includes Turtledove and Flat Cays. Saba Island has two salt ponds where shorebirds forage. On north facing slopes of Saba, scrub-shrub with introduced guinea grass provides poorer quality nesting habitat for sooty terns. Brown noddies, roseate terns and tropicbirds nest on south coast cliffs. Division of Fish and Wildlife has been monitoring nesting seabirds in this area for many years and has established a rat control project to protect nests. PHOTO: JUDY PIERCE, DFW



PHOTO: KEVIN T. EDWARDS

Major USVI seabird nesting areas are found on 25 of the most remote cays off St. Thomas and St. John, where their eggs and offspring are less vulnerable to predators than on the major islands. Seabird communities are the most diverse and important component of this ecosystem. The species of breeding seabirds varies depending on the type of nesting habitat on the island. **Flat Cay** and **Saba Island** with their cobble and reef rubble pocket beaches harbor active rookeries of gulls and terns. **Cockroach Cay** and **Dutchcap Cays'** rocky coastlines host colonies of boobies and tropicbirds and **Congo Cay** and **Dutchcap Cay** provide habitat for nesting pelicans. With the exception of some tern species, most seabirds nest at the same colony year after year, and rarely form new colonies.



## COCKROACH/SULA CAY

Cockroach/Sula Cay is known for its importance in the breeding habits of Masked Boobies. It has the only known breeding colony for these seabirds in U.S. territory aside from Mona and Monito Islands in Puerto Rico. Sula Cay is separated from Cockroach Cay by a weathered-out dyke and forms the southeastern tip of the larger cay. The largest Red-billed Tropicbird colony in the USVI occurs on Cockroach, along with several hundred nesting Brown Boobies.

PHOTO: FRANCISCO DALLMEIER



## FRENCHCAP CAY

Located off St. Thomas, the dominant vegetation on this cay is sedge with clumps of figs pruned by the wind. This cay supports small numbers of Audobon's Shearwater nesting pairs and the largest brown booby rookery in the USVI. During the summer months, Frenchcap supports one of the largest nesting populations of bridled terns, which conceal their nests on the cliffs or under the figs. The largest colonies of nesting Brown Noddies are found on this cay and Saba Island.

### ALL CURRENT, MAJOR THREATS TO SEABIRD POPULATIONS ARE DUE DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY TO HUMAN ACTIVITIES. THREATS TO SEABIRDS ON CAYS INCLUDE:

- Exotic animal species such as cats, mongoose and rats that can decimate seabird populations
- Use of cays as foraging habitat for goats that destroy understory vegetation and prevent the establishment of new trees leading to erosion and impacts to habitat, as well as trample nests of ground nesting birds
- Natural exposure of cays to winds and waves and damages from hurricanes and tropical storms that lead to loss of habitat, at least temporarily
- Boat groundings that can lead to spills of petroleum products and oiling of adult seabirds, their nests, or foraging habitat and food sources
- Establishment of exotic plant species that outcompete native vegetation in nesting areas degrading the habitat quality for nesting seabirds
- Seabirds disturbed by humans may crush eggs or chicks while fleeing, leaving nests vulnerable to predators and the elements. Repeated disturbance may cause birds to abandon the colony altogether. Seabirds caught in fishing line can drag the line through the nesting colony, entangling more birds and resulting in seabird death and injury.

## Visiting the Offshore Cays and Other Protected Areas

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DESPITE THEIR RUGGED BEAUTY AND CHARM, MANY OF THESE CAYS CAN BE TREACHEROUS. HIGH WINDS, SEA SWELLS AND RUGGED TERRAIN MAKE THESE ISLANDS A PROTECTIVE HOME FOR AREA WILDLIFE, BUT A FORBIDDING LANDSCAPE FOR HUMANS.

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### FEDERALLY OWNED PROTECTED AREAS

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#### **Buck Island National Wildlife Refuge**

*(US Fish and Wildlife Service, St. Thomas)*

Buck Island National Wildlife Refuge is always open during daylight hours, but the lighthouse is closed to the public due to its deteriorated condition. Hiking and bird watching are allowed on the refuge.

#### **Green Cay National Wildlife Refuge** *(USFWS, St. Croix)*

Green Cay NWR is closed to the public and special access is not permitted.

#### **Buck Island Reef National Monument**

*(National Park Service, St. Croix)*

Buck Island Reef NM is a 19015-acre marine protected area. The island itself is only open during daylight hours to protect nesting sea turtles and their hatchlings. Water skiing, jet skiing and any kind of fishing or collection is strictly prohibited. There are 8 moorings at the east end of the island inside the coral barrier reef provided for day use for snorkeling. SCUBA is prohibited at the underwater trail; there are two SCUBA mooring buoys north of the underwater trail provided for SCUBA.

#### **Anchoring**

Within Buck Island Reef National Monument, permits are available for anchorage in a designated overnight anchorage area at West Beach. Only authorized concessionaires can bring visitors to the Island. Vessels over 42 feet are not permitted in the lagoon and must use a tender to visit the underwater trail area. Vessel maneuverability is limited by depth and the coral barrier reef. No anchoring is allowed in the lagoon, boats must use a mooring buoy.

#### **Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument** *(NPS, St. John)*

Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument is under the administration of the Virgin Islands National Park. The Monument does not close, but the visitor center in Cruz Bay is only open during the day.

#### **Anchoring**

No anchoring is allowed within the Coral Reef Monument. On the south shore of the Park, only vessels less than 16 ft may anchor, and only in sand. Vessels greater than 16 ft and up to 60 ft must use mooring buoys as all other anchoring is prohibited in this area. On the north shore of the Park, vessels measuring 60 ft or less must use available moorings or anchor in sand 200 ft seaward of moorings. Overnight anchoring or mooring at permitted areas within the Park requires the payment of a fee. Overnight stays are limited to 30 nights in a calendar year, and no more than 7 consecutive nights in a particular bay.

