

Area and Population

Area and estimated population of the various islands as at 31st March, 1949, are as follows :—

Island.	Area.	Population.				Total.
		Males.		Females.		
		Non-indigenous.	Indigenous.	Non-indigenous.	Indigenous.	
	Acres.					
Rarotonga	16,500	170	2,681	90	2,596	5,537
Mangaia	17,500	8	916	2	973	1,899
Mauke	4,600	3	351	..	451	805
Mitiaro	2,500	1	96	..	130	227
Atiu	6,950	4	678	2	609	1,293
Aitutaki	3,900	7	1,314	4	1,265	2,590
Palmerston	1,000	..	34	..	33	67
Pukapuka	1,250	4	345	1	338	688
Manihiki	1,250	2	227	..	244	473
Rakahanga	1,000	1	174	..	157	332
Penrhyn	4,000	2	374	..	335	711
Manuae	1,524	..	18	..	10	28
Takutea	302	..	..	..	..	..
Nassau	300	..	..	..	..	..
Suwarrov	600	..	..	..	..	..
		202	7,208	99	7,141	
Totals	63,176	7,410		7,240		14,650

Population Density.—In the absence of exact information regarding the area of arable land, statistics of this nature are apt to be misleading. Overpopulation is known to exist in some islands, notably Pukapuka, and the lease of Nassau Island, situated some forty-five miles from Pukapuka, was purchased to enable the Administration to resettle some of the surplus population of that island. It is worthy of note that formerly Nassau Island was used by the inhabitants of Pukapuka as an additional source of food-supply.

Topography

Lower Group.—These islands are of volcanic origin, having a hilly or mountainous interior surrounded by fertile lowlands. The height of the interior varies up to an elevation of 2,140 ft. The Island of Manuae is a normal coral atoll. All the islands in this area are surrounded by a coral reef. In addition, most islands have an elevated coral reef—known locally as the makatea—which encircles the islands almost immediately behind the coast-line. The soil of the Lower Group is very fertile and is suitable for the cultivation of the usual tropical and sub-tropical products.

The Northern Group.—The islands of the Northern Group are typical coral atolls. The soil of the majority of these islands is poor, being largely coral sand. Coconut palms thrive, but there is some shortage of other native food crops.

Climate

The whole Group lies within the hurricane belt and destructive storms have been experienced during the hurricane season, which extends from January to March. Considerable damage was caused by such storms in 1935, 1943, and 1946. The area is now covered by the meteorological service, with headquarters in Fiji, and hurricane warnings are issued by this service.