There are fourteen British Overseas Territories (BOT), sometimes known as United Kingdom Overseas Territories (UKOT). Indeed, these lands are part of the United Kingdom and as such feature Queen Elizabeth II as their monarch and head of state.

It has been said in different ways and at different times that the sun never set on the British Empire. Truly, the British colonial system spanned the globe, in various decades and centuries holding vast lands such as America, Canada, and Australia, as well as many islands of varied sizes and shapes. Some of these lands are former colonies that maintain links through the British Commonwealth, a voluntary association of 54 countries, including Australia, Canada, India, Malta, New Zealand, Singapore, and others. The United States has no such ties to the United Kingdom, but remains a strong ally and trading partner with Britain. Additionally, there are the Crown dependencies – the islands of Guernsey and Jersey and the Isle of Man. These islands nearby to Great Britain are not independent countries and thus are not in
the Commonwealth, but have their own political relationships with the United Kingdom.

In this essay, we specifically consider the British Overseas Territories that are within the Caribbean. This excludes the BOT members outside the Atlantic Ocean – the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia that are on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, the British Antarctic Territory, the British Indian Ocean Territory (also a military base), Gibraltar (whose strait connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea), and the Pitcairn Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Additionally not near the Caribbean, there are Atlantic Ocean islands that are British Overseas Territories. The islands of St. Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha are located far distant from anywhere, sitting in the center of the southern Atlantic Ocean. The Falkland Islands and the somewhat nearby South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands belong to the United Kingdom, but are claimed by Argentina, their nearest continental neighbor.

The remaining six British Overseas Territories count in the Caribbean tally.

Section I – Actually, in the Atlantic Ocean, but near the Caribbean Sea

1 – Bermuda

Bermuda is in the Atlantic Ocean, east of North and South Carolina. As such, it really isn’t in the Caribbean Sea, but often is grouped with those islands. (See the essay on defining the LACAR region.) The first British sailors to reach Bermuda, actually arrived by shipwreck in 1609; nevertheless, Britain has controlled the island ever since. Strikingly, the island is famed for the adjacent Bermuda Triangle, a region bounded by Miami, Puerto Rico, and Bermuda. This Bermuda Triangle is a legendary zone where airplanes and ships are said to have wrecked and/or disappeared mysteriously. Computative analysis indicates that the number of planes and ships lost there is not statistically different than would occur by random chance for the large number of vessels passing through the region.

2 – Turks and Caicos Islands

These islands are immediately north of the Windward Passage, the strait that separates Cuba from Haiti. Originally settled by Taino and Lucayan natives, the islands were visited by Christopher Columbus’ ships in 1492. Subsequently, the islands were ruled under French, Spanish, and British control respectively, but left to Britain with the Treaty of Versailles. Under British rule, the islands at times were paired with the Bahamas and with Jamaica, but the Turks and Caicos have been separate since 1973. “Turks” refers to a cactus that features a red top, reminiscent of the Turkish hat – the fez.

X – the Bahamas

The Bahamas are not included as a British Overseas Territory, despite the fact that the islands were included as a colony of the United Kingdom. Of course, now the Bahamas is an independent country. Thus, the X for the Bahamas in this list.

However, the islands listed here as 1-2-X create the British insular triangle of historical control over these Atlantic, not truly Caribbean, island sets.

Section II – Within the Lesser Antilles

3 – British Virgin Islands (BVI)
The islands, grouped with the U.S. Virgin Islands, were named in honor of St. Ursula, whose legendary and many varied accounts feature her martyrdom along with that of her group of virgin maiden followers. There are more than four dozen islands in this group, but the larger populated islands are Tortola, Virgin Gorda, and Anegada. Anguilla is to the southeast of BVI.

4 – Anguilla

At only 35 square miles in area, Anguilla is the 59th largest island in the Caribbean. In 1967 Anguilla marked the 300th anniversary of British colonial control. For approximately the second half of those three centuries, Anguilla was in a British partnership with nearby islands St. Kitts and Nevis. Often unhappy with that arrangement, Anguilla eventually broke away, securing its independence in 1967; however, the actual goal of this move instead was alone to be a British colony. Thus, after two years of independence, Anguilla was happy to have its request granted, rejoining the British Empire. This move from independence to colonial land would seem to be the only such voluntary act in history.

Y – St. Kitts and Nevis

St. Kitts (technically St. Christopher, but always the nickname is used) and Nevis lie next from BVI in this southeastern arc of islands. These islands were the last British islands in the Caribbean to gain independence. Thus, we add the letter Y to this list of British territories, as St. Kitts and Nevis no longer are included as a British Overseas Territory.

Z – Antigua and Barbuda

Antigua in 1632 and Barbuda in 1678 were secured as British colonies, not gaining independence until 1981. They now belong in the British Commonwealth. In 2017, Hurricane Irma essentially destroyed everything on Barbuda, compelling survivors to relocate to Antigua.

5 – Montserrat

Some say that Montserrat greatly resembles Ireland, except for the volcano. Hmm, that would seem to be a big difference! In July 1995, the volcano Soufrière Hills erupted, devastating the southern half of the island. The volcano remained active to varying degrees on through 2010. The capital city Plymouth was destroyed. The southern half of the island remains in an exclusion zone, uninhabitable and with very restricted access.

So, this part of the insular chain is listed here as 3-4-Y-Z-5. These are the more northern British islands of the Caribbean chain of smaller islands – the Lesser Antilles. Skipping a few islands such as the historically French islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, the traditionally British islands of the Caribbean continue. These now independent countries, but former British colonies, include Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados, Grenada, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Section III – In the Caribbean, but an odd fit

6 – Cayman Islands

Located south of Cuba and west of Jamaica, in a sense the Cayman Islands are out of place. They are small, like the Lesser Antilles, but they do not lie in that chain of islands separating the east side of the Caribbean Sea from the open Atlantic Ocean. Like the Turks and Caicos, the Cayman Islands once was paired with Jamaica in British administration,
but now have status as a BOT. Given the nearby presence of Jamaica in the Greater Antilles, the Cayman Islands could fit into that sub-group of the Caribbean, except that its area is insufficient to be counted as “Greater.”

The name Cayman comes from the Spanish word caiman that means alligator. In the Cayman Islands, there are two species of crocodiles – the American and the Cuban. The caiman, a smaller relative of alligators and crocodiles, does not live in the Cayman Islands, though their habitat does include Cuba, Puerto Rico and several continental countries of Central and South America.

Overall, the British Overseas Territories fit into three categories. The technically Atlantic islands of Bermuda and the paired Turks and Caicos fall there along with the independent Bahamas. BVI, Anguilla, and Montserrat are amidst numerous former British colonies in that eastern set of Caribbean islands known as the Lesser Antilles. The Cayman Islands are found near Jamaica, thus historically cohesive, but not so in size.

The British Overseas Territories also each have a unique element. Bermuda is infamous of the perhaps myth of the dangerous Bermuda Triangle. The Turks were named for a cactus that looks like it has a red hat. The British Virgin Islands have a strange naming legend. Anguilla is the colony that became independent only to request and receive reversion to colonial status. Montserrat is a half-destroyed volcanic island. The Cayman Islands don’t have caimans, but are named for alligators, yet have crocodiles.

Did you know?

The 1982 war between the United Kingdom and Argentina was fought over the Falkland Islands primarily, though Argentina forces briefly did take over South Georgia. The British Navy prevailed in this war.

Cited and additional bibliography:

https://www.ieyenews.com/cayman-isla...s-and-animals/.
