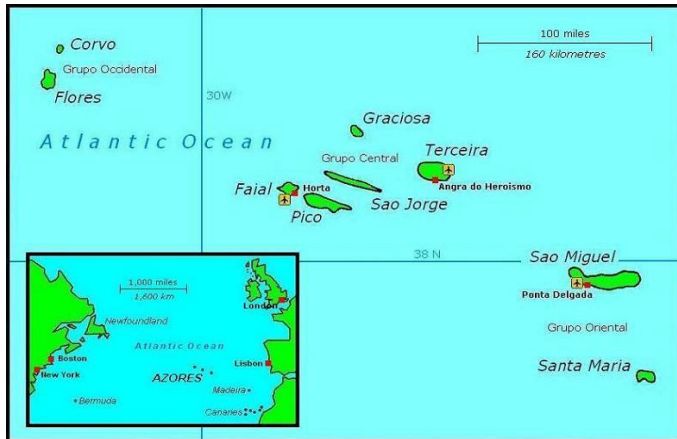


AZORES (MACARONESIA)



Current situation & main challenges

Socio-economic context

The Azores archipelago has 246,353 inhabitants with 56% of them living in the largest island of São Miguel. There is a slowdown trend of the population growth in most of the islands (crude rate of increase -0.44%)⁽¹⁾, which is linked to the drop in net migration rates, along with the reduction of natural growth rates. The population density shows a relatively stable trend over the last decade of the 20th Century, standing at around 106 inhabitants per km².

The archipelago's economy contributes, on average, with 2.2% to the national economy of Portugal, with an GDP per capita of 15,111 € (2014, prel. data) 9% below the national average⁽¹⁾. The primary sector has traditionally accounted for the region's economic activity, although currently there is a growing concentration of activity in the tertiary sector, which has the highest contribution to the GDP. Yet, agriculture, a traditional and specialized sector centred around livestock and dairy production, remains relevant for the local economy, with an annual production of over 500 million litres of milk⁽¹⁰⁾, ca. 30% of Portuguese milk production⁽¹³⁾. Fisheries bring in revenues of about 28 million € for the region, with 9,000 tonnes of fish extracted from an exclusive economic zone of about a million km² (11). The tourism industry has grown markedly over the last 15 years, nearly doubling the accommodation capacity since 2000, reaching about 10,000 beds⁽¹²⁾.

Legal and political context

The Azores are an autonomous overseas region of the Republic of Portugal and consist of a chain of nine volcanic islands stretching some 370 miles across the North-East Atlantic ocean, with a total area of 2,322 km² of emerged land. The Azores includes an EEZ of nearly one million km², the largest of whole Portugal. Its strategic location midway between North America and Europe contributed to a historical role in trans-Atlantic navigation. Besides an extensive Marine Park, the archipelago has established a Network of Protected Areas which, along with others areas designated under regional, national or international frameworks (such as the Ramsar Convention and the UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Program), are managed under a recent (2012) scheme of Nature Parks, one per island. In terms of Global Agreements, Portugal has concluded or ratified the main Treaties and Conventions regarding Nature and Biodiversity Conservation, such as CBD, Bern Convention, CITES, Bonn Convention and Ramsar Convention. Other policy instruments of direct importance for biodiversity in the archipelago are the EC Birds and Habitats directives and the Natura 2000 network, the Man And Biosphere program and the network REDBIOS.

Facts & figures

Geography

Total area:	958,214 km ²
Land area:	2,322 km ² (0.24%) ⁽¹⁾
Protected land area:	560 km ² (24%) ⁽²⁾
Total marine area:	955,892 km ² (99.75%) ⁽³⁾
Exclusive economic zone (EEZ):	926,149 km ² (97%) ⁽³⁾
Marine protected area: (MPA and/or MMA):	112,635 km ² (1,242 km ² marine coastal; 111,393 km ² marine offshore) (12%) ⁽⁴⁾

Overseas Regions (Governance/Dependency):

PT

Socio-economic facts

Total population (2014):	246,353 ⁽¹⁾
Population density (2014):	106 inhabitants / km ² (1)
GDP (2014, prel. data):	3,731 million € (1)
Main income sources (2013) ⁽¹⁾ :	
28% Public administration and defence; compulsory social security; education; human health and social work activities 25% Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; transportation and storages; accommodation & food service activities 9% Mining and quarrying; manufacturing; electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; water abstraction, purification and supply; sewerage, waste management & remediation activities 9% Agriculture, livestock production, hunting, forestry and fishing.	