*The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does not have jurisdiction over waters surrounding the refuges.*

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### TERRITORIAL OWNED ISLANDS AND CAYS

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*A special use permit from DPNR is required to access territorially owned or managed islands and cays. To obtain a permit, please call the Division of Fish and Wildlife (St Thomas) at 340-775-6762 or (St Croix) 340-772-1955.*

#### **The following activities are strictly prohibited:**

*(from the Virgin Islands Code of Regulations)*

- Taking any bird or eggs or other wildlife, or part of the organism.
- The use, possession or discharge of any firearm into any wildlife or marine sanctuary (this includes bow and arrow, or any trap or other contrivance designed to be, or capable of being, used to take birds, fish or other wildlife).
- To throw, place, or deposit any waste within any wildlife or marine sanctuary.
- The operation of helicopters or fixed wing aircraft over a seabird rookery at an altitude of less than 1,000 feet or within one-half mile of islands or cays important for seabird nesting.

# USVI PROTECTED AREAS

## TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENT

### Wildlife Sanctuaries

- 1 Booby Rock
- 2 Bovoni Cay
- 3 Capella Island
- 4 Carval Rock
- 5 Cas Cay
- 6 Cockroach Cay
- 7 Congo Cay
- 8 Cricket Rock
- 9 Dog Island
- 10 Dutchcap Cay
- 11 Flanagan Island
- 12 Flat Cay and Little Flat Cay
- 13 Frenchcap Cay
- 14 Grass Cay
- 15 Hassel Island (*partial*)
- 16 Kalkun Cay
- 17 Leduck Island
- 18 Outer Brass Island
- 19 Perkins Cay
- 20 Protestant Cay
- 21 Ruth Cay
- 22 Saba Island
- 23 Sail Rock
- 24 Salt Cay
- 25 Savana Island
- 26 Shark Island
- 27 Steven Cay
- 28 Sula Cay
- 29 Turtledove Cay
- 30 Water Island (*partial*)
- 31 West Cay

### Territorial Park and Marine Reserves

- 32 Whistling Cay
- 33 East End Marine Park (*St. Croix*)
- 34 St. James Reserve (*St. Thomas*)
- 35 Cas Cay/Mangrove Lagoon Marine Reserve (*St. Thomas*)

## FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

### National Park Service

- 36 Buck Island Reef National Monument (*St. Croix*)
- 37 Salt River Bay National Historical Park & Ecological Preserve (*St. Croix*)

### Virgin Islands National Park and Coral Reef National Monument

(*St. John*) including:

- 38 Cocoloba Cay
- 39 Hassel Island (*partial, St. Thomas*)
- 40 Henley Cay
- 41 Ramgoat Cay
- 42 Rat Cay
- 43 Trunk Cay

### US Fish and Wildlife Service – National Wildlife Refuge

- 44 Buck Island (*St. Thomas*)
- 45 Green Cay (*St. Croix*)
- 46 Sandy Point (*St. Croix*)

### Private

- 47 South Gate Coastal Reserve
- 48 Estate Little Princess Preserve

## OTHER CAYS IN THE USVI

### Private Ownership

- 49 Cinnamon Cay
- 50 Current Rock
- 51 Fish Cay
- 52 Great St. James Island
- 53 Hans Lollick Island
- 54 Hassel Island (*partial*)
- 55 Inner Brass Island
- 56 Little Hans Lollick Island

### Unknown Ownership

- 57 Little St. James Island
- 58 Lovango Cay
- 59 Mingo Cay
- 60 Patricia Cay
- 61 Pelican Cay
- 62 Rotto Cay
- 63 Thatch Cay
- 64 Water Island (*partial*)

### Unknown Ownership

- 65 Two Brothers Cay
- 66 Green Cay (*St. Thomas*)
- 67 Waterlemon Cay



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON PROTECTED AREAS AND REGULATIONS TO PROTECT IMPORTANT HABITATS AND THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES:

**National Park Service**

[www.nps.gov/state/vi](http://www.nps.gov/state/vi)

St. Croix - (340) 773-1460

St. John - (340) 776-6201

**Territorial Wildlife Sanctuaries and Marine Reserves  
DPNR Division of Fish and Wildlife**

[www.dpnr.gov.vi/dfw.htm](http://www.dpnr.gov.vi/dfw.htm)

St Thomas / St. John - (340) 775-6762

St Croix - (340) 772-1955

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Caribbean Islands National  
Wildlife Refuge Complex**

[www.fws.gov/caribbean/Refuges/default.htm](http://www.fws.gov/caribbean/Refuges/default.htm)

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FOR ADDITIONAL COPIES OR INFORMATION REGARDING  
THE CORAL REEF CONSERVATION PROGRAM (CRCP)

**NOAA Fisheries Caribbean Field Office**

[www.coralreef.noaa.gov](http://www.coralreef.noaa.gov)

[sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr.htm](http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr.htm)

Boquerón, PR

(787) 851-3700

**DPNR Division of Fish and Wildlife**

<http://www.dpnr.gov.vi/dfw.htm>

6291 Estate Nazareth

St Thomas, V.I., 00802

St Thomas / St. John (340) 775-6762

St Croix – (340) 772-1955

**COVER PHOTO BY JUDY PIERCE**

*Cover Image shows Saba Island.*

*All photos provided by the Division of Fish and Wildlife, unless otherwise noted.*

