Visas
UK citizens do not require a visa to visit the Cayman Islands, but they do need a passport that is valid for at least 90 days after you leave (at a minimum of six months is recommended). For more information visit www.immigration.gov.ky

Getting there
The main passenger airport of the Cayman Islands is Owen Roberts International Airport, close to George Town, on Grand Cayman. British Airways fly direct to Grand Cayman (GCM) from London Heathrow four times a week.

Money
The currency is the Cayman Islands dollar and it is permanently fixed to the US dollar – CI$1 = USD 1.25. You can pay with US dollars anywhere, but you’ll get your change in CI dollars.

Health
There are good medical facilities on the Cayman Islands, but all visitors should have comprehensive travel insurance.
Malaria is not a problem, and no vaccinations are required, but it is recommended that all visitors have had Hepatitis A and MMR and are up-to-date with their Tetanus-diphtheria inoculation.

Further reading
The Bradt travel guide to the Cayman Islands, by Tricia Hayne (Bradt, ISBN: 9781841622149) www.bradtguides.com
The Rough Guide to the Caribbean, by Peter Corlett (Rough Guides, ISBN. 978 1 84353 539 3) www.roughguides.com
Cayman Islands: Diving & Snorkeling guide by Tim Rock. Birds of the Cayman Islands by Patricia Bradley is a checklist of 222 species found on all three islands. It is available from the Natural History Book Service www.nhbs.com
Flora of the Cayman Islands, by George R Proctor

When to go
Between December and April, temperatures and humidity are lowest and most pleasant.
July and August can experience temperatures rising to an average of more than 28°C.
There can be frequent afternoon showers between May and October.

UK Tour Operators
Many UK tour operators offer package trips to the Cayman Islands. A full list can be found at www.caymanislands.co.uk.

Useful organisations
Cayman Islands Department of Tourism www.caymanislands.co.uk
In the UK, phone 020 7491 7771
The National Trust for the Cayman Islands is a non-profit, statutory body with a mission to preserve natural environments and places of historic significance.
It owns and manages a number of important nature reserves, including the Mastic Reserve and Tai I and Saba, Reserve on Grand Cayman, the Booby Pond Nature Reserve on Little Cayman, the Bras Patroi Reserve on Cayman Brac, www.nationaltrust.org.ky
www.naturecayman.com is a website guide to the ecology and wildlife of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.
www.caymanwildlife.org is a comprehensive guide to wildlife on all three islands.

More information at: The National Travel Health Network and Centre www.nathnac.org

Any information about The Cayman Islands can be obtained from: The Cayman Islands Department of Tourism, 6 Arlington Street, London SW1A 1RE
Phone: +44 (0) 20 7491 7771
Email: info-uk@caymanislands.ky

CAYMAN ISLANDS
WILDLIFE EXPLORERS GUIDE

Everything you need to know to plan your wildlife adventure to the Cayman Islands.
Welcome

Writer: James Fair has worked as an environmental journalist since the mid-1990s, mostly as a reporter and commissioning editor for BBC Wildlife Magazine. While he has kayaked within sight of polar bears in the Arctic, and lured Tasmanian devils to a feeding bait, visiting the Cayman Islands has been a real highlight of his career. Watching the brown boobies on Cayman Brac is one treasured memory, as is snorkelling around Owen Island off Little Cayman. “What I love about the Cayman Islands is that nothing runs away from you,” James says. “It’s as if you are as much an attraction for the wildlife, as the wildlife is for you.”

Photography: Will Burrard-Lucas is a professional wildlife photographer from the UK. His 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, please visit Will’s website [www.burrard-lucas.com](http://www.burrard-lucas.com) or follow him on Facebook.

“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.”

Image contributions were also made by the following photographers with thanks: Jay Easterbrook, Heather Holt, Peter Hillenbrand, Neil van Niekerk, Courtney Platt.

