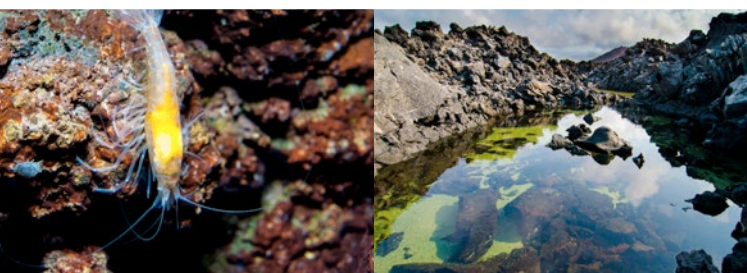




Ascension's underwater life is not what one would generally expect of a tropical island – due to its isolated position in the central Atlantic, diversity of species is low. However, what Ascension lacks in diversity it makes up for in sheer abundance! The fish that you are likely to notice first is the black triggerfish (*Melichthys niger*) that has a circumtropical range, but is present in Ascension's waters in notably prolific numbers. Ascension's marine life features species from both the Caribbean and West Africa with interesting examples of algae, corals, sponges and other marine invertebrates, in addition to the eye-catching fish. Most species can be observed relatively easily whilst snorkelling in depths ranging from 5 to 15 metres. Areas such as English Bay and Comfortless Cove are particularly popular.



ENDEMIC SHRIMP

Inland from Shelly Beach, east of Mars Bay, are some tiny pools that are the only known habitat for two particularly interesting species of shrimp, found nowhere else in the world.

The presence of shrimps in the pools was recorded in 1968. The *Typhlatya rogersi* species is pale pinkish and semi-transparent and is abundant in the pools. The second species, *Procaris ascensionis*, is bright orange in colour and is larger than the *Typhlatya* shrimp, but less common. The pools also contain a number of other interesting species such as clusters of globular green alga, *Valonis ventricosa* and the coral *Favia gravida*.

The species found in these pools are unique and could easily be lost to the world forever; please ensure that you avoid entering the water and take care not to introduce any pollutants such as sun-cream from your hands.

DOLPHINS & WHALES

There are three cetacean species commonly recorded around Ascension - bottlenose dolphins, pan-tropical spotted dolphins, and humpback whales. Bottlenose dolphins in particular are permanent residents in Ascension's waters and can be seen all around the island.



STAYING SAFE

Snorkelling and diving in Ascension's warm waters are great ways to explore the Island's marine life. Please help us to protect our pristine underwater environment and keep yourself safe –

- Assess sea conditions before venturing out - currents and swell can be dangerous, even off beaches deemed relatively safe
- Dive responsibly - remember that there is no recompression chamber on Ascension. Stay well within your decompression limits
- Take nothing but photographs and leave nothing but bubbles
- Respect all marine life - look but don't touch
- Many of our species and habitats are protected by the Wildlife Protection Ordinance and Protected Areas legislation – it is an offence to deliberately harm or remove them without written authorisation.

Image Credits

Ascension Island Conservation Department, Shallow Marine Survey Group; Judith Brown

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ENDEMIC FISH

Recent surveys show that there are at least 11 endemic fish species in the waters around Ascension, as well as 16 species that are shared endemics with the neighbouring island of St Helena. Most of Ascension's endemic fish are small species with bright colouration, and include:

COMMON FISH

As well as endemic species there are a number of more common but equally intriguing species such as rock hind grouper, moray eels, sergeant major, tuna and marlin.

MARINE LIFE OF ASCENSION ISLAND

Ascension Island harbours globally important marine biodiversity, representing a unique assemblage of western and eastern Atlantic flora and fauna.

Until recently, comparatively little was known about Ascension's inshore marine life. This changed after an expedition led by the Shallow Marine Survey Group in 2012. The Ascension Island Conservation Department is continuing to carry out monthly biodiversity surveys to gather more information on the marine life and how this changes over the course of the year, for example identifying times when different species are spawning. These data, as well as being highly informative, will play an important role in ensuring that our marine life and fish populations are maintained and properly managed for future generations to enjoy.



Resplendent angelfish
(*Centropyge resplendens*)

These are a small species of angelfish (around 4cm), found mainly at depths greater than 10m and usually concentrated around sand and maerl habitats. They are predominantly purple-blue, with a yellow stripe running along their back from head to tail.

Ascension goby
(*Priolepsis ascensionis*)

This is a reef-dwelling species, often to be found beneath overhangs and in holes. Only a few centimetres long, they are bright yellow with white stripes and a black spot on their dorsal (back) fin.



Rockhind grouper
(*Epinephelus adscensionis*)

Light brown and covered in reddish-brown spots, these fish can grow to be quite large (around 60cm) and are common in rocky areas.



Yellowfin tuna
(*Thunnus albacares*)

Growing to huge proportions, these may reach 2m long and weigh hundreds of pounds. Conspicuous in appearance, with blue-silver body and large bright yellow sickle-shaped rear fins.



Lubbock's yellowtail damselfish
(*Stegastes lubbocki*)

Often seen in rocky areas, this small fish – around 5cm – has a dark, almost black, body and a yellow tail. Juveniles may be more of a brighter purple colour with a yellow tail.

White hawkfish
(*Amblycirrhitus earnshawii*)

This species is endemic to Ascension Island and is unmistakable with its white colouration. A small fish (around 6cm), with a large head and tapering body, they may be seen resting on rocks or similar surfaces, particularly where there are crevices or other structures. They are usually solitary but may occasionally be seen in pairs and are active during the day.



Spotted moray 'conger' eel
(*Gymnothorax moringa*)

Often found in rocky holes and crevices, this is a large eel that is dark-brown or black with pale or white speckles along the whole body. While usually placid, large specimens have been recorded as attacking divers so approach with caution, particularly around dawn and dusk.



Atlantic blue marlin
(*Makaira mazara*)

A very large billfish, easily reaching 1000lb in weight with blue-black on top and a pale underside and an unmistakable long, pointed bill.