

Wildlife Conservation In The Falkland Islands

Issue 6 ■ June 2006



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FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

Protecting the wildlife of the Falkland Islands for future generations

www.falklandsconservation.com

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: Two-banded plover on nest, Sea Lion Island.

This is one of 62 breeding Falkland birds to be surveyed over the next 5 years. *Emma Philip.*

The Vital Volunteers

Grant Munro, Director Falklands Conservation

This issue focuses on the important role that volunteers play in the work of Falklands Conservation and the contributions they can and have made to wildlife conservation in the Falklands. Much of our work would be impossible without those who volunteer their time and expertise. This year has been no exception with the completion of yet another very busy and successful fieldwork programme.

A major annual fieldwork exercise is the Falkland Islands Seabird Monitoring Programme, now in its 21st season, which tracks population trends, and determines breeding success and diet at selected seabird colonies throughout the Islands. This year Falklands Conservation also undertook complete Falkland censuses of penguins, of black-browed albatrosses and white-chinned petrels.

However, our monitoring efforts are not just limited to the impressive colonies of seabirds for which the Falklands are best known. Falklands Conservation also conducts annual surveys of invertebrates, maps habitats at a number of sites and monitors the impact of a variety of land uses. This year the Cetacean Watch Programme was continued and a new Breeding Birds Survey launched which will record the distribution of all breeding bird species in the Islands.

There are a number of contributions in this issue from volunteers who have helped with this summer's work. It is hoped that these will inspire others to come forward and get involved. They are but a sample of the opportunities available and the number of volunteers involved. The success of our WATCH Group is largely due to the input of dedicated volunteer leaders.

The Plants Working Group collects seeds and specimens for the Herbarium which itself is volunteer run. Others donate photographs or write letters of support to decision makers in government.

We want make working with volunteers an established and integral part of our work and are now developing a more focused task based approach. We hope this will provide maximum benefit to Falklands Conservation whilst ensuring that we have sufficient resources to support expanded volunteer opportunities and that volunteers always enjoy their time with us – and come back for more.

In the forthcoming months the range of volunteering opportunities will be developed and posted on the Falklands Conservation website and in the office in Stanley so that anyone who is interested can see where their skills may fit and find a volunteering opportunity to suit. We hope to see you in the future.

Whilst it is impossible to name every person that has assisted over the years, Falklands Conservation are immensely grateful to everyone who has helped.

LEFT: Alan Murray (left in picture) assisting Gus Clausen with the penguin census on East Falkland – November 2005. Alan, who is Head of the RSPB Volunteering Unit, was on sabbatical leave to advise us on the development of our own volunteer programme.

CENTRE: Lillian Kidd, volunteer curator at work in the Falkland Islands Herbarium.

RIGHT: With volunteer assistance, a complete census of black-browed albatross colonies was undertaken in 2005. At the last count in 2000 a dramatic decline in numbers led to its re-classification by BirdLife International as an 'Endangered' species. It also saw the setting up of Falklands Conservation's Albatross and Petrel Programme to quantify and tackle the incidental mortality of seabirds at sea. Rudi Abbuehl.



Conservation in Action

Recent highlights from Falklands Conservation Activities



Penguin Census

Gus Clausen, looking for penguins on East Falkland. Gus was leader of the East Falkland team taking part in our 2005/06 Islands-wide count of all gentoo, rockhopper, king and macaroni Penguins. Populations of both gentoo and rockhopper penguins have declined in numbers since the last census five years ago.



Survey of Hawks Nest Ponds

Robin Woods holding a rufous-chested dotterel chick at Hawks Nest Ponds, West Falkland and a general view of this area (*below*). This was one of a number of sites surveyed this spring-summer season to obtain accurate information in order to assess them for Important Bird Area status. Although a good selection of breeding Falkland waterbirds were present here, the populations were too small for this site to qualify as an IBA.

Alan Murray.



Education Programme

Ali Liddle, our Education Officer, out with a class from the Infant/Junior School on a field trip near Stanley, with the 'Lady Liz' in the background.

Ali is producing teaching materials and project resources for children on native Falklands wildlife and local environmental issues. She is doing similar work on Ascension Island as part of a Programme supported by the UK Overseas Territories Environment Programme.



Albatross Census

Nic Huin, our Science Officer, counting black-browed albatross on Steeple Jason Island, November 2005. The total number for the Falklands has fallen a further 4.5% since the count in 2000/01. Mitigation measures were introduced in 2004 and since then at sea mortality in Falkland waters has been reduced by 90%. Many birds continue to be killed further afield and in international waters. *Emma Philip.*

Working with Cetaceans

Paola Palavecino

*Sea Lion Island, Falkland Islands
November 2004: that was the beginning
of one of the best experiences of my life.
I went there as a volunteer for a photo
identification project of killer whales for
Falklands Conservation. At 04:30 in the
morning I was heading down toward the
beach to start the day's observation.
As I walked I found myself surrounded by
amazing wildlife – Magellanic penguins
greeting the new day with their distinctive
calls whilst the elephant seals lay on the
beach like giant rolls of carpet, steaming in
the early morning sunshine.*

At this time of year the beach is full with elephant seal pups playing around and going into the sea for the first time. The killer whales know that it is the young seals first trip to sea, so each year they turn up to take advantage of an easy meal. At high tide, at one of the rocky outlets from the beach, I saw these giants approaching where I was stood, the excitement and adrenaline started to run through my body as I realised the killer whales were right in front of me! The group was silent, as they were discussing how to arrange the hunt, then they divided and headed in different directions. The biggest female was the chosen one to bring the hunt to the climax. Suddenly a great splash of water revealed her tactic as she rushed at a elephant seal pup. This time the pup was lucky and escaped. The next time may be different. The following days more amazing experiences would come as I watched the behaviour of the small family groups moving up and down the beaches and rocks of Sea Lion Island.

There have been many records of killer whale sightings over the last several years but there was no information their pods (groups), how many pods there were or how many individuals per pod. Through photo identification we have now identified two different pods. Individuals can be identified by the scarring that the animals have on



Another of my volunteer outings for Falklands Conservation was when a Gray's beaked whale was found stranded at North Arm to the south of East Falkland. This was something totally new for me as I had never seen a beaked whale before, so to help with the measurements and the identification of the animal was a good challenge. Oli Yates.

their bodies and by the shape of their dorsal fins. As killer whales live for up to 90 years, I hope that we will be able to continue the project into the future, following our new found friends.

Closer to Stanley I have conducted a survey of Peale's and Commerson's dolphin over several months at a small beach called Surf Bay. It is a first attempt to get an idea of the occurrence of these small cetaceans. Not only did I enjoy the days when the dolphins were present, surfing in the waves meters away from me, or swimming around as I snorkelled, but also the days when there was just myself and the rest of the magical wildlife of the area.

Volunteering for me is not just a word. It is being part of something and learning from what you have been involved in. Everything is so fragile and it amazes me how we don't take enough care of our environment and the wildlife. To see cetaceans free in the ocean makes you feel agitated toward the people that keep these creatures in captivity. Everyone can help with small details, you don't have to travel huge distances and take part in field work if you don't wish to, simply passing the message of conservation is a step toward a better future for wildlife. It is in your hands, if you are considering being a volunteer go for it! You will never regret it, and you will never be the same again.



A Penguin Adventure

Dee Masters

Firstly I must confess to having no real idea of what to expect from the Falkland Islands. Now I can honestly say that it is one of the most beautiful places I have ever had the pleasure to visit. The hospitality and kindness put forward by the people I met overwhelmed me to a huge extent and left me with profound memories.

As a primate keeper from Edinburgh Zoo, first impressions about me seemed to be that of confusion. Why had I volunteered to carry out in situ work on a penguin count with Falklands Conservation when I did not work with penguins on a daily basis? As an animal keeper I feel that it is just as important to have a broad knowledge of all animals worldwide, be they endangered or not. Therefore any experience gained is worthwhile and as a result my enthusiasm and personality seemed to overcast any lack of experience I had. The team at Falklands Conservation were very welcoming and within days I felt as if I had always been there. All preparations for the penguin census were fully organised on my arrival and the team as a whole were very professional thus making the change of environment and surroundings easy for me.

For the first six days of the census, myself and Helen Otley (West Falkland Team Leader) travelled to several islands, all of which were very different. These were Bleaker Island, Great Island, Barren Island, Arch Island and Clump Island. Our means of transport consisted of a boat called the *Condor*, which was an experience alone, purely because I do unfortunately suffer from sea-sickness. On these islands I developed my counting skills, which I must say takes a bit of practice. The aim is to only count incubating birds so the correct number of breeding pairs can be obtained. As a result all counts had to be completed by approximately 3.00pm every day, before partner birds returned and the nest sites turned into one mass of moving penguins. If Helen and myself disagreed on counts we would literally keep counting over and over until we reached the same figures. We could be there for a long time some days! Also on Bleaker Island I experienced my first wild Rockhopper colony mixed with King Shags, which was amazing.

To see and observe penguins in their natural habitat was delightful, particularly the bad attitude and



It was a pleasure to visit Fox Bay School for the day. To give them a real understanding of the penguin census we all travelled to Fox Bay East to count the small colony of Gentoos: there were 82 breeding pairs. By that time there were chicks, which made it extra special for all. Dee is seated third from the left, Helen is back row far right. Penguin News.

boldness of the Rockhoppers compared to the nervous and clumsy Gentoos. Luckily, along the way I also had the added bonus to observe the odd stray King penguin and three Macaroni penguins.

