SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION

of the
North-east Tobago UNESCO
Man and the Biosphere Reserve

The NETMABR is located on the north-eastern end of Tobago, the smaller of the twin-island Caribbean Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, forming the southernmost end of the Lesser Antilles. Although the island is small, the area is relatively isolated, approximately half the size of the entire island and home to a little less than a quarter of the island's population.

BIOGEOGRAPHY

Terrestrial ecoregions: Trinidad and Tobago dry forest and Trinidad and Tobago moist broadleaf forests.

MARINE ECOREGIONS

Eastern Caribbean and Guianan

BIOPHYSICS

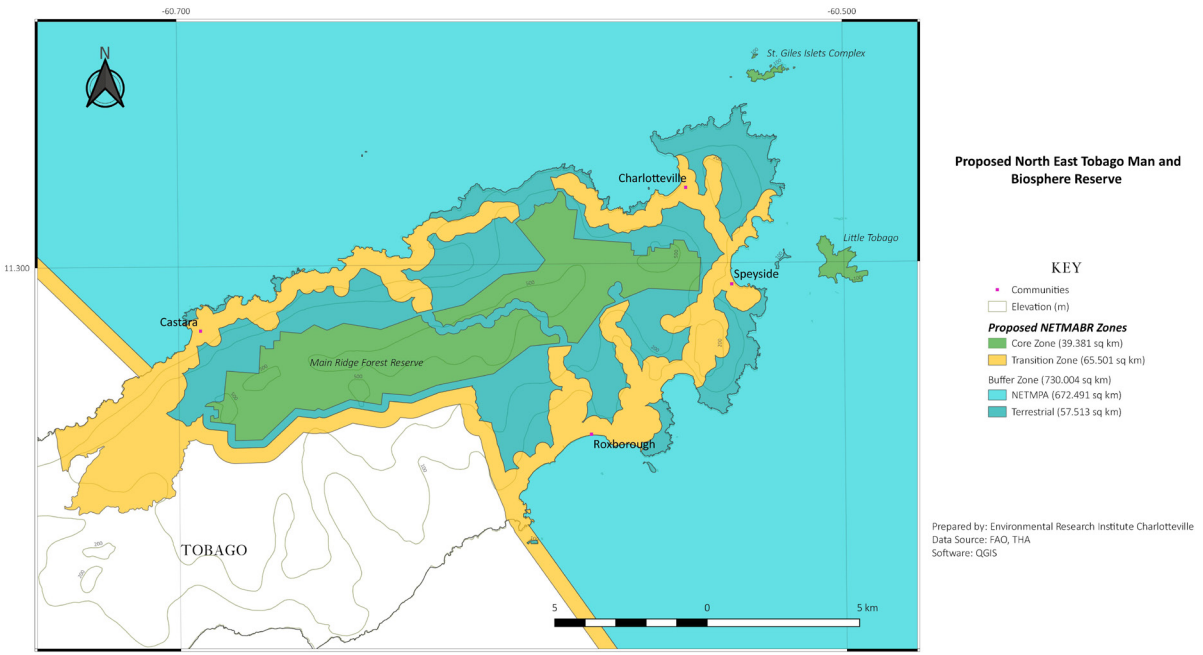
Characterised by the Main Ridge (L: 17km, W: 2-6km, max. H: 573m) with steep slopes directly to sea level and only interrupted by some low lying, coastal valleys which harbour villages and the small remains of wetlands such as marshes and grass lands. The coast consists mostly of rocky shores, interrupted by some sandy beaches. The coastal marine area is covered by reefs; within bays the substrate consists of a sand / clay mixture to various degrees. The seafloor towards the Caribbean (north) drops to about 500m, while it drops to about 1,000m towards the Atlantic in the north-east.

CLIMATE

Tropical wet-dry climate which is controlled mainly by seasonal fluctuations of the trade winds and the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) with precipitation in the driest month being less than 60mm. Average temperature of the coldest month (February) is 25.6°C, warmest month (July) 27.3 °C. Tobago's mean annual precipitation is 2,519.3 mm. Climate change contributes increasingly to rising average temperatures, less distinct seasons, and rarer but heavier rainfalls.

GEOLOGY

The significant movement of the oceanic island Tobago over the past 10 million years has brought it from the west in the Pacific, which lead to a direct joint to Venezuela at least once, before it migrated eastwards to the present location. About 11,000 years ago the last separation from the continental mainland took place. Meanwhile it became attached several times to the South American continent and was joined to Trinidad through a land bridge during periods of low sea level as for instance in the past ice age. The Main Ridge forms the easternmost allochthonous fragment of the Caribbean Mountain system and consists of cretaceous metavolcanic rocks with unmetamorphosed cretaceous volcanic and plutonic rocks in the centre.