Contents

4-5
Ten Amazing facts you never knew about the Cayman Islands and its wildlife

6-7
Marine Life

8-9
Bird Life

10-11
Reptile Life

12-13
Plants and Butterflies

14-15
About Bats / Tips on wildlife watching

|-----|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|

5km

Cayman Islands Wildlife Explorers Guide
10 amazing things you never knew about the Cayman Islands and its wildlife

one | The Cayman Islands are part of a mountain range called the Cayman Ridge, which rises more than 7,500m – the size of a very large mountain in the Himalayas – from the ocean floor. These are cracks in the seabed from which superheated water, up to 450°C, comes out. Which is why there are so many great beaches in the islands.

two | There are no rivers in the Cayman Islands. Because the islands are the peaks of a limestone mountain, and limestone is really porous, all the water just 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.

three | There are many parrotfish in the Cayman Islands and what’s mesmerizing about parrotfish, apart from the fact that they can change sex from male to female and back again, is that they excrete sand. They munch on rock and coral, and it comes out as sand. Which is why there are so many great beaches in the islands.

four | Cayman has its very own blue dragon, an iguana found nowhere else in the world which is incredibly rare and really is blue. It is estimated there were about a dozen of these amazing beasts remaining in 2002, making it ‘Functionally Extinct’ but thanks to an extensive breeding programme in Grand Cayman the blues are back in force. In 2012 over seven hundred were counted, taking the species off the IUCN Red List as ‘Critically Endangered’, they are now classified as ‘Endangered’, and are prevalent enough to be spotted, you can even walk right up to them. Find out more on pages 10-11.

five | In the middle of North Sound on Grand Cayman, wild Southern stingrays gather in huge numbers at a place called ‘Stingray City’. You can get in the water with them, and meet them personally, your boat captain will even be able to tell you some of their adopted `names’.

six | The Cayman Islands are home to three sea turtle species: the green, the loggerhead, and the hawksbill. Green and loggerhead turtles nest on beaches all around the Cayman Islands, including Seven Mile Beach. From May to September, female turtles crawl up onto the beach to 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 our 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.

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

eight | There are over 230 birds in the Cayman Islands. Little Cayman has the largest colony of red footed boobies in the Western Hemisphere. A close relative of the Atlantic gannet, these remarkable birds may fly up to 125km in a single day on a fishing trip, and then 125km back home again, and can be away for more than 12 hours.

nine | The Grand Cayman pygmy blue Baphidium exilis thompsoni is a Grand Cayman endemic subspecies of butterfly, found nowhere else in the world. It was first discovered in 1938 and was not found again until 1985, when two colonies were located on the north and west coasts.

ten | In a secret bay on Grand Cayman, one of only a dozen places worldwide, there exists the rare and magical phenomenon of bioluminescence. This extraordinary natural light show is caused by a high concentration of a particular species of plankton alongside red mangroves and minimal light movement in the sheltered water, resulting in a stunning bioluminescence light, best seen on very dark nights on a tour with Cayman Kayaks.
The average visitor to the Cayman Islands – indeed, the average person – may not have “swimming with stingrays” on their bucket list, but they should. This name is misleading, and not only are these oval-shaped rays with a wingspan of up to 1.8m, gentle with people (if not threatened or stepped on), for fish they are also surprisingly enchanting. During the mid-1980s, a unique phenomenon called ‘Stingray City’ was born when the rays learned to gather in a particular spot in Grand Cayman’s North Sound to feed on scraps thrown overboard by fishermen.

Today, it’s a thriving tourist attraction, and for anyone with even a passing interest in nature, it’s not to be missed. You can go diving with the stingrays in 4m of water if you wish, but you can also join them in just 0.5m on the sandbar, and for this you’ll just need a mask and snorkel. You’ll find them completely approachable and not afraid to take close-in shots. Who alters most endearing poppy-drops’ smiles? Of course, there really is nothing else like it on Earth. And whether you are snorkelling in the shallow waters of Point of Sand and round Owen Island on Little Cayman or just off the Grand Cayman Beach Resort on Cayman Brac, you’ll find the experience is mostly the same – fish and other marine creatures that are clearly so absorbed in looking stunning or just plain weird that they don’t have time to run away from you. In the case of the queen conchs, they really can’t run away from you.