Biodiversity

Threatened ecosystems: Laurel forest (laurisilva) (only 2% of the original cover remains today)⁽⁷⁾

Endemic species:

491 endemic taxa (6% of total identified spp. & ssp), from which 8% marine & 92% terrestrial, mostly arthropods, molluscs and plants.⁽⁸⁾

Birds: *Hydrobates monteiroi*; *Buteo buteo rothschildi* *Pyrrhula azorica*; *Regulus regulus sanctae mariae*.
Molluscs: *Leptaxis vetusa*; *Plutonia angulosa*. Fish: *Centrolabrus coeruleus*; Plants: *Myosotis azorica*; *Juniperus brevifolia*; *Azorina vidalii*; *Platanthera azorica*.
Mamals: *Nyctalus azoreum*. Arthropods: *Crotchiella brachyptera*

Threatened species: 132⁽⁹⁾
 All endemic species mentioned above, except for *Centrolabrus coeruleus*.

Current conservation status

Threats and pressures on biodiversity

Since the arrival in the Azores of the first settlers, in the XVth century, the indigenous flora and fauna have been under severe pressure from habitat destruction, harvesting of living resources and the introduction of invasive species. The numerous introduced species in the area mainly occur in the coastal zone and in connection with human settlements, many on flat fertile areas (*fajãs*). By the beginning of the XIXth century, practically all the mid and low altitude land had been urbanized or converted to agriculture (particularly for livestock production, motivated by the EU's by subsidies from the Common Agriculture Policy). Currently, the total surface area of agricultural operations represents 56% of the territory while the utilized agricultural area (UAA), mainly comprising grazing lands, occupies approximately 92% of this surface area (far higher than Portugal's national average: 78%)⁽¹³⁾.

In addition, from the 1940's to the 1960's a huge effort, led or supported by public authorities, replaced the vegetation of most mid and high altitude areas with monocultures of the fast growing Japanese cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica*).

Today, only 2% of the original Laurel forest cover (a conservation priority only found in the Macaronesia region) has been spared from deforestation⁽⁷⁾, the existing population of the monk seal was eradicated and the huge colonies of seabirds confined to small nesting places in remote islets and cliffs.

Current investments

Azores Network of Protected Areas: establishment of a network of protected areas (from nature reserves and natural monuments to protected landscapes) and Natura 2000 sites, as well as the development of an innovative governance system of the protected sites (a management entity in each Island, called as "Nature Park"), aiming to improve their management and ensure the ecological structure and connectivity of the archipelago.

Designation of three Biosphere Reserves: three islands (Corvo, Graciosa and Flores) have been proposed by the Azores Government and approved by UNESCO as Biosphere Reserves, with the purpose of promoting solutions to conciliate biodiversity and its sustainable usage.

Eradication and control of invasive plant species: the strategic and operational plans "PRECEFIAS" (Regional Plan of Eradication and Control of Invasive Plant Species in Sensitive Areas) and "MAIS ENDÉMICAS - PLANTAR O FUTURO" (More Endemics - Planting the Future) are two complementary instruments that have the common goal of improving the conservation status of species and habitats of the Azores, with direct influence on the recovery of the Azorean landscape.

Azorean Biodiversity Databank: an Internet database for regional biodiversity outreach. It is an important resource for fundamental research in systematics, biodiversity, education and conservation management in the Azores. It also provides an original platform for biogeographical and macroecological research on islands.

Critical areas for action / Investment niches

- Improve knowledge on distributional data and status of the Azorean endemic taxa both in native and human-made habitats;
- Development of a RED LIST for the Azorean fauna and flora, ideally following IUCN's recommended criteria for Red Lists;
- Selection of additional areas needed for the conservation of Azorean indigenous fauna and flora, with the support of the ATLANTIS software (used for the Azorean Biodiversity Portal).

Important conservation activities (Iconic ongoing conservation projects)

SOS Cagarro: a government-led campaign carried out annually since 1995, with the objective of involving the public in saving the Cory's shearwater (*Calonectris borealis*) juveniles when flying from the nest in Autumn and are disoriented by human activities, namely by urban public lights.

Activities: a) Development of several activities in schools and libraries aiming at environmental awareness and education; b) organization of evening rescue brigades to collect juvenile shearwaters in danger and to release them in the next morning; c) development of joint actions with the police and scouts to raise drivers awareness; d) development of promotional and educational materials to be distributed to the people engaged in the campaign (volunteers, etc.); e) reduction of public lighting during the night.

Results: In 2015 nearly 5,000 birds were saved.

Project "Terras do Priolo": a partnership between SPEA (the local representative of Birdlife International) and the Azores government, with support from the Life program, dedicated to the conservation of *Pyrrhula murina*, an endemic bullfinch, and its remaining natural habitat, the Natura 2000 SPA Pico da Vara / Ribeira do Guilherme. Conservation projects involving this species have been running since 2003.

Budget: € 3.363.260 (2013-2018)

Activities: a) Planning actions for the recovery and management of the bullfinch's habitat; production of native plants; control of predators; evaluation of new threats; improvement of the visitation area and monitoring of its impact.