ECOSYTEMS

The NETMABR, is a land- and sea- scape that encompasses in a small area, a wide range of ecosystem processes, services, and biodiversity, including two of the world's most biodiverse ecosystems: tropical rainforest and coral reefs.

Tropical Forests: covering approx. 150km2, lower montane forest with very small pockets of elfin woodland and evergreen formation forests, lowland rain forest, very small pockets for swamp / mangrove forest, and dry tropical broadleaf forest.

Fresh and Brackish Water: Riverine and riparian ecosystems are the freshwater ecosystems creating critical links within the landscape, whilst estuarine and mangrove ecosystems form the interface between freshwater and marine ecosystems; four permanent rivers, many smaller riparian watercourses. Several very small estuaries with mangroves and or grassy wetlands.

Coastal Marine: includes beaches, cliffs, marine systems (incl. of coral sponge co-dominated reefs) from the littoral zone to a 50m depth contour and covers roughly 400ha. The beaches of NE Tobago are predominantly narrow bands of sand at the base of steep valleys. Many are isolated from easy landward access. The cumulative length of all beaches is approximately 10km across 35 beaches, some of which are important marine turtle rookeries.

Offshore Islands: Little Tobago, the St. Giles complex, Goat Island, Sister's Rocks, Brother's Rocks, and Booby Island with some dry tropical forest and important Bird and Biodiversity Areas.

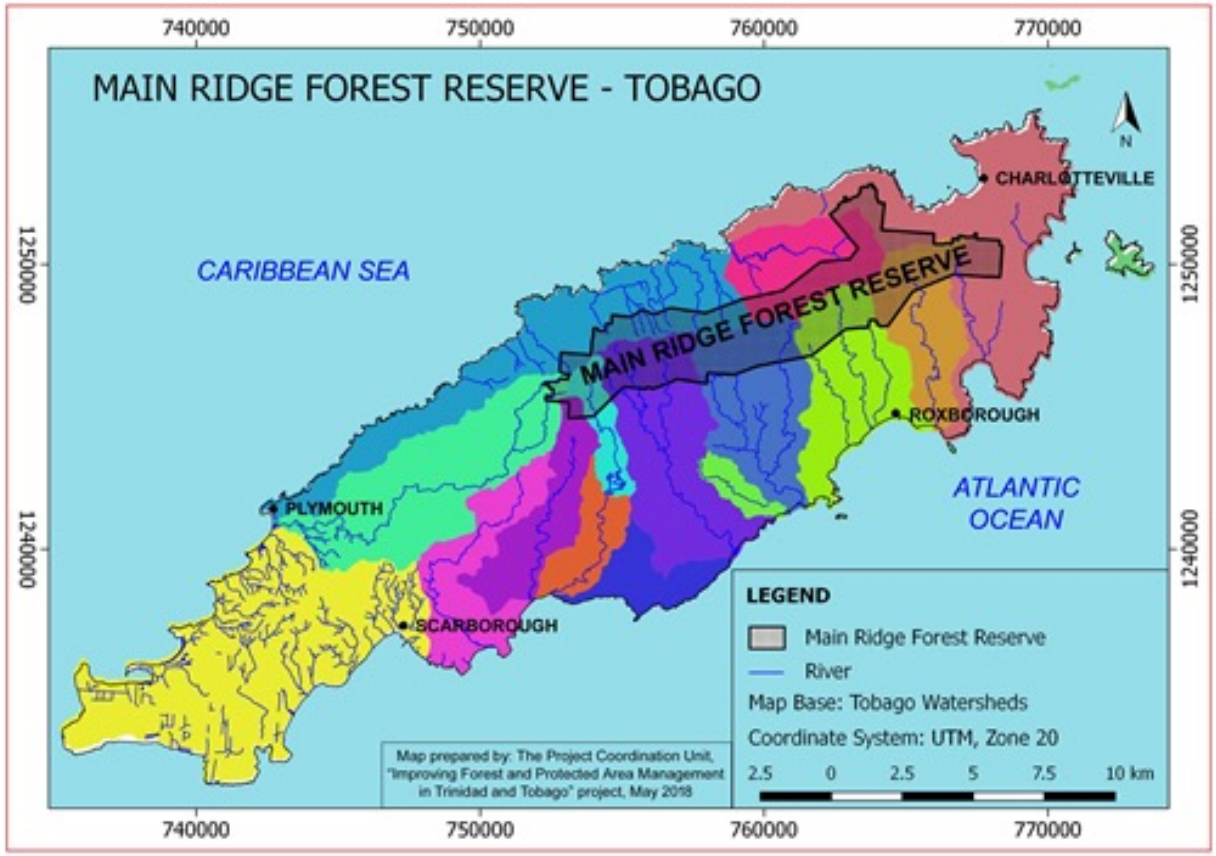
Marine Pelagic: starts beyond a depth contour of 50m, extending to the outer edge of the NETMABR (11.1km from the coast); encompasses both the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean and thus the interaction of the Guiana Current and the Caribbean System. This ecosystem and the coastal reef ecosystems are seasonally enriched by a nutrient pulse from the Orinoco River.