If you’re looking for real adventure, then Bloody Bay Marine Park on Little Cayman is the place to be, discovered as being one of the greatest dive sites in the world, here the ocean plunges vertically to a depth of 1,800m. If you’ve got a head for heights, then here you’ll find eagle rays, sharks and huge Nurse sharks. You’ll be amazed by the prolification of sealife down here, too. All over the world, coral is under threat from issues as diverse as disease, fishing, pollution and global warming, but at least on Little Cayman something is being done about it – pioneered 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 CCMI representatives welcome visitors for talks and site visits, so do get involved if you visit in Little Cayman, as this can enrich your dive experience around all three islands.

But as with much in the Cayman Islands, the real pleasure of the marine experience here is being able to find those unusual smothers, like the fabulous pearl oyster, which can weigh more than 2kg. A queen conch, about the size of a small fish. No other creature can make black and white look so beautiful and delicate. If I had to pick one, it would be the juvenile spotted drum, from Indiana when I was just eight.

What is your first wildlife memory?
Taking a live copperhead snake I had caught to ‘Show and tell’ when I was six.

How did you become interested in marine wildlife?
I inherited my passion for diving from my father, and his love of diving in lakes in Indiana when I was just nine.

What is your favourite Cayman Island species?
I tend to pick one, but I think the leatherback turtle is just simply beautiful (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.

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… Shrimp, crustaceans and small fish, which they hunt by capturing them from the sandy seabed.
- Can be seen at… Stingray City and Stingray Sandbar in North Sound on 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… The shellfish equivalent of T-Rex, with a spiky large shell that can grow up to 30cm long. It can live for over 40 years. And when carrying oxygen, this mollusc’s blood appears to be blue, rather than red.
- Eats… Algae and detritus on the seabed.
- Can be seen at… Almost anywhere where there are shallow waters with sandy seabed and seagrass.
- Can be seen at… Almost anywhere where there are shallow waters with sandy seabed and seagrass.

Information Centre

For more information about Stingray City and the many operators offering trips there, see www.caymanislands.co.uk and www.discovercayman.com.co. Many outfits will take you snorkelling, too. There’s good snorkelling off Seven Mile Beach on Grand Cayman, and other popular spots on that island include Cemetery Beach, Smith Cove, Eden Rock and Devil’s Gutter. The Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI) offers various courses, talks and information sessions for visitors of all ages. www.ccmi.info

At the time of print, the Marine Parks were under extensive review. For more information on Marine Parks, the Cayman Islands Department of Environment can be contacted on http://www.doe.com. Lurking are an innumerable 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.reefsource.co.uk and www.divetech.com.
As well as being famous for the 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 – diving seabirds closely related to gannets – 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.

Look out for the much larger magnificent frigatebirds, indiscernible blackbeaks with a huge 2m wingspan. Like old-fashioned pirates or modern-day muggers, they try to force the boobies to regurgitate their meals – known as ‘kleptoparasitism’. In the business – and the aerial ‘dogfights’ between the two species can be spectacular.

Strangely, once the boobies have landed on their roosting tree, they’re safe, as if there is a commonly agreed ‘no fly zone’.

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-visit location for any visitor to Little Cayman.

There are more boobies 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.

Also on ‘the Brac’ is a quite different bird: the Cayman Brac parrot. In the dry forest 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 there are probably less than 400 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 tidbits from garden feeders.

Contrasting with the cheeky bananaquits are the West Indian whistling-ducks, elegant waterbirds with an upright stance. Though rare in the Caribbean these days, visitors can reliably see them at Bel Air pond just off South Sound Road.

