

Blue lines indicate the area meeting the ISRA Criteria; dashed lines indicate the suggested buffer for use in the development of appropriate place-based conservation measures

GRUTA DO ILHÉU DAS CABRAS ISRA

European Atlantic Region

SUMMARY

Gruta do Ilhéu das Cabras is located within the municipality of Angra do Heroísmo on Terceira Island, Azores, Portugal. This coastal cave, formed by an ancient submarine volcano, is characterised by semi-submerged cavities, a mixture of boulder and cobble deposits, sandy substrate, and rocky reefs. Within this area there are: **threatened species** and **undefined aggregations** (Common Eagle Ray *Myliobatis aquila*).

CRITERIA

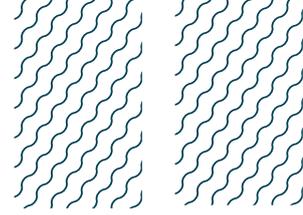
Criterion A - Vulnerability; Sub-criterion C5 - Undefined Aggregations

— —
PORTUGAL

— —
0-40 metres

— —
0.25 km²





DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Gruta do Ilhéu das Cabras is located within the municipality of Angra do Heroísmo on Terceira Island, Azores, Portugal. It is situated on the northern face of the western islet (Ilhéu das Cabras). This coastal cave, formed by an ancient submarine volcano, is characterised by semi-submerged cavities, a mixture of boulder and cobble deposits, sandy substrate, and rocky reefs (Barcelos 2024). At low tide, the above-surface entrance reaches ~4 m in height and slightly less in width. The area is generally sheltered from the prevalent southerly winds and waves (Barcelos 2024).

This Important Shark and Ray Area is benthic and pelagic and is delineated from surface waters (0 m) to 40 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

ISRA CRITERIA

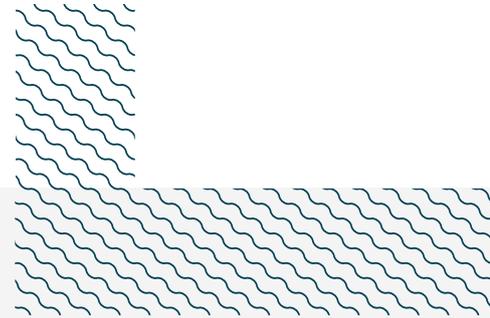
CRITERION A - VULNERABILITY

One Qualifying Species considered threatened with extinction according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species regularly occurs in the area. This is the Critically Endangered Common Eagle Ray (Jabado et al. 2021).

SUB-CRITERION C5 - UNDEFINED AGGREGATION

Gruta do Ilhéu das Cabras is an important area for undefined aggregations of one ray species.

During 2002–2003, year-round underwater visual censuses were conducted to count Common Eagle Rays within aggregations in this area. Surveys were undertaken opportunistically four times a month (total surveys = 221). Between June–September, aggregations of an average of eight individuals were observed in 123 surveys (55.7% of surveys), while between October–May, the average was one individual observed in 98 surveys (44.3% of surveys) (Barreiros & Rodeia 2004). Individuals were mostly swimming inside and along the entrance of the cave in the area during the day while during the night (n = 12 surveys) they were mostly resting on the substrate (Barreiros & Rodeia 2004). Of 23 individuals marked with tags designed to visually allow identification (ranging in size, 63–157 cm disc width), 12 individuals were recorded within the area every year from 2003–2006 (Barreiros & Rodeia 2004; JP Barreiros unpubl. data 2003–2006). Although no further dedicated surveys were undertaken, aggregations of 10–30 Common Eagle Rays have been regularly recorded within the area by recreational divers in ~75% of dives between July and September during 2006–2025 (JP Barreiros unpubl. data 2006–2025). Although no mating behaviour was observed, captured individuals showed mature gonads during the summer months and the sex ratio was 1:4.3 (male:female) in 2002 and 1:4.5 in 2003 suggesting a potential reproductive purpose of the area. Further information is required to understand the nature and function of these aggregations.



Acknowledgments

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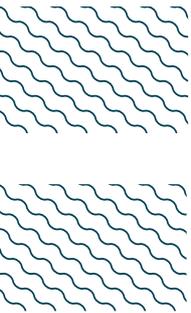
QUALIFYING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category	Global Depth Range (m)	ISRA Criteria/Sub-criteria Met									
				A	B	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	D1	D2	
RAYS													
<i>Myliobatis aquila</i>	Common Eagle Ray	CR	0-537	X							X		

SUPPORTING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category
RAYS		
<i>Taeniurops grabatus</i>	Round Fantail Stingray	NT

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species Categories are available by searching species names at www.iucnredlist.org Abbreviations refer to: CR, Critically Endangered; EN, Endangered; VU, Vulnerable; NT, Near Threatened; LC, Least Concern; DD, Data Deficient.





REFERENCES

Barcelos P. 2024. Ilhéus das Cabras. Version 1. Angra do Heroísmo: Angrosfera.

Barreiros JP, Rodeia J. 2004. Preliminary results of reproductive aggregations of eagle rays (*Myliobatis aquila*) in a single volcanic cave from the Azores (NE Atlantic). *XIth European Congress of Ichthyology, Tallinn, Estonia. Abstract Volume*, 129-130.

Jabado RW, Chartrain E, Cliff G, Da Silva C, Derrick D, Dia M, Diop M, Doherty P, Leurs GHL, Metcalfe K, et al. 2021. *Myliobatis aquila*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2021*: e.T161569A124508353. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2021-1.RLTS.T161569A124508353.en>