



Chris Davies, British Representative at the time, examining an example of the invasive plant species Dodder

Invasive plant species in Chagos

Dodder

Dodder is the name commonly used in Diego Garcia for the semi-parasitic plant *Cassytha filiformis*, an unusual genus of the Lauraceae family. The species is pan tropical and consists of fast growing vines which entwine branches of host plants and eventually smother and kill the host completely. It is leafless and is densely covered in waxy plates, the flowers have three sepals and three petals which are all whitish. The fruit is a drupe which is also white when ripe. Its chlorophyll, more commonly on younger tissue, is in the stems, but the plant loses this if the host plant is vigorous enough to sustain it, turning from green to yellow, orange or light brown. Although called Dodder in Diego Garcia, true dodders belongs to the genus *Cuscuta* and are fully parasitic.

It is a world-wide pest, but its significance in Chagos arises because it mainly parasitizes the shoreline shrub *Scaevola taccada*, known locally as 'scavvy'. The concern is that its preferred host (scavvy) is the primary soil-stabilising plant along the shoreline, preventing erosion by the waves, and protecting the islands themselves. Red foot boobies can also nest in the *Scaevola*. In Diego Garcia especially, dodder has become an abundant pest.

Its eradication is extremely difficult, especially in locations where herbicides are not used, such as Diego Garcia. It has to be pulled up by hand and burned, which is very time consuming and therefore expensive.

For more see: Topp, J.M.W and Sheppard, C.R.C. 1999 Higher Plants of the Chagos Archipelago. In: Ecology of the Chagos Archipelago. Sheppard, C.R.C. and Seaward, M.R.D. (eds.). Occasional Publications of the Linnean Society of London, Vol 2. pp225-235.

The Chagos Conservation Trust is a charity (Registered in the UK No. 1031561) established in 1992 whose aims are to promote conservation, scientific and historical research and to advance education concerning the archipelago. The Trust is a non political association.

If you would like more information on the publications or membership, please contact the Secretary simonhughes@hughes-mccormack.co.uk.

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