Results: 1) From previous projects: enlargement of the SPA "Pico da Vara/Ribeira do Guilherme"; the species went from "CR" to "EN" in the IUCN's Red List. 2) Expected: recovery of 102.4 ha of habitat, of 4 ha of water line areas and of 6.3 ha of landslide areas; Creation of 9.6 km of access rails for visitor use; the planting of 200 000 plant specimens from more than 25 native species grown in nurseries; development of methodologies and strategies for growing natives and controlling IAS.

Useful links

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/best/index_en.htm

<http://www.atlantis.azores.gov.pt/atlantis/common/index.jsf>

<http://www.azores.gov.pt/Gra/srrn-natureza/menus/secundario/%C3%81reas+Protegidas/>

<http://www.azores.gov.pt/Gra/srrn-natureza/conteudos/livres/Listagem+%C3%A1reas+Rede+Natura+2000.htm>

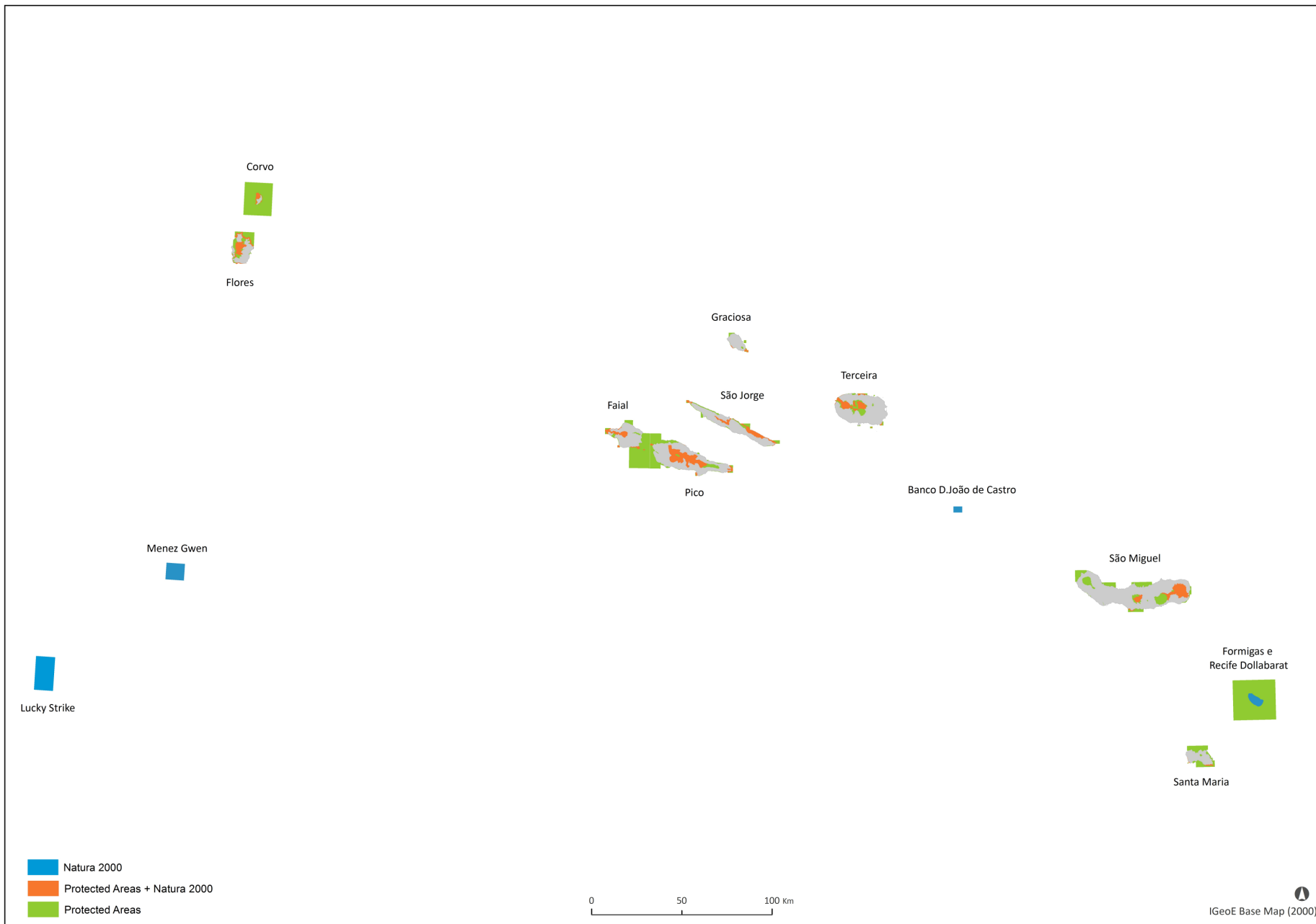
<http://www.azores.gov.pt/Gra/SRMCT-MAR/menus/secundario/%C3%81reas+Marinhas+Protegidas/>



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FUNDO REGIONAL DE CIÊNCIA E TECNOLOGIA

Azores: Protected Areas and Natura 2000 sites



Azores: Marine Protected Areas



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