In total, the Cayman Islands have a record of 246 different bird species, though you are more likely to see more of these than the 70 or so you might find at the reserve. There’s no charge. More info naturecayman@gov.ky

Information Centre

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. More info email naturecayman@gov.ky

For birding tours on Grand Cayman, contact the National Trust’s Stuart Mailer

What’s your favourite place in the Cayman Islands?

I have a favourite on each of the three islands, including Booby Pond on Little Cayman, where there is a 10,000 or more red-footed booby rookery.

What’s your favourite bird of the Cayman Islands?

The Cuban bullfinch, which is only found on Grand Cayman and in Cuba. It is a very self-possessed bird: the males are andromantic black with a touch of white – while the females are drab olive-grey.

What’s your first wildlife memory?

Feeding ducks with my grandmother at a park near her home in Co Down, in Northern Ireland, where I was born.

How did you become interested in birds?

It became a passion when I worked in Malawi and Botswana for six years.

Brac Parrot

- Looks like… Medium-sized, green parrot with distinctive iridescent pink on the throat and cheeks, with white on its forehead and around its eyes.
- Eats… Fruits and seeds of a wide variety of plants, including cultivated mangoes and papayas.
- Can be seen… Only in the Brac Parrot Reserve on Cayman Brac, though you are more likely to hear one.
- Did you know… The Brac parrot was never found on Little Cayman until the 20th century – until a hurricane hit the island in 1932. It’s thought that the hurricanes destroyed too many trees, and the parrot was unable to cling on.

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 catch for food 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.

Information Centre

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. More info email naturecayman@gov.ky

For birding tours on Grand Cayman, contact the National Trust’s Stuart Mailer

See also www.nationaltrust.org.ky

What’s your first wildlife memory?

Feeding ducks with my grandmother at a park near her home in Co Down, in Northern Ireland, where I was born.

How did you become interested in birds?

It became a passion when I worked in Malawi and Botswana for six years.

Brac Parrot

- Looks like… Medium-sized, green parrot with distinctive iridescent pink on the throat and cheeks, with white on its forehead and around its eyes.
- Eats… Fruits and seeds of a wide variety of plants, including cultivated mangoes and papayas.
- Can be seen… Only in the Brac Parrot Reserve on Cayman Brac, though you are more likely to hear one.
- Did you know… The Brac parrot was never found on Little Cayman until the 20th century – until a hurricane hit the island in 1932. It’s thought that the hurricanes destroyed too many trees, and the parrot was unable to cling on.

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 catch for food 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.

Information Centre

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. More info email naturecayman@gov.ky

For birding tours on Grand Cayman, contact the National Trust’s Stuart Mailer

See also www.nationaltrust.org.ky

What’s your first wildlife memory?

Feeding ducks with my grandmother at a park near her home in Co Down, in Northern Ireland, where I was born.

How did you become interested in birds?

It became a passion when I worked in Malawi and Botswana for six years.
There be dragons in the Cayman Islands – and not just any old dragons, but bright blue ones up to 1.5m long with dandyish crests running the length of their backs and tails. OK, these dragons can’t fly, and they appear to spend the bulk of their time skulking in the shade rather than breathing fire and guarding treasure troves...

...but then this is real life, not a fairy tale, even though the story of how the blue iguana was rescued from the brink of extinction might read like one. Once down to a dozen known wild animals, this extraordinary reptile was just about to join the dodos until a young British scientist called Fred Burton stepped in. Over a period of three decades, Fred has worked tirelessly to protect the blue iguana and breed them in captivity. And though it is still incredibly rare, it is at least safe from extinction.

What’s more, you can see blue iguanas very easily. No need to go rampaging through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that if you’d like to, a quiet stroll through the bush, although you can also do that...
Plants & Butterflies

With luck, you’ll also see Cayman’s national flower, the banana orchid though it only flowers in May and June, and this is also a good spot for 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 is worth going with a guide such as Stuart Mailor from the National Trust or Ann Stafford from CaymANNature. Stuart is resident expert of the National Trust Visitors Centre, which provides information, tours, events, books and souvenirs related to the preservation of natural environments and places of historic significance in the Cayman Islands. Ann Stafford isn’t only knowledgeable about plants, but as she puts it, “I am interested in food chains – who eats what – and everything goes back to dependence on plants.”