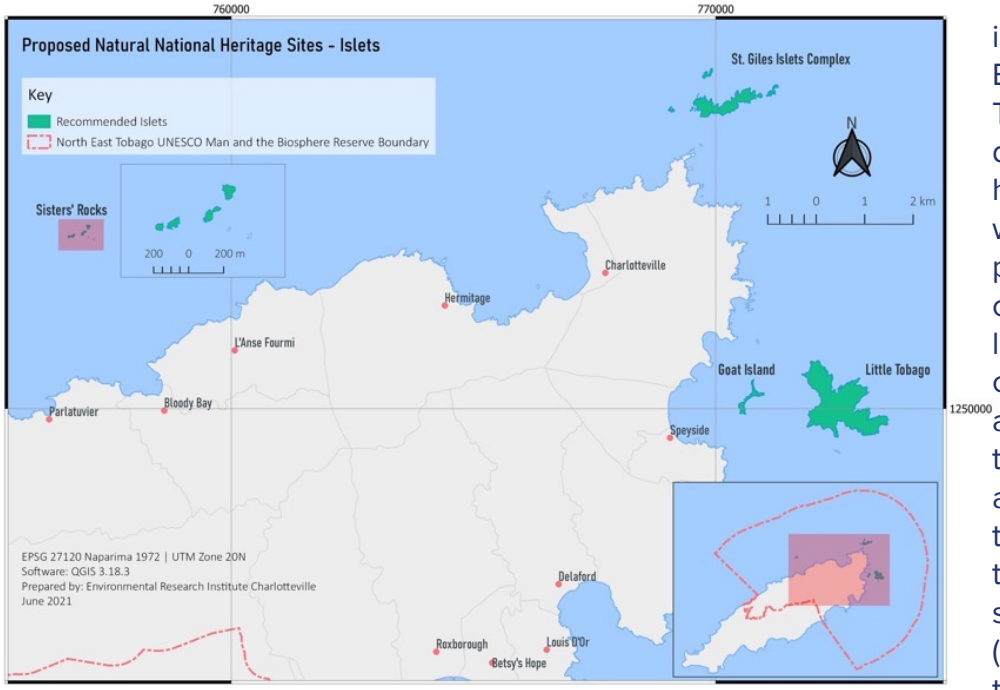
HUMAN SYSTEMS

Land Tenure: Mostly public lands, with some larger private estates, many small private holdings that cover (roughly) not more that 20% of the area.

NATIONAL HERITAGE SITES

Existing: Main Ridge Forest Reserve; **Proposed:** Little Tobago, Goat Island, Sisters, St Giles Island Complex.





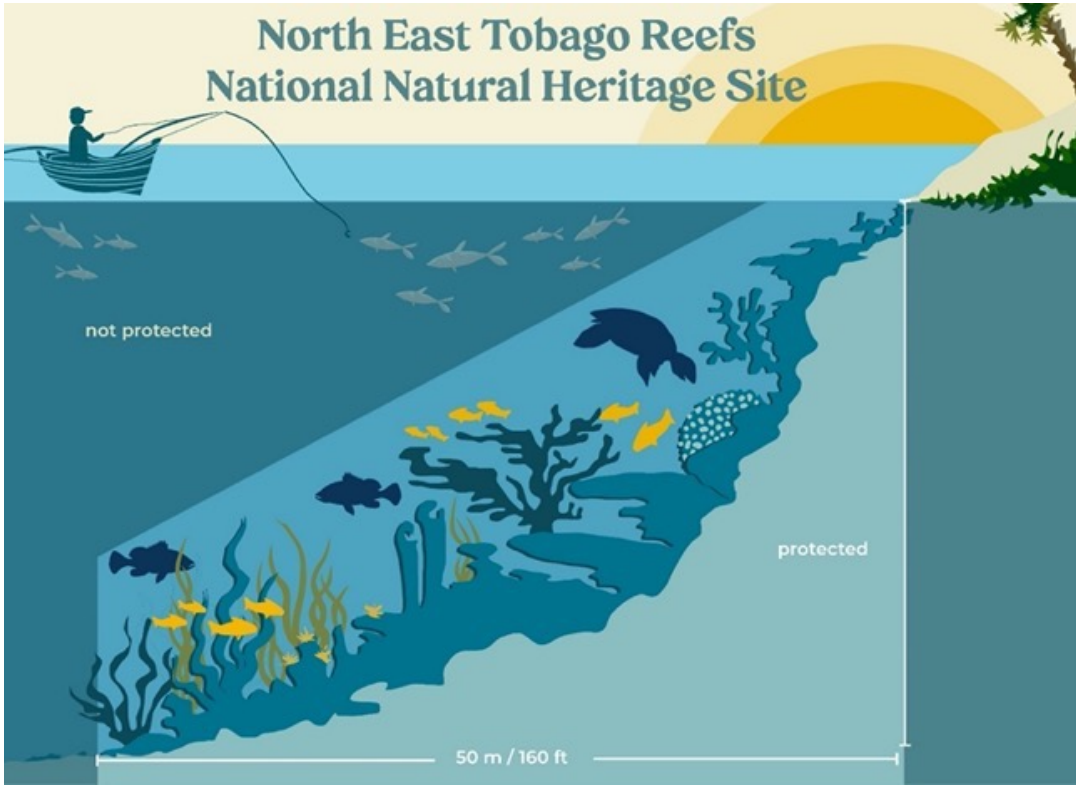
Proposed Islets for Natural National Heritage Site Status