On reaching West Falkland itself Helen and I were joined by with Peter Nightingale of West Lagoons Farm, Hill Cove. Peter was employed by Falklands Conservation as a guide due to his extensive knowledge of West Falkland and its tracks. He also proved very good at getting us out of boggy situations! Not that it happened too often of course. On our travels across West Falkland in our red Landrover we were very hard to miss. I'm sure there are many who will remember us popping in for the odd cup of tea, shower, dinner, possible bed or all of those. A night out of the tents was much appreciated I must say. Places visited on West Falkland to carry out the census included Lucas Hill, Rodeo Point, Albermarle, Cape Orford, Ten Shilling Bay, Stephens Peak, Fox Point, Gladys Cove, Port Richards, Port North, Shag Cove, Gladstone, Long Point, Tamar Point, Little Mountain, Leopard Bay, Town Point, North Beach, Dunnose Head, Narrows, Queen Point, Fox Bay West, Fox Bay East, Carcass Bay and Hill Gap. So you can see we were very busy.

Overall the experience of my visit to the Falklands and its people has been one of a lifetime. It has opened my eyes to in situ work and broadened my knowledge on the specific species, as was intended. Now all that is left are the photos to tell the story, of which there are hundreds.

2005 Penguin Census Results



Rockhopper Penguin
211,000 pairs



Macaroni Penguin
24 pairs or individual at 19 sites



Gentoo Penguin
66,000 pairs



King Penguin
267 chicks, 763 adults on egg

Steeple Jason Island: A Very Special Place for Falkland Birds

Grant Munro

Falklands Conservation has had a long association with Steeple Jason. In 1987 Kate Thompson conducted the first counts of black-browed albatross and rockhopper penguins here. A number of fieldwork visits were made over the next fifteen years, and in 2003 it became a regular study site within Falklands Conservation's Falkland Islands Seabird Monitoring Programme (FISMP). We are currently working on a long term management plan with the Wildlife Conservation Society. Here is a short description of the island, its importance for Falklands wildlife, and the work we are doing there.

The Jason Islands form a rocky spine of islands and reefs stretching to the north and west of West Falkland. Steeple Jason is the most westerly of the main islands, lying approximately 60 km to the northwest of West Falkland.

This chain thrusts out into the South Atlantic and is washed by the northward flowing West Falkland Current. As the current is forced up and through the ridges that form the Jason Islands chain upwellings and eddies cause cold nutrient rich water to mix with warmer surface waters resulting in an area of high marine productivity.

The subsequent richness of marine life is of critical importance to the thousands of seabirds that breed each year on Steeple Jason and the other Jason islands.

It is probable that Steeple Jason was the point first sighted in 1592 by John Davis who discovered the Falklands. Sealing started in the Falklands in the 1700's and continued until 1968, during this time thousands of seals and penguins were killed and rendered down for their oil. Steeple Jason did not escape this exploitation. Trypots are visible on some beaches and many bones are still visible in the peat. Sheep farming began in 1872, originally managed by Charles Hansen from Carcass Island, and sheep were not finally removed until 1968. Approximately 800 sheep were stocked on Steeple Jason and they undoubtedly had an impact upon the vegetation. In 1970 Len Hill of Birdland, UK bought the island.

Steeple Jason (together with neighbouring Grand Jason) is now owned by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) of New York and is managed as a private nature reserve with conservation as a priority. A secondary aim is to use the island as a site for research that will contribute to the understanding and conservation of wildlife across the Patagonian Shelf. A steering committee, including WCS, Prof. John Croxall of Birdlife International and a trustee of Falklands Conservation, and Falklands Conservation, advise on the management and scientific work conducted on the island.





The Jason Islands are recognised as an Important Bird Area by Birdlife International. Seven species listed as threatened by the IUCN (The World Conservation Union) are known to breed here. The most notable and emblematic is the black-browed albatross. The largest albatross colony in the world is on Steeple Jason. It stretches over 4 km along the southwest-facing coast and contains 171,286 breeding pairs or 43% of the Falklands population (2005).

Other threatened birds include gentoo penguin, southern giant petrel, Magellanic penguin, macaroni penguin, striated caracara and Cobb's wren (on offshore Steeple Islet). The island is also important for restricted range species such as the ruddy-headed goose, black-throated finch, Falkland flightless steamer duck and tussacbird.

Because of its seabird importance, the site has been selected for regular study and included in the FISMP. This is our longest running programme, now in its 21st year, and was established to monitor



TOP LEFT: The location of Steeple Jason.

RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM: Steeple Jason is also the most important breeding site for rockhopper penguins in the Falklands with 59,033 breeding pairs or 28% of the population (2005). Breeding numbers have declined by 46% in the last 5 years due to the occurrence of a widespread harmful algal bloom in 2002/03. Emma Philip

A research station was constructed on Steeple Jason in 2001-02 to accommodate researchers and fieldworkers visiting the island.

We have also studied the invertebrate fauna – Dr Alex Jones and Helen Otley inspecting contents of a malaise trap. The relatively poor number found here is thought to be due to the presence of house mice. Steeple Jason is one of the few offshore islands to have been invaded by mice and not rats.

Black-browed albatross. The conservation of these magnificent birds is a priority for Falklands Conservation and a workshop held in the Falklands in March 2006 has provided a framework for future action. Rudi Abbuehl



the populations, breeding success and diet of selected seabird colonies around the archipelago. Two visits are now made annually to Steeple Jason, the first in late November to count original breeding pairs and the second in late January or early February to count chicks and thus determine breeding success.

Counts are made of the three small colonies of gentoo penguins near the WCS house and the larger colony at the neck. Counts are also made of selected areas of the mixed rockhopper and albatross colonies. In addition to these counts for the FISMP further counts of the southern giant petrel colonies are made as part of the Albatross and Petrel Programme to fulfil monitoring requirements under the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels (ACAP) and every five years a complete census of black-browed albatross, rockhopper penguins, gentoo penguins is conducted.

For the very large mixed colonies of black-browed albatross and rockhopper penguins on Steeple Jason it is impossible to conduct direct counts. Instead colony area and nest density is measured and an estimate of the breeding population obtained. This involves accurately mapping the perimeter of the colony to the outside nest both with gps and by laser rangefinder and compass. Coordinates can then be plotted and the area of the colony calculated and transects conducted through the colony. The number of nests within a 5 metre wide corridor are counted to determine the density of nests within the colony.

An island wide census of black-browed albatross, including Steeple Jason, was repeated in late 2005. This showed that a population decline of 10.5 % has occurred on Steeple Jason since the previous census in 2000. Although great steps have been made in Falkland waters, with the adoption of mitigation measures in the longline and trawler fleets, continued vigilance and the adoption of such measures in international and adjoining waters is still required if declines are to be slowed or halted.

We are also concerned with land management issues and with WCS are producing a management plan for the Island so that priorities in conservation,

research and tourism can be unified into achievable future targets ensuring the long term protection of the island. Sheep grazed on Steeple Jason for almost 100 years and undoubtedly had an effect on the vegetation. Primary plant colonisers of eroded ground, such as sheep's sorrel, now predominate in many areas. In 2005 a baseline habitat map and survey was conducted and plant species recorded. Fixed-point photography was also undertaken so that vegetation changes can be monitored. This should yield important information on vegetation succession, recolonisation of bare ground and highlight expansion of tussock grass areas.

Despite the four hours of pitching and rolling onboard Mike Clarke's *Condor* that are required to travel from Carcass Island to Steeple Jason, Falklands Conservation is never short of volunteers who would like to help with our work here. We are very grateful for this assistance, which maximises the limited time we have on the island. We also acknowledge the essential support of Michael Clarke for boat transfers and Rob McGill, for his local management for WCS and transit through Carcass Island. Without them our fieldwork visits to Steeple Jason would not be possible. And finally Falklands Conservation would particularly like to thank WCS for their permission to work and study this very special island, so important for Falkland birds.

Striated caracara (Johnny Rook) with Steeple Jason in the background. A census of these birds in 1997 showed the Jason Islands to be the Falklands stronghold for this extremely rare bird of prey. 68 pairs are known to breed on Steeple Jason.
Debbie Summers



The Falkland Islands Breeding Birds Surveys

It's time to collect more information on our resident birds!

Robin Woods

The First Breeding Birds Survey

The first Breeding Birds Survey was launched in Spring 1983 through co-operation with Tom Davies and the Falkland Islands Trust in Stanley and the Trustees of the Falkland Islands Foundation in UK. I always believed that Falkland Islanders' knowledge of local birds could be recorded systematically and that there were enough interested people to make this a feasible project. More than 160 people (the majority Falkland Islands residents) sent in nearly 6,000 records over ten breeding seasons from 1983-93, during which the Trust and the Foundation had amalgamated to become Falklands Conservation. This information took years to collate and analyse and the *Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Falkland Islands* was jointly published by Anthony Nelson and Falklands Conservation in 1997. According to Christian Friis in Toronto, coordinator for American bird atlases, the Falkland Islands are certainly the only South American country to have a breeding birds atlas project.

The Need for a New Survey

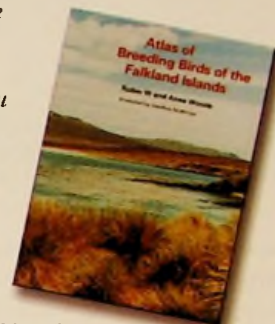
There have been many changes since 1993, including the construction of all-weather roads across East and West Falkland, the depletion of camp populations and expansion of Stanley, the increase in tourism by sea and air and successful eradications of rats from almost 20 islands. The economic value of sheep farming has declined and fishing has become vital to the economy. Falklands Conservation has grown into an internationally known researching and monitoring organisation. It is time to take another snapshot of all Falkland breeding birds.