So, for example, if you’re looking for Cayman’s largest butterfly, the Grand Cayman swallowtail, then you should know that its caterpillars only feed on leaves of citrus family trees. These grow naturally and are also cultivated, so the butterfly can be seen across Grand Cayman.

In contrast, the pretty blue butterfly is tiny and requires low-lying saline habitat where a plant called glasswort grows. One good place for this is Barkers, the remnant of the ironwood forest to the south-east of George Town. Ironwood is another culturally significant tree that was used for foundation posts for Cayman houses – it is termite and rot resistant.

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 and ephiphytic orchids and bromeliads.

The limestone karst substrate on which everything on all three islands grows is spectacular in this wild and often windswept terrain. The leaves of the silver thatch do not rot in saltwater, so they became highly prized by the ropemaking industry. Cayman Islanders established profitable trades with other Caribbean islands such as Cuba and Jamaica.

Bananorchid

• **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 grey-yellow colour and look like, well, unripe bananas. Don’t try eating them, however.

• **Did you know...** Like many orchids, it’s an epiphyte, which is Greek for “upon a plant”. Epiphytes grow on trees, or occasionally artificial structures such as buildings, but – unlike parasites – don’t harm their hosts.

Silverthatchpalm tree

• **Looks like...** A tall, spindly palm tree with fan-like leaves at the crown. The leaves are green on top but silverly underneath, hence its name.

• **Can be seen...** On all three islands, but one very good place is the eastern 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 established profitable trades with other Caribbean islands such as Cuba and Jamaica.

Information Centre

You can visit the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park every day of the year except Christmas Day and Good Friday from 10.30. More info: www.botanic-park.ky

The National Trust organise Mastic Trail hikes, contact stuartmailor@nationaltrust.org.ky or www.nationaltrust.org.ky

Ann Stafford runs island nature tours, which can include the Botanic Park and the Mastic Trail. Ann is co-author of the book ‘Butterflies of the Cayman Islands’ with RR Askew.

When did you first visit the Cayman Islands?

In 1973, after my husband got a job here – he’s Guyanese, and we’d been living in Guyana.

What’s your first wildlife memory?

Robins and phoebes in the countryside of Warwickshire where I was born.

What got you interested in plants?

Growing up in Warwickshire, we were surrounded by woods and fields. My uncle got me interested in butterflies. He later wrote a book about them.

What’s your favourite plant of the Cayman Islands?

The silver thatch palm tree – it’s an epiphytic species and it was the mainstay of the economy at times gone by. The growing fronds were made into ropes, baskets and hats and traded, and the open fronds were used for thatching houses.

What’s your favourite place in the Cayman Islands?

The remnant of the ironwood forest to the south-east of George Town. Ironwood is another culturally significant tree that was used for foundation posts for Cayman houses – it is termite and rot resistant.

Growing up in Warwickshire, we were surrounded by woods and fields. My uncle got me interested in butterflies. He later wrote a book about them.

What’s your first wildlife memory?

Robins and phoebes in the countryside of Warwickshire where I was born.

What got you interested in plants?

Growing up in Warwickshire, we were surrounded by woods and fields. My uncle got me interested in butterflies. He later wrote a book about them.

What’s your favourite plant of the Cayman Islands?

The silver thatch palm tree – it’s an epiphytic species and it was the mainstay of the economy at times gone by. The growing fronds were made into ropes, baskets and hats and traded, and the open fronds were used for thatching houses.

What’s your favourite place in the Cayman Islands?