HISTORY

Prior to the 1498 arrival of Christopher Columbus the island of Tobago, or Aloubaéra as it was known then, was inhabited by Ariwakan and Kalinago peoples. The first European settlements were set up in 1632 by the Dutch. It is believed that the natives survived, though in declining numbers until 1810 where there were only twenty left in the north coast of the island, all coming from one family. Tobago is said to have changed hands over thirty times gaining notoriety as battlefield fuelled by aspirations of conquest by European powers like the British, French, Dutch, and Courlanders. Finally, in 1814 the island was permanently British through the Treaty of Paris. For decades, Tobago, at the hands of African slaves, was a model sugar producer. However, competition from larger and more fertile colonies like Brazil and Cuba in addition to persistent neglect and use of outdated technology along with the abolition of the slave trade and slavery (1838) all attributed to the island's loss of profitability in the sugar trade. From the late 1900th century, the island enjoyed relative prosperity as producer of cocoa, citrus, and coconut that was exported to Trinidad and neighbouring Caribbean islands; however, that all came to an end in 1963 when hurricane Flora flattened the island. While aspects of the African/European culture have been eroded through evolution, acculturation, and inadequate transmission, today NE Tobago represents the island's centre of cultural heritage conservation. It is important to note that given Tobago's small size, cultural practices and traditions are fairly homogeneous with little to no distinctions between villages.

CULTURE

The cultural practices of North-east Tobagonians represent a society that is perched in the balance, resting in the threshold of so-called modernity and a heritage fashioned from a tumultuous past. Perhaps one of the most distinguishing features of the people is their spirituality. Christianity is dominant undoubtedly due to the Europeans quelling of African practices. African slaves who were brought to the island were stripped of their identity; their psyche was dismembered and discarded, replaced by a Eurocentric identity. African traditional worship was rooted in animism with the idea of ancestral worship and possession was prevalent, essentially accessibility to the spirit world formed the ethos of their practices. However, slaves were forbidden from practicing their religion therefore Christianity took hold. This led to the development of syncretic practices evident in the Orisha and Spiritual Baptist traditions. Not only that but the practice of obeah and ancestral veneration today forms part of the African continuity. The harvest celebration held on various Sundays around the island is another divergent characteristic of Tobago and is closely linked to the Christian churches.



Cross Section of Band of North-East Tobago Reefs Proposed as Natural National Heritage Site

SOCIO-ECONOMICS

Unfortunately, there is a significant socio-economic data deficiency for NE Tobago; additionally, the latest census data (2011) seem highly questionable.

The society is relatively young; young males are more vulnerable to social risks, while young females often achieve higher educational levels, which in itself causes inter-gender issues.

The pre-school system is underdeveloped and causes complaints by concerned parents. Free primary and secondary education is available to all children; however, requires modernisation in infrastructure and pedagogy. While there are no tertiary or vocational learning institutions within the NETMABR, students can access those in south Tobago. Brain drain is a major issue, as many students seek education, and later, employment elsewhere.

The social welfare system covers the basic needs; however, is difficult to access for highly vulnerable persons.

There are three gas stations, three police stations, two health centres, two secondary and 12 primary schools, two libraries, one fire station, a newly constructed administrative complex, and seven community centres/ multipurpose facilities.

The THA is the main employer (approx. 60%), especially through unemployment relief programmes as well as administrative and governmental services. Other relevant economic activities are mainly artisanal fishing and tourism, followed by vending, construction, repair services, gastronomy, agriculture, all on a relatively small scale.