The Launch of a 2nd Breeding Birds Survey

This new Survey is being organized and promoted by Falklands Conservation, but as with Breeding Birds Surveys worldwide, volunteer fieldwork is essential. In November 2005, I spoke to a group of keen people in Stanley and to some military personnel at Mount Pleasant who were willing to help. Record forms, maps and instructions were made available for people to take at the Post Office, Stanley Airport and the Visitor Centre and at Mount Pleasant. The project was publicised in a 'Conservation Conversation' with Liz Elliott of the Falkland Islands Radio Station in December.

A good start was made in January 2006 by ornithologist John Cromarty who spent three months

If you are keen to survey one particular 10km square or several and make yourself known to FC in Stanley, you can collect a free copy of the 1997 Atlas while stocks last, showing where birds were recorded between 1983 and 1993 and where records were lacking. This background material will help you to organize fieldwork and find as many species as possible.



surveying several potentially important bird areas on East and West Falkland. He completed BBS forms for the 10km squares including East Bay and Lake Sullivan, Narrows Farm, Cape Dolphin and Race Point. More detailed surveying is planned in some selected localities to study the populations of some species.

How You Can Help

Information from Falkland Islanders is especially valuable. If you have computer-access you can download and print record forms, maps with grid squares and instructions from Falklands Conservation at www.falklandsconservation.com.

Recently, White-winged Coots have bred at least once on Bleaker Island – who knows what other new breeding species will be found?

Please help if you can and enjoy the fieldwork.

Barn owl at Fitzroy. In the original survey, Barn Owls were found breeding for the first time in the Falkland Islands.
Alan Henry



Rare and Vagrant Birds in the Falkland Islands 2005

Mike Morrison, Alan Henry, Robin Woods

This report summarises the sightings of rare and vagrant birds submitted to Falklands Conservation or made by the authors and staff of Falklands Conservation during 2005.

Adelie Penguin *Pygoscelis adeliae*

A single bird, an immature having no white eye ring, was seen on the south beach just west of Hooker's Point on 26th May (Mike & Jacqui Summers).

Royal Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus schlegeli*

A single bird was present on 4th January at the Tamar Rockhopper penguin rookery on Pebble Island (Allan White).

Erect-crested Penguin *Eudyptes sclateri*

A single bird on the south coast of Port Harriet Point was sighted on 9th October (Mike & Donna Evans). The bird, first recorded in January 1997, returned to the rookery at Marble on Pebble Island and was present all through the breeding season. It is thought to have mated with a Rockhopper penguin – on 19th November it was incubating an egg (Mike Morrison & Alan Henry).

Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta*

A single bird was seen just off Cape Pembroke on 14th March (Alan Henry).

Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*

A single bird was recorded at Cape Pembroke on 15th March (Alan Henry).

Cocoi Heron *Ardea cocoi*

Three sightings were made during the year, all of single birds. The first was at Bertha's Beach Pond, on 13th February (Mike & Sue Morrison, Alan & Trish Henry), the second on Weddell Island on 17th February (Lesley Garland), and the third at Duperrey Harbour on 4th July (Pat & Daniela Whitney).

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Although now considered a regular visitor there were very few sightings in 2005. One was at the Agricultural Department on the 20th March. Dennis Middleton saw two at Dolphin Cottage, Stanley, on the 30th March and Sue Morrison saw a single bird on Brandon

Road, Stanley, on 1st April, and another on Fitzroy Road, Stanley on 4th April.

Coscoroba Swan *Coscoroba coscoroba*

This is a rare breeding species. A pair successfully bred on Pebble Island in 2000/01. All 2005 sightings are from East Falkland, mainly the Fitzroy area: a single bird on Triste Point pond, Walker Creek, on 9th January (Sue & Mike Morrison); four birds in a bay by Elephant Island, Kelp Lagoon, on 6th February (Andy Douse); two birds, possibly a pair, on the big pond in Whale Point on 12th & 13th February and five birds on Bertha's Beach Pond 13th February (Sue & Mike Morrison, Alan & Trish Henry); four birds on the big pond in Pleasant Roads, two birds on the big pond in Whale Point, and two birds on Bertha's Beach Pond were all seen on 10th April (Sue & Mike Morrison); two birds again seen on the big pond in Whale Point on 15th December, and seven on 22nd and 31st December (Alan Henry).

Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera*

This is a rare breeding species but there have been no reports of any breeding in recent years. A single male in eclipse plumage in Turners Stream, near Chatta Creek, seen on 28th December 2004, was in the same location on several dates (1st & 14th January 19th February and 6th March) (Sue & Mike Morrison). On 11th January a single male was spotted on the second beach pond at Cattle Point, also in eclipse plumage and probably the same bird seen in near by Sand Pond in November 2004 (Sue & Mike Morrison). A single female at Moody Brook, first recorded on the 21st August, was in the same area until 13th September (Sue & Mike Morrison). A pair was observed on Hawk's Nest Pond north on 27th and 29th November (Robin Woods & Alan Murray). A single male, also in eclipse plumage, was seen at Fox Point, Fitzroy on 31st December (Alan Henry).



Cinnamon Teal at Moody Brook (Alan Henry)

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*

A single teal in eclipse male or female plumage was recorded on a small pond on Pleasant Island, Fitzroy, on 7th March by Tim Reid, an experienced birder, who has seen this species in South America. This is possibly the first record of this species in the Falkland Islands but no corroborating evidence from field notes has been submitted.

Red Shoveler *Anas platalea*

Four birds, two males and two females, were seen on 11th January on a small pond in Cattle Point, North Arm (Sue & Mike Morrison). These are possibly some of the same birds from a party of six in the same area in December 2003 and February 2004. A single adult male was on Enderby Pond, Lively Island, 1st March (Nic Huin and Tim Reid).



Red Shovelers, Cattle Point (Mike Morrison)

Red-gartered Coot *Fulica armillata*

A single bird was recorded in Mary Hill Quarry, Cape Pembroke, from 8th to 13th May (Sue & Mike Morrison). A single bird was seen on Hawk's Nest Pond south (Will Wagstaff) in mid November, and was still in the same location on 26th and 27th November (Robin Woods & Alan Murray).

White-winged Coot *Fulica leucoptera*

The first recorded attempt at breeding in the Falklands of this species occurred on Bleaker Island in 2005 (see 2004 Report). Two birds were seen on a pond near Elephant Point, Saunders Island 23rd January (Andy Douse). These are possibly two of the three seen in the same location by Andy in September last year. Three birds were seen on the same pond on the 4th November (Alan Henry & Mike Morrison). Three birds were also seen on Enderby Pond, Lively Island, on 1st March (Nic Huin & Tim Reid).

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*

Single birds were recorded in Windmill paddock at Teal Inlet from 23rd to 26th September (Kristiane Thorsen), on the airstrip at Port Stephens on 10th October (Mike & Donna Evans) and in a field near Estancia House on 22nd October by Tony & Alisa Heathman.



Hudsonian Godwit, Kelp Point (Alan Henry)

Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*

For the third year in succession this species has returned to Whale Point, Fitzroy, which seems to be their favoured wintering ground. All 2005 records are from here: a single bird at Kelp Point on 6th February (Andy Douse), fifty-one birds near the wreck of the St Mary on 13th February (Sue & Mike Morrison, Alan & Trish Henry), two birds at the wreck of the St Mary and one at Kelp Point on 10th April (Sue & Mike Morrison), sixteen birds at Kelp Point 15th December (Alan Henry) and six birds at Kelp Point on 22nd December (Alan Henry).

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

Two birds were on the big pond in Whale Point, Fitzroy, on 6th February (Andy Douse) and one bird here on 12th & 13th February (Sue & Mike Morrison and Alan & Trish Henry).

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Three birds were observed on the sand beach at Ronda, Salvador on 20th March, and on 26th March a single bird was seen at the big pond, Bull Point, North Arm, with large numbers of White-rumped Sandpipers (Mike & Sue Morrison).



Lesser Yellowlegs, Whale Point, Fitzroy (Mike Morrison)

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*

Three birds were seen on a sandy point at Sand Hills, Walker Creek, on 10th January (Sue & Mike Morrison) and a single bird on the big pond Whale Point, Fitzroy, on 6th February (Andy Douse). Eight birds were at Bull Point, North Arm, on 8th October (Sue & Mike Morrison, Alan Henry) and two birds at Penguin Walk, Cape Pembroke, on 13th October (Alan Henry). Three birds were recorded on 4th December at Sea Lion Point, Ronda, Salvador, (Sue & Mike Morrison), five birds at Cape Pembroke on 4th December and thirteen on 10th December (Alan Henry), and a single bird here on 11th December (Tim Reid).

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

Two birds were seen by a small pond at Fox Point, Fitzroy, on 3rd January (Sue & Mike Morrison), first recorded here on 18th December 2004.

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*

A single bird was present on Pebble Island on 21st & 22nd November (Terry Spruce).

South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki*

A single bird was seen off Cape Pembroke on 9th January (Alan and Bob Henry).

Chilean Skua *Catharacta chilensis*

A single bird was observed on Steeple Jason Island on 22nd November (Tim Reid).

Eared Dove *Zenaida auriculata*

Alan Eagle reported a single bird near the hay barn at Fitzroy settlement on 21st April. A single bird was observed flying in a southerly direction 25th April from the house at 10 Fitzroy Road East, Stanley (Sue Morrison). A single immature bird was found dead at Government House on 3rd May (Gordon Liddle). This is possibly the same bird seen by Dennis Middleton on the 30th April.

Green-backed Firecrown *Sephanoides sephanoides*

Roddy Napier recorded a single bird at West Point Island between the 2nd and 4th April. A description given by

Dennis Harris of a very small green bird with a fast wing beat, seen in the yard at 15 Fitzroy Road, Stanley on the 8th November, was possibly also this species.

Black-crowned Monjita *Xolmis coronata*

There was a single bird near Marble Shanty, Pebble Island, on 19th November (Alan Henry, Mike Morrison, Joan & Terry Spruce). This is the first record of this species in the Falkland Islands.

Austral Negrito *Lessonia rufa*

Single male was seen on Sea Lion Island on 3rd October. (Ian Duncan).

Chilean Swallow *Tachycineta leucopygia*

Two birds were seen on the Eliza Cove Road on 8th February and a single bird was seen over sand grass in Fox Point, Fitzroy, on 13th February (Alan Henry). Thirty to forty birds were seen at Volunteer Shanty by Rod Tuckwood, reported on the 23rd February 'as seen a few days ago'. Tim Reid and Nic Huin reported six birds on Steeple Jason Island migrating east on 7th March, and a single bird on Carcass Island on 9th March. A swallow, possibly this species, was seen on Davis Street, Stanley, on 10th October (Gordon Liddle).

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

A single bird was seen with two Cliff Swallows on Fitzroy Road East, Stanley 2nd and 3rd April (Alan Henry).

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

Two birds were seen on Fitzroy Road East, Stanley, on 2nd April. (Sue & Mike Morrison). One bird was seen in the same area until 5th April by Alan Henry.

Rufous-collared Sparrow *Junco capensis*

A single bird was seen at Pebble Island settlement on 15th May (Arina Berntsen).

Shiny Cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis*

A single adult male was seen at Pebble Island settlement on 19th September (Tracy Evans, Jacqui Jennings). This is the third record of this species in the Falkland Islands, all in the last four years.



Black-crowned Monjita on Pebble Island (Mike Morrison)



Cliff Swallow, Stanley (Alan Henry)

NOTICEBOARD

NEW BOOKS



Birds and Mammals of the Falkland Islands

Lady Philippa Scott, one of our Vice Presidents, is presented with a copy of *Birds and Mammals of the Falkland Islands*, by author Robin Woods on the Falklands Conservation stand at the Great West Bird Fair, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire, in January 2006. *Photo: Tim Carr*

The Wildfowl and Wetland Trust were celebrating the 60th anniversary of their founding by Sir Peter Scott. Robin gave a talk here on Sir Peter's links with Falklands Conservation and his inspirational role in our early days.

Falklands Conservation members can obtain a copy of this book for the special price of £10 from our website: www.falklandsconservation.com or from our offices in FI or UK.

Staff Changes

Sarah Clement, Falkland Conservation's Community Officer, left us in January. Sarah brought a huge amount of contagious enthusiasm and energy to the many facets of her job with us and made a great success of community events from beach cleans to the annual charity ball. We wish her every success in her work at Sealed PR. Anna Shepherd has taken over from Sarah.

Tim Reid, worked at Falklands Conservation for 5 years arriving in 2001 to undertake the assessment of mortality in the longline and trawl fisheries. He has taken up a PhD research position studying flesh-footed shearwaters on Lord Howe Island. We thank him for all the work he has done and wish him all the best in the future.

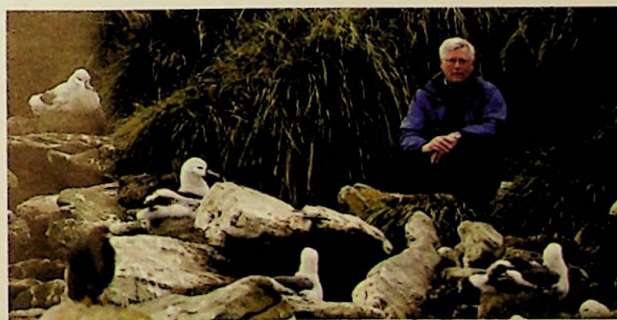


New Edition of A Visitor's Guide to the Falkland Islands

A completely revised, updated and enlarged edition of the popular *A Visitor's Guide to the Falkland Islands* is now available in the Falkland Islands and in UK. TV presenter and adventurer Ben Fogle officially launched the new book in November 2005. He is seen here with author Debbie Summers and FC's UK Chairman, Henry Robinson.

'Countryfile' go to West Point – 'Albatross Island'

A BBC team including presenter John Craven (pictured below), accompanied by Graham Madge of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, visited West Point Island in March to see a black-browed albatross colony at first hand and to report on their decline in a programme broadcast on April 9. This was the first every *Countryfile* programme solely devoted to place outside the UK and covered a series of items about the Falkland Islands. It coincided with the Volvo Ocean Race passing either side of the Islands. The Race is supporting BirdLife International's Global Seabird Programme. More information about this can be found on www.savethealbatross.net. *Photo: Graham Madge.*



Watching for Whales and Dolphins

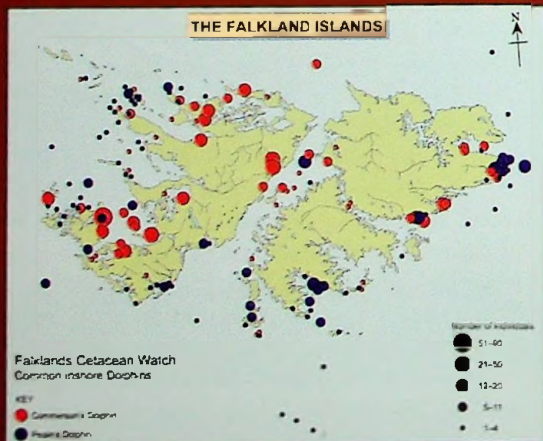


Photo: Paola Palvecina

Commerson's Dolphin

These small dolphins, known locally as 'puffing pigs', are about 1.7m (5ft 5ins) in length with a rather short, stocky body. Juveniles are uniformly dark, fading with age to the highly visible black and white of the adults. Males have a 'raindrop' black patch on the underside, the females a horseshoe shape. Commerson's dolphins prefer inland sheltered waters, often near kelp beds. Our Seabirds at Sea Team never recorded them out of sight of land. They are often observed bow riding in small groups of 2 – 8, although during the winter months group sizes are frequently over 100 strong.

The seas around the Falkland Islands are important for these dolphins, which have a restricted world distribution. Along with Peale's dolphin, they are threatened by exploitation in South America where both are used as bait in crab pots. The populations in the Falkland Islands and South America are most probably distinct and do not mix.



MAP: Altogether 462 sightings have been logged from all around the coast of the Falklands.

Our Cetacean Watch programme started two years ago and has confirmed that the Falkland Islands are a wonderful place for whales and dolphins. The majority of the sightings have been of Commerson's dolphin, and the larger greyish Peale's dolphin. However, there have been a substantial number of large, endangered sei whales observed and a few fin whales, the second largest animal on earth. The shallow waters and large bays of the extensive Falklands coastline provide excellent foraging grounds for both the larger whales and smaller dolphins.

For further information on how you can take part in the Falkland Islands Cetacean Watch go to www.falklandsconservation/cetacean_watch.html.



Wildlife Conservation In The Falkland Islands

Issue 7



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Issue 7 April 2007



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FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

Protecting the wildlife of the Falkland Islands for future generations

www.falklandsconservation.com

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: Striated caracara (Johnny Rook) in flight. *A Jones.*

21 Years of Seabird Monitoring

Grant Munro, Chief Executive Officer, Falklands Conservation

This year celebrates the 20th Anniversary of the Falklands fishery. In 1987 the Falklands Interim Conservation Zone (FICZ) was established and a licensing regime instigated bringing the developing, but unregulated, fishery under local management control. Since then with maritime patrols, aerial surveillance, a stringent licensing policy and stock assessment the fishery has become one of the best managed in the world.

Whilst the commercial fishery has driven the economic independence of the Falklands, it has brought new challenges to ensure that it is sustainably managed. The vast colonies of globally important seabirds for which the Falklands are famous also rely on the rich marine productivity of the South Atlantic. Falklands Conservation has since the start of the fishery worked with the industry and Government to ensure that the fishery's impact is monitored and minimised.

In 1985-86 a mass starvation of rockhopper penguins occurred when concern was already being expressed about the likely impact of the new fishery on the seabird populations. It was accepted that baseline data on penguin numbers should be obtained to find out the level of interaction and potential competition with the fishing industry. The following year, 1987, the Falkland Islands Seabird Monitoring Programme was in place. Over the past 20 years it has collected data on population dynamics, productivity and diet. Spin-off projects include satellite tracking of penguins and albatross to ascertain where they feed and the potential overlap with fishing activities and oil exploration. More recently major declines in the population of black-browed albatross have been highlighted, leading to the development of the Albatross and Petrel Programme (see report page 4).

The FISMP has shown that there is very little direct competition between the commercial fishery and penguins breeding in the Falklands. The species and size of the krill, squid and fish targeted by penguins is different from that taken by the fishery and there has been shown to be no correlation between breeding success and annual catches. Of more significance to the penguin populations are oceanic events. El Nino events in the Pacific cause knock on effects in the Atlantic by changing current patterns

and sea temperature, making normal food resources unavailable. In 2002/03 a harmful algal bloom resulted in the poisoning of many penguins. Over time gentoo, king and Magellanic penguin populations seem able to recover from these events. However, the rockhopper penguin has suffered a steady decline in numbers. A major focus of the FISMP will now be to obtain a better understanding of its inability to recover from such periodic events.

Falklands Conservation has also addressed incidental seabird mortality, caused by accidental collision with fishing gear as birds forage around fishing vessels. The design and adoption of mitigation techniques, such as bird-scaring lines, into the fishery license conditions has been a major success story. Mortality in the longline fishery is now a hundredth of what it was and mortality in the trawl fishery has been reduced by 90%. Both are now at sustainable levels in Falklands waters.

Penguins and albatrosses are high in the food chain. By monitoring the health of their populations, the state of the ocean ecosystem can be assessed.

The FISMP has fulfilled this role for the last 20 years.

Started in 1986-87, and now in its 21st year, our Falklands Seabird Monitoring Programme has this year come of age.

ABOVE: Kate Thompson measuring the beak of a black-browed albatross chick in the first FISMP season, 1986-87;

BELOW: Nic Huin and Isaac Foster counting penguins at Volunteer Point, February 2007.



Falklands Conservation gratefully acknowledges funding from the Falkland Islands Government, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the many personal donations that have made this work possible. Thanks are also extended to all those who have participated in the Programme, especially the many volunteer counters and landowners.

The Albatross and Petrel Programme: reflecting on the past three years

Isaac Forster – Albatross and Petrel Programme Co-ordinator

After impressive seabird conservation efforts by our Seabirds at Sea team from 1998-2004, the Albatross and Petrel Programme has followed on in their footsteps, continuing to lead on reducing incidental deaths in the local fishery, and monitor the health of breeding colonies in the Falklands. Here we provide a summary of significant activity that has taken place over the last few years as Falklands Conservation continues its efforts to protect the Islands' seabirds.

The aim of the Albatross and Petrel Programme was to achieve compliance with the ratified Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), through increased knowledge and directed conservation efforts for Falklands ACAP listed species: the black-browed albatross, the southern giant petrel, and white-chinned petrel. The Programme has achieved this in a variety of ways focussing on biological monitoring and assessment, continued liaison with fisheries to improve mitigation designs and implementation on vessels, and education of the public and stakeholders.

Production of management plans and visitor guidelines for breeding sites

Containing important information on the breeding biology of ACAP species, a series of visitor guidelines has been produced, specifically designed to limit disturbance at critical life-cycle stages. During courtship and early incubation birds are particularly susceptible to human interactions and may readily abandon eggs. The guide has been circulated to all landholders that receive tourists. Additionally specific areas were selected that have particularly high numbers of tourists and/or military visits,

or have settlements nearby, and with landowners consent site management plans were drafted. These have been completed for five key breeding areas.

Monitoring of populations through biological surveys and demographic studies

Between 2004 and 2006 baseline population censuses were carried out for the black-browed albatross, southern giant petrel and white-chinned petrel. Databases have been developed to track information on these three species, and long-term study sites established to monitor population trends, and investigate demographic characteristics. Steeple Jason Island, owned by the Wildlife Conservation Society (USA), provides the location for the albatross and giant petrel study sites, and Kidney Island for the white-chinned petrel.

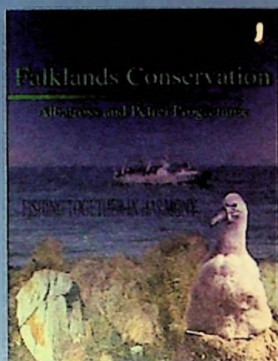
Census results showed that the Falkland Islands hold 399,416 breeding pairs of black-browed albatross (66% of the world population), 19,816 pairs of southern giant petrel (approximately 40% of world population), and only a small population of around 100 pairs of white-chinned petrels. These figures were used in selecting the areas for management guidelines.

Development of educational materials to highlight seabird conservation issues

The distribution of information is an important component in advancing the understanding and awareness of the myriad of threats facing seabirds.

The Programme provided information for young Falkland Islanders through the school curriculum, after consultation with teachers. Simple identification guides and information sheets on key sustainability issues as they relate to the Falklands (e.g. marine pollution, hydrocarbon





development, waste disposal and recycling, invasive species, global warming, etc) were developed. The children produced drawings for posters illustrating the benefits of using seabird mitigation measures. These were then circulated to fishing vessels, providing a simple yet poignant statement of

the concerns that children have about the welfare of the Falkland Islands wildlife.

Further materials targeting fishers have also been produced, concentrating on the results achieved with mitigation devices developed by the Seabirds at Sea Team. By demonstrating the huge reductions in mortality that have since occurred we hope to build a sense of pride amongst the fishing community here, and produce a generation of fishermen for whom the usage of a bird scaring line is simply seen as part of their every day routine.

RIGHT: Interactions between black-browed albatrosses and an unprotected trawl warp cable. Changes in requirements of fishing licenses will further reduce this risk. Sarah Crofts.

BELOW: Surveying the black-browed albatross colony at Beauchene Island. Oli Yates

Continued monitoring and assessment of mitigation devices and mortality.

Effective design, development and trials of the mitigation devices were conducted by the Seabirds at Sea Team, and implementation of the resulting devices has occurred during the current Programme. Within the Falkland Islands fisheries all longlining and trawling vessels must now use devices to reduce mortality. As a result of this there has been a 90% decrease in trawler related deaths, and last year only 16 birds were estimated to have been caught in the longlining industry, a far cry from reports from the mid 1990's when up to 90 albatrosses were being killed every day. Monitoring of seabird interactions is still ongoing as there are areas where further improvements are still achievable, and designs of devices are being modified to suit individual vessels to enhance performance.



The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP)

The Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, or ACAP, is a multilateral agreement which seeks to conserve albatrosses and petrels by coordinating international activity to mitigate known threats to albatross and petrel populations. ACAP has been developed under the auspices of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). To date there are 11 signatories - Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, France, New Zealand, Peru, South Africa, Spain and the United Kingdom. Of these, Australia, Chile, Ecuador, France, New Zealand, Peru, South Africa, Spain and the United Kingdom have also ratified ACAP, meaning that it is a binding agreement to produce an Action Plan that addresses all threats to relevant albatrosses and petrels.



35 experts and key players were brought together for the ACAP meeting in Stanley.

Hosting an International Workshop to co-ordinate conservation efforts in the region

In April 2006, Falklands Conservation hosted an ACAP meeting specifically to address priorities for albatross and petrel conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and the South Atlantic region. Actions were recommended on a wide range of issues, from breeding sites and foraging range information, to development and implementation of by-catch mitigation devices. The detailed workshop report is available on our website: www.falklandsconservation.com.

Looking Ahead

With many of the Programme's targets successfully achieved, the future will focus on continued monitoring of the seabird populations and fisheries interactions to ensure progress continues apace. However, the long-term viability of albatross and petrel populations in the Falkland Islands can only be secured through a regional conservation effort, so the challenge now is to spread the results gained here across to other South American fisheries.

There are many people to acknowledge for their efforts in making the Albatross and Petrel Programme such a success. Special thanks must go to Oli Yates, Sarah Crofts, and Tim Reid who formed the backbone of the project. Major contributions were gratefully received from the UK Overseas Territories Environment Programme and from the Falkland Islands Government. In addition we would like to thank the following supporters:

- International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators
- Lavinia Corporation & Laskarides Shipping
- Northstar / Earthspan
- American Bird Conservancy
- Cable & Wireless South Atlantic Limited.
- Consolidated Fisheries Limited

Volunteering for Falkland Seabirds

Antony Bellamy

After 7 years of service, every employee working for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds enjoys a sabbatical – one month's additional paid leave to undertake or assist in a conservation project of their choice. With a passion for the romance and mystique of seabirds, and the islands they inhabit, the chance to assist Falklands Conservation was an opportunity not to be missed..

I was asked to assist Nic Huin (Science Officer) with the setting up of the first of many years planned demographic fieldwork, researching into the life of the black-browed albatross. This work was to take place in November 2006 on Steeple Jason Island, which holds the largest black browed albatross colony in the world. Grant Munro's description of the island as "debatably the most stunning spot in the Falklands" certainly wetted my appetite.

The first day's travel to Steeple could not have started the month off better. Accompanied by an interesting collection of frozen food, a whole sheep carcass, 17 kilograms of bird rings and 3 satellite transmitters, we were escorted ashore by small family pod of orca (killer whales). The following four weeks were occupied with nest marking 300 pairs of black browed albatross, ringing both adults on each nest, and successfully attaching satellite transmitters onto seven birds.

We also undertook penguin colony counts as part of the annual seabird monitoring programme, assisted with the 'Johnny Rook' survey on the Island, and with replanting eroded areas with tussac grass.



Antony next to a typically large tussac grass pedestal on Steeple Jason Island. A. Bellamy.

After a day's work and from the comfort of the living room sofa I could watch some of the 1,600 strong gentoo penguin colony come ashore, or take an adrenalin-fuelled stroll through 8 foot high, bull sea lion infested tussac grass to watch the sunset amongst 170,000 pairs of albatross. These are experiences which will never leave me. A huge and hearty 'thank you' to all who flew, shipped, drove, housed, fed and otherwise entertained me during my stay.



RIGHT: A large bull sea lion on Steeple Jason – a surprise for the unwary hiding in the tussac grass!

BELOW: Gentoo penguins coming ashore in the evening.



Kidney Island: An Exceptional Tussac Island

Oliver Yates

This Island is the best wildlife site within easy reach of Stanley, and is a jewel amongst the offshore islands of the Falklands archipelago. As part of its Albatross and Petrel Programme, Falklands Conservation, in conjunction with the Falkland Islands Government's Environmental Planning Department, has recently produced management guidelines for its long-term protection. Oli Yates, who headed the Programme 2005-06, describes the Island and its wildlife importance.

Kidney Island, which is owned by the Falkland Islands Government, lies off the coast of East Falkland, at the southern entrance to Berkeley Sound. It is roughly kidney-shaped, as its name suggests, and almost entirely covered with dense, mature tussac grass reaching well over 2 m high. It covers 32 ha and is approximately 1 km from west to east. Largely low-lying, the highest point on the Island is only 18 m above sea level.

Near vertical cliffs form much of the northern coastline giving it a rocky appearance from the sea. On the south side cliffs give way to a shallow sheltered sandy bay, providing a suitable anchorage for small craft.

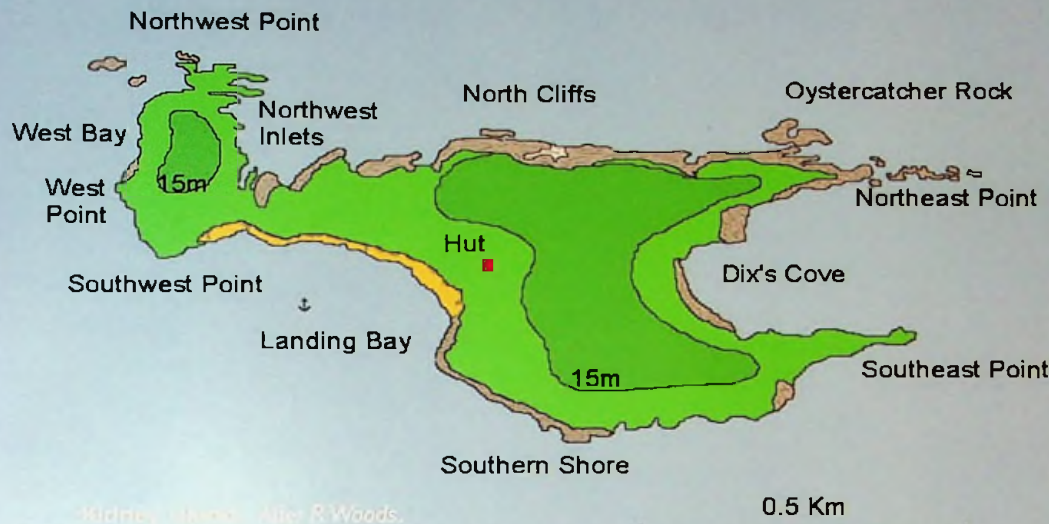
Since 1908 the Island has been visited by a variety of researchers in order to study its abundant wildlife. In 1964, Kidney Island, along with its neighbour, the much smaller Cochon Island, was declared a Wildlife Reserve. In 1999, in accordance with the Wildlife and Nature Ordinance, the islands were re-designated as a National Nature Reserve. The Kidney Island Group was recognised as an Important Bird Area (Site FK09) in 2006.

Kidney Island, although now protected as a nature reserve, has not always been free from exploitation. Vast numbers of rockhopper penguin eggs were collected for human consumption with 25,000 being taken in 1915 alone. It was historically used for the cutting of tussac grass to feed horses and cattle in Stanley during the winter. The egg collecting and cutting continued until the early 1950s and a small hut, which was used by the tussac cutters, remains today and can be used by visitors to shelter from the elements.

Despite relatively easy access and human activity over many years, both Kidney and Cochon remain free of introduced predators. Both are rat-free and consequently have diverse and numerous bird populations, including the tussacbird and endemic Cobb's wren. At least 34 bird species have been known to breed on Kidney Island since the 1930s. The islands have never been grazed and Kidney Island now supports 35 species of flowering plants including the two endemic Falkland ragworts and only three introduced species.



Only 250 pairs of Rockhopper penguins now breed on the northern cliffs of Kidney Island. Numbers are slowly increasing but the size of this colony is much reduced from 3,500 pairs recorded here in the 1930s. The cause of their widespread decline is not fully understood.
Allan White



Kidney is one of only three known breeding sites in the Falklands for white-chinned petrels, burrowing seabirds protected under the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels (ACAP).

In greater abundance on Kidney Island are the sooty shearwaters. These birds, along with white-chinned petrels, form rafts before dusk just off the coast of Kidney, waiting to fly into their nest sites as the sun goes down. This is without doubt the most impressive time to be on the Island. The sky fills with clouds of petrels flying overhead at great speed as they call in search of their mate. The rustle of birds crashing into the tussac and crawling into burrows is a magical experience.

The new management guidelines drawn up by Falklands Conservation underwent a period of public consultation managed by the Environmental Planning Department and were subsequently endorsed by the Environmental Committee. Now agreed by the Falkland Islands Government, the management plan includes specific proposals to monitor the Island's wildlife on a regular basis, to continue collection of data on species and habitats including cetaceans and the inshore

coastal areas, to restrict the number of visitors at any one time and to guard against the introduction of non-native species and the risk of fire. With this plan, the Island and its exceptional wildlife have safeguards in place to give effective protection for many years to come.



In 2005 Falklands Conservation recorded 30 breeding pairs of white-chinned petrels on Kidney Island. A burrowscope was used to gather data from the 2m long curved nesting burrows dug in the peat at the foot of tussac stands. Tim Reid.



Sooty Shearwater: more than 100,000 are thought to nest on Kidney Island. Alan Henry



Falklands Conservation boat leaving Kidney Island. The island is just 35 minutes away by launch from Stanley.

The Striated Caracara Survey 2006

Robin Woods & Jonathan Meiburg

Visitors to the Falklands' outermost islands are often keen to see penguins and albatrosses, but striated caracaras (Johnny Rooks) have not received similar publicity. People are often surprised and entertained by these remarkably inquisitive and opportunistic birds of prey yet are unaware that these caracaras cannot readily be seen anywhere else in the world. Charles Darwin visiting East Falkland in 1833 and 1834 found them to be 'exceedingly numerous'. He described them as 'extraordinarily tame and fearless, very mischievous and inquisitive, quarrelsome and passionate'. Johnny Rooks still show the same characteristics but they are no longer numerous, due to persecution since the early days of settlement, introduced predators and loss of habitat and prey through fire and grazing. A Johnny Rook is now a rare sight around the coasts of East Falkland, where they were formerly breeding.

The striated caracara *Phalacrocorax australis* is classified as NEAR THREATENED by BirdLife International due to its small population and restricted range, and it is legally protected in the Falklands. Surveys are required to monitor the population and re-assess its world status. The main concentration of these birds occurs in the Jason Islands group with smaller dense populations at Bird Island and Beauchêne Island.

Elsewhere, striated caracaras occur only on isolated islands off Tierra del Fuego. The Falkland birds are very important, possibly representing the majority of the world population, which may also be genetically isolated from those in South America. A new survey was felt to be necessary in 2006 after applications were received by the Falkland Islands Government for licences to cull birds claimed to attack sheep. It is hoped that further research will increase understanding of this remarkable bird and be useful in discussing ways of compensating farmers.

Our team consisted of Gavin Harrison, from Edinburgh Zoo, knowledgeable on raptor behaviour and very enthusiastic, Mike Morrison, a Falkland Islander and a veteran of the 1997 and 1998 surveys and Robin Woods. Giselle Botha, a yachtswoman, came for the first fortnight while Jonathan Meiburg, who completed graduate studies on striated caracaras at the University of Texas and participated in the 1997 survey, joined us later. Rikki Evans helped on North Fur Island and in January 2007, Michael and Jeannette Clarke with their granddaughter Adrianna Merrey, counted the nests on the Falklands Conservation Nature Reserve, Saddle Island.

A pair of Striated Caracaras at Bird Island, on watch by their nest in deep tussac grass. The first Falklands Conservation survey in 1997 and 1998 suggested a Falkland population of about 500 breeding pairs.



We visited 18 outlying islands, concentrating on breeding Striated Caracaras. Bird Island, where we camped for three days, was a strenuous introduction as dense tussac grass grows up to 2.5m and walking was difficult, especially up the slopes. Many nests we found were on ledges in deep gulches, others inland on giant tussac pedestals; some were less than 50m apart, a remarkable density for large birds of prey. On several islands, tussac was nearly impenetrable, but on others, it was sparse due to over-grazing and erosion. We camped on five islands - where it was difficult to find flat ground to pitch tents amidst close-growing tussac grass.

Territories were marked on sketch maps with GPS co-ordinates. As we clambered along the coasts, some nests were difficult to locate in tussac when the incubating bird sat tight and the mate watched silently up to 300m away, but some sitting birds walked out as we approached. Other nests, with brightly coloured marine debris or clumps and strands of sheep's wool, were visible from long distances. A few adults were aggressive, knocking us on the head; others just stood by their nests and watched us watching them!

Some preliminary results: Steeple Jason had at least 64 breeding pairs (68 in 1997), Elephant Jason 30 (at least 22 in 1997) and Flat Jason 26 (29 in 1997). We were surprised to find 14 territories on The Twins, two small islands which are Falklands Conservation nature reserves off Carcass Island, which held no more than six in 1997. Nearby Sedge Island had four pairs (only one possible nest site in 1997) while a partial survey of Carcass Island found 11 sites suggesting an increase to at least 16 pairs. Grand Jason showed a noticeable decrease since 1997 from about 70 to about 50 pairs, perhaps



Condor, shown here off Steeple Islet, was chartered for one month from 4 November 2006.

Climbing on and off the dinghy, while carrying bags of equipment, was an interesting experience especially in a swell of 1 m or more.

Good timing was vital, lifejackets were always worn and Michael Clarke's boat-handling skills were essential for our safety.

Johnny Rooks are remarkably inquisitive and will investigate anything unusual that they find – on the chance that it is edible! Kevin Schafer.





The average clutch is three; we found more than one nest with these beautifully marked eggs.

The survey team of Gavin Harrison, Mike Morrison and Giselle Botha locating and plotting a site on the southern island of The Twins.



related to the marked decline in the black-browed albatross population.

Just over 300 pairs were found in territories and we concluded that the population generally seemed stable, with maturing birds apparently colonising islands where there were few pairs in 1997. As we were unable, in one month, to survey all islands where striated caracaras breed, a calculation made from records received since 1998 suggests that there are possibly a further 200 pairs. The estimated population is therefore roughly the same as it was eight or nine years ago.

This poses new questions. We have little evidence except hearsay of the longevity of adult Johnny Rooks in the wild. From studies of other raptors, it is possible that the annual mortality of adults is about 5% and that they live for at least 20 years. With conservation measures in place, the population should be increasing. The factors which are keeping numbers at about 500 pairs may include lack of food in the winter, shortage of habitat or breeding sites and possibly continued predation. This survey has demonstrated the need for detailed studies of Johnny Rook diet and behaviour, and their demographics and movements, which would require a carefully planned and intensive ringing scheme.

Falklands Conservation gratefully acknowledges the financial support given by the Falkland Islands Government (FIG) and a substantial grant from the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (Edinburgh Zoo) which made this survey possible.

All photographs in this article unless otherwise indicated are © R. Woods.

Seabird Monitoring 2006-07

Nic Huin, Science Officer

Seabirds breeding in the Falkland Islands have had a productive season. On Steeple Jason Island the breeding success was 69% for the black-browed-albatross (the highest recorded so far from any colony of this species in the Falklands) and 46% for southern giant petrels, included in the annual monitoring programme for the first time. The count of king penguin chicks at Volunteer Point in November totalled 533, the highest ever recorded here since the Programme began. Rockhopper penguins were the exception with an average year, and a slow decline in numbers noted at some colonies.

The monitoring programme now includes a demographic study of the black-browed albatross. This year 300 nests were marked and all breeding birds were ringed, and later on in March, 400 chicks were ringed at the study nests. We will have to wait 7–10 years to find out how many of these young birds return their breeding site. Altogether a total of 1000 birds were ringed this season, a promising start for the study.

In November we tracked the movements of black-browed albatross at sea with the deployment of 4 satellite tags on breeding adults. In March 3 devices were deployed on chicks about to fledge. We wait to see how far they will travel, if they will make it to Brazilian waters or if any brave fledging decides to visit South Africa instead.



TOP: Gentoo penguins have had their third best breeding season on record producing on average 1.2 chicks per pair.

RIGHT: All satellite devices worked well, showing albatross foraging up to 650 miles north of the Falkland Islands.

Conservation in Action

Recent highlights from Falklands Conservation activities



Mark 'Flasher' Cutts and Steve Copsey of the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society who, with Robin Woods, conducted a survey of Middle Island (a Falklands Conservation nature reserve) in December 2006. Four endemic plants were recorded including woolly Falkland ragwort *Senecio littoralis* shown above. *Robin Woods.*



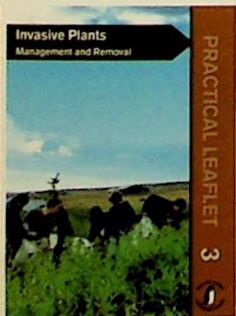
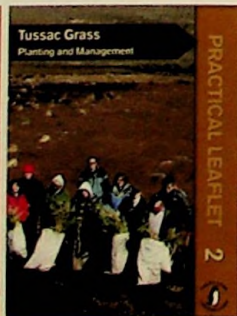
LEFT: The WATCH Group in action during January and February 2007 planting tussac on Sea Lion Island (*top: Patricia Henry*) and beach cleaning on Bleaker Island (*bottom: Mandy Ford*).



BELOW: Ten students from the Community School spent five days in October undertaking conservation work at Elephant Beach Farm with Ali Liddle, FC Education Officer.



RIGHT: A series of four leaflets providing information and advice on practical conservation matters, compiled by Becky Ingham and with support from the UK Overseas Territories Environment Programme, have just been published.



NOTICEBOARD

Tom Davies OBE

We are sorry to have to report that T.H. (Tom) Davies passed away on 15 September 2006 after a long illness. Tom studied Agricultural Botany at University College of Wales, Aberystwyth and first went to the Falklands as leader of an agricultural review team in 1969. In the 1970s he made several visits as consultant to the Grassland Trials Unit and returned in 1982 as Senior Agronomist, becoming Team Leader at the Agricultural Research Centre in 1984. He was awarded the OBE in 1987 for his work in the Falklands. He was Chairman of the Falkland Islands Trust (later Falklands Conservation) in Stanley from 1982 to 1985. In 1983 he enthusiastically supported the project to map the distribution and abundance of Falkland breeding birds. He encouraged local committee members, promoted the BBS to Islanders and military personnel and helped in obtaining support from Trustees of the FI Foundation in UK. His role is detailed in the Introduction to the *Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Falkland Islands* published in 1997. Tom maintained his interest in the Falklands after retirement to Devon in 1986, serving as a Trustee of Falklands Conservation and giving illustrated talks about the Falklands. In 1989, he and his former colleague, Jim McAdam, wrote the beautifully illustrated *Wild Flowers of the Falkland Islands*, still used by many people in the Islands today. We offer our sympathy to his widow Gwen and family. We are very pleased to hear that Gwen will continue the link as a member of Falklands Conservation.

Trustee Changes

Gordon Liddle, our Chairman in the Islands from 2004 to 2006, has left Islands to take up a post at Dundee University. The new Chairman is Jan Cheek. Four new Trustees were appointed at the 2006 AGM: Mike Richardson and Mike Bowles in the UK, Debbie Summers and Alan Henry in the Falklands.

Getting Serious with Invasives

Grateful thanks are offered to the National Trust for Scotland for their recent donation of 12 tonnes of rat bait. This recently arrived in the Falklands from its storage on the isle of Canna in the Hebrides. Falklands Conservation, through its grants scheme, has given half of it to Sally Poncet's Beaver Island Restoration Project. The rest is available for use by landowners and others for eradication projects and control of rodents where these are harming native wildlife.

A big welcome to the start of the South Atlantic Invasive Species Project, and the appointment of Brian Summers (our Falkland Islands Chairman from 1999 to 2002) as its Falkland Islands, South Georgia and South

Sandwich Islands Project Officer. This is a European Commission-funded initiative running until September 2009, which will work to investigate how to effectively control or eradicate introduced species, which have an adverse effect on our environment. A second Project Officer is working on St Helena, Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha.

We are delighted to announce that funding has been awarded from the UK Overseas Territories Environment Programme to Falklands Conservation in order to undertake a Falkland Islands Plants Conservation Project. Work will start in July 2007 and include a pilot scheme to demonstrate sustainable use of native pasture, identify Important Plant Areas and promote greater protection for rare Falkland plants, and undertake surveys of non-native plant species to support the work of the EU scheme.

Overseas Territories Environment Conference



Grant Munro and Ann Brown represented Falklands Conservation at this gathering in Jersey in October 2006. It provided a rare opportunity to meet and discuss conservation issues with colleagues on UK Territories across the world.

More Members Needed

Can you help us get more supporters – every additional member makes a real difference to our effectiveness. We now have a new stock of re-designed membership leaflets. If you know of anyone you think would be interested in joining or could arrange a wider distribution on a once-off or regular basis please get in touch with either our UK or Stanley office who will be delighted to send you a supply.



The Queen of the Falklands Fritillary



On Carcass Island, off West Falkland, January 2006. A Jones.



This butterfly is often found close to patches of yellow violet, thought to be its food plant. Alan Henry

The Queen of the Falklands fritillary (*Issoria sytheris*) is the only resident native butterfly found in the Falkland Islands. It is a Falkland race (sub-species) of a similar butterfly found in South America.

It has a widespread distribution, occurring in scattered localities on both main islands as well as some outlying islands, with more sightings on West than East Falkland. The butterflies have been recorded up to 1,000 ft above sea level, in diddle-dee, white grass, and re-seeded grasslands. Although tolerant of exposed and windy conditions, it prefers flying in sunny conditions, sheltering amongst low vegetation and rock during inclement periods.

It has a long flight period and might be seen on the wing on warm summer days anytime from October to February, though December and early January seem to be the best time. In 1991, David Carstairs noted that 'It appears to be in a general decline from the 1920's.'

In order to adequately conserve this rare and beautiful insect we need to learn more about its distribution and life cycle.

Records of any sightings should be sent to Dr Alex Jones, Falkland Islands Invertebrates Conservation Project, Insect Room, UMZC, Department of Zoology, Downing St. Cambridge, CB2 3EJ or e-mail to: agj25@cam.ac.uk.



Wildlife Conservation In The Falkland Islands

Issue 8



Wildlife Conservation In The Falkland Islands

Issue 8 November 2007



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FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

Protecting the wildlife of the Falkland Islands for future generations

www.falklandsconservation.com

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: Gentoo penguin with young. *Kevin Schafer.*

Falkland Islands Plant Conservation Programme

Grant Munro, Falklands Conservation Chief Executive

Falklands Conservation has begun an ambitious project to address plant conservation across the Falkland Islands.

The Falklands have a native flora of 171 vascular plants with 13 endemic species (found nowhere else in the world) but significantly 23 species (13%) are classed as threatened in the national Red Data List. Some exist in just a few isolated populations. There is an urgent need for more information to ensure their long-term survival. There are now more introduced vascular plant species in the Falklands (177) than native species (171) and a number of these have the potential to cause serious problems. Tackling this issue has been hampered by a lack of botanical expertise. A new post in Falklands Conservation will allow plant and habitat conservation to take a more prominent and effective role.

One important element of the Plants Programme will be defining Important Plant Areas. The identification of these special places for plants, along with the Important Bird Areas identified in 2006, will lead to establishing Key Biodiversity Areas for future monitoring of the Islands' environment. The work will also inform particular species and habitat action plans and feed into a Biodiversity Strategy currently being developed by the Falkland Islands Government.

A second important element of the Programme is a pilot scheme of rotational grazing run in conjunction with Ben Berntsen of Elephant Beach Farm and the Department of Agriculture. This is expected to demonstrate an efficient and sustainable use of native pasture and serve as a model for other farms. In the Falkland Islands, site protection, in the form of either private or National Nature Reserves, covers less than 4% of the land area. If conservation efforts are to have significant impact, land management of the 1.2 million hectares of agricultural rangeland beyond protected areas must be addressed. Agriculture is the traditional and largest land-use in the Falkland Islands but has suffered declines in profitability over recent years. Rotational grazing has the potential to benefit both farm viability and the sustainable use of native pasture. This practical approach will be a positive step to foster stronger collaboration and confidence between farming and conservation interests. Healthy and productive habitats are the goal of all.

RIGHT: After a 5-year gap we have a botanist in the Islands again. Welcome to Dr Rebecca Upson who has been appointed to the new post of Plants Conservation Officer.



LEFT: It is hoped that under an experimental grazing scheme native plants such as the pretty dusty miller shown here, will recover and re-colonise. Alan Henry.

BELOW: Pasture improvements should benefit birds such as the long-tailed meadow lark. Alan Henry.



The two-year Falkland Island Plant Conservation Programme is being run in partnership with the Falkland Islands Government Department of Agriculture and Environmental Planning Department, Elephant Beach Farm and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew with additional support provided by the UK Overseas Territories Environmental Programme (OTEP) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Lifting the Kelp Veil on the Falkland Islands' Inshore Waters

Paul Brickle, Wetjens Dimmlich, Stephen Cartwright, Dion Poncet, Judith Brown.

For a nation comprising over 700 islands and a correspondingly vast coastline, surprisingly little is known about the inshore marine environment surrounding the Falklands. Most of the available literature for the region deals with waters that are on the whole deeper than 50m. Literature concerning the supratidal (splash zone), intertidal and subtidal zones is particularly uncommon. Prior to the first shallow marine survey of the Falkland Islands (Brown and Root Survey 1996) there were only a handful of very specific papers such as Hoggarth's examination of the biology of Falkland Islands false king crab (*Paralomis granulosa*). There is also a paucity of papers dealing with taxonomy and they often deal with the Falkland Islands as an appendix to much larger studies which may cover the whole Patagonian Shelf. One example and probably the most comprehensive of these are of course the Discovery Reports.

This paucity of published papers reflects the limited support to date for marine environmental research into areas that are not directly related to offshore

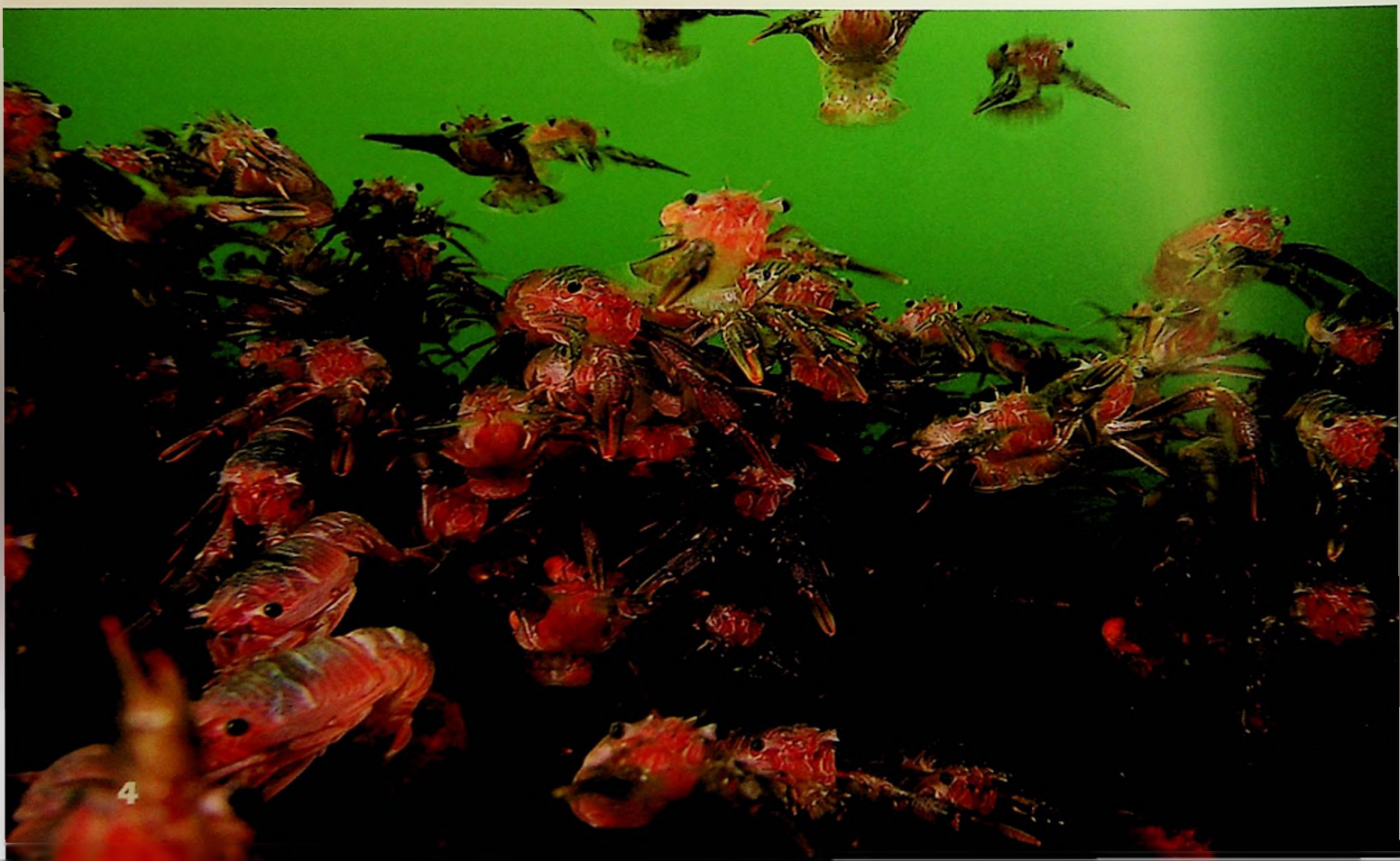


commercial fisheries operations. The Shallow Marine Surveys Group (SMSG) was set up in June 2006 to try and redress this lack of knowledge with the primary aim of producing a definitive quality field guide to the shallow marine fauna of the Falkland Islands. Through a fortunate set of circumstances we now have in the Islands a group of people who have the diving experience required to operate in these remote

locations, the scientific expertise to accurately identify specimens and ready access to vessels and equipment well-suited to both short and longer duration diving operations. Most importantly, initial financial support has been provided by the Falkland Islands Government Environmental Studies Budget and additional funding has also been received from the Antarctic Research Trust.

With the help of volunteers we have been collecting, identifying and photographing marine animals since June 2006. The work is conducted in our spare time, and will continue over a period of approximately two years. The scope of this work includes the splash

A unique perspective of lobster krill from inside a school of *Munida gregaria*. P. Brickle.



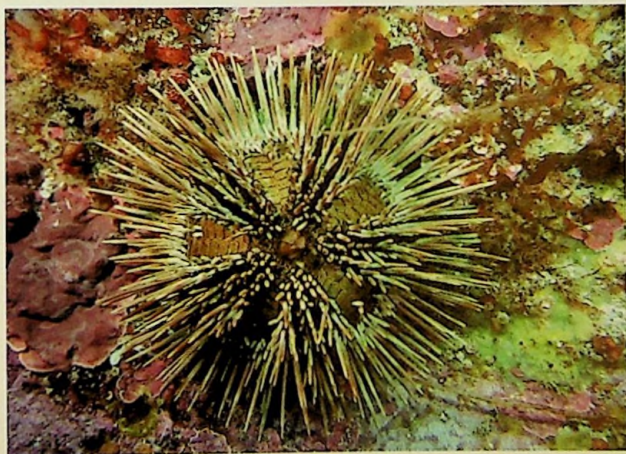
zone, the inter-tidal and sub-tidal environments on sandy, pebble and rocky beaches of Falkland Islands shores with particular emphasis on those environments within easy reach of Stanley. As sufficient knowledge is gained we will conduct a full shallow marine survey of the National Nature Reserve, Kidney Island, in year two.

One of the challenges we face during these surveys is identifying some of the animals we see. This is mainly due to their limited distribution in the Southwest Atlantic. If the distribution doesn't extend into the Pacific then it is unlikely to be reported in any of the South American literature. It is this lack of readily available information on species found in our region that we aim to address with the publication of the Falkland Islands guide to the shallow marine life

The project has progressed well over the first year with many of the echinoderms, molluscs and

TOP The painted shrimp (*Campylonotus vegans*) makes a colourful photographic subject. P. Brickle.

BOTTOM The spectacular starburst pattern of the naked sea urchin, *Arbacia dufresnii*. P. Brickle.