The remnant of the ironwood forest to the south-east of George Town. Ironwood is another culturally significant tree that was used for foundation posts for Cayman houses – it is termite and rot resistant.
Ethical Wildlife Watching

Marine Parks, Replenishment Zones, Environmental Zones and Animal Sanctuaries have been set up on the Islands to ensure that Cayman’s treasures will be in pristine condition for generations of visitors to enjoy. At the time of print a full review of marine parks was being conducted. For up to the minute information contact the Cayman Islands Department of Environment at doe@gov.ky or go to www.doe.com.

Bats

Though some attempts are being made to base ecotourism projects around Cayman’s only native mammals, these are very much in their infancy. Some visitors will be unaware that there are bats on the islands, however some will notice some of the 80 inhabited bat houses which are visible all over the islands. These bat houses look like little houses set on top of utility poles, visitors can watch bats fly in and out at dusk, either on their own or by signing up for one of the National Trust ‘Bat Fly-Out informative talks’, which are held under the bat houses.

The commonest species 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 is one of a keystone species in natural pest control.

There are nine species in total on the islands, and four of these are fruit and nectar eating bats which like the Caribbean fruit bat tend to be much larger than their insect-eating cousins.

One of the most interesting bats is the Antillean nectar bat, which is described as looking like a ‘tiny flying piglet’ and eats nectar and pollen, as well as fruits and insects. The bat has a long nose and a long sticky tongue which it uses to reach into flowers to get their nectar. It 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.

One of the most interesting bats is the Antillean nectar bat, which is described as looking like a “tiny flying piglet” and eats nectar and pollen, as well as fruits and insects. The bat has a long nose and a long sticky tongue which it uses to reach into flowers to get their nectar. It 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.

Both of these species are very rare and you are unlikely to see them – but still, its nice to know that they are pollinating night-blooming flowers and pollinizing the flowers that keep the ecosystem healthy.

Lois Blumenthal initiated the National Trust Bat Conservation Programme for the Cayman Islands in 1992. It is the most successful in the Caribbean and is internationally acclaimed as a prototype for tropical countries worldwide.

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 – if they are out of the water they cannot breathe. Your tour operator should give you a safety and conduct briefing before you get in, divers should remove any sharp pieces of equipment and jewellery that might damage the mucus coating which covers the rays with protection from parasites and other infections.

Ethical Nature Tips

The rule of thumb for snorkelling or diving on or around coral reefs is don’t touch anything. It could bite you 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 that may vary at certain times of year. Our advice is make sure you fully understand the regulations if you would like to do this.

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 ingrown survival mechanisms, panicked mother bats may abandon a cave that is too often disturbed, leaving helpless pups behind. NO flash cameras inside bat caves. Do not shine any lights directly on the bats.

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

Summary of Cayman Islands marine conservation laws

**LOBSTERS**
- Closed season: 1 March through 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: Six inch tail minumum size.
- Only spiny lobster (crayfish) may be taken.

**CONCH**
- Closed season: 1 May through 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 per day, whichever is less.
- No one may purchase or receive more than ten conch from Cayman waters in any one day.
- Size limit: Twelve inch minimum size limit applies throughout Cayman waters year round EXCEPT:
  - Designated Grouper Spawning Areas are protected.

**SHARKS**
- No one may feed, attempt to feed or provide food to attract any shark in Cayman waters.
- No one may take ANY marine life alive or dead while on SCUBA.
- No taking of ANY marine life alive or dead while on SCUBA.
- 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 gift nets, poison or other noxious substances is prohibited.
- Dumping ANYTHING in Cayman waters is prohibited.
- Not more than three conch shells and or any black coral requires a CITES permit, issued through the DDE.

**LOBSTERS**
- Closed season: 1 March through 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: Six inch tail minimum size.
- Only spiny lobster (crayfish) may be taken.

**CONCH**
- Closed season: 1 May through 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 per day, whichever is less.
- No one may purchase or receive more than ten conch from Cayman waters in any one day.
- Size limit: Twelve inch minimum size limit applies throughout Cayman waters year round EXCEPT:
  - Designated Grouper Spawning Areas are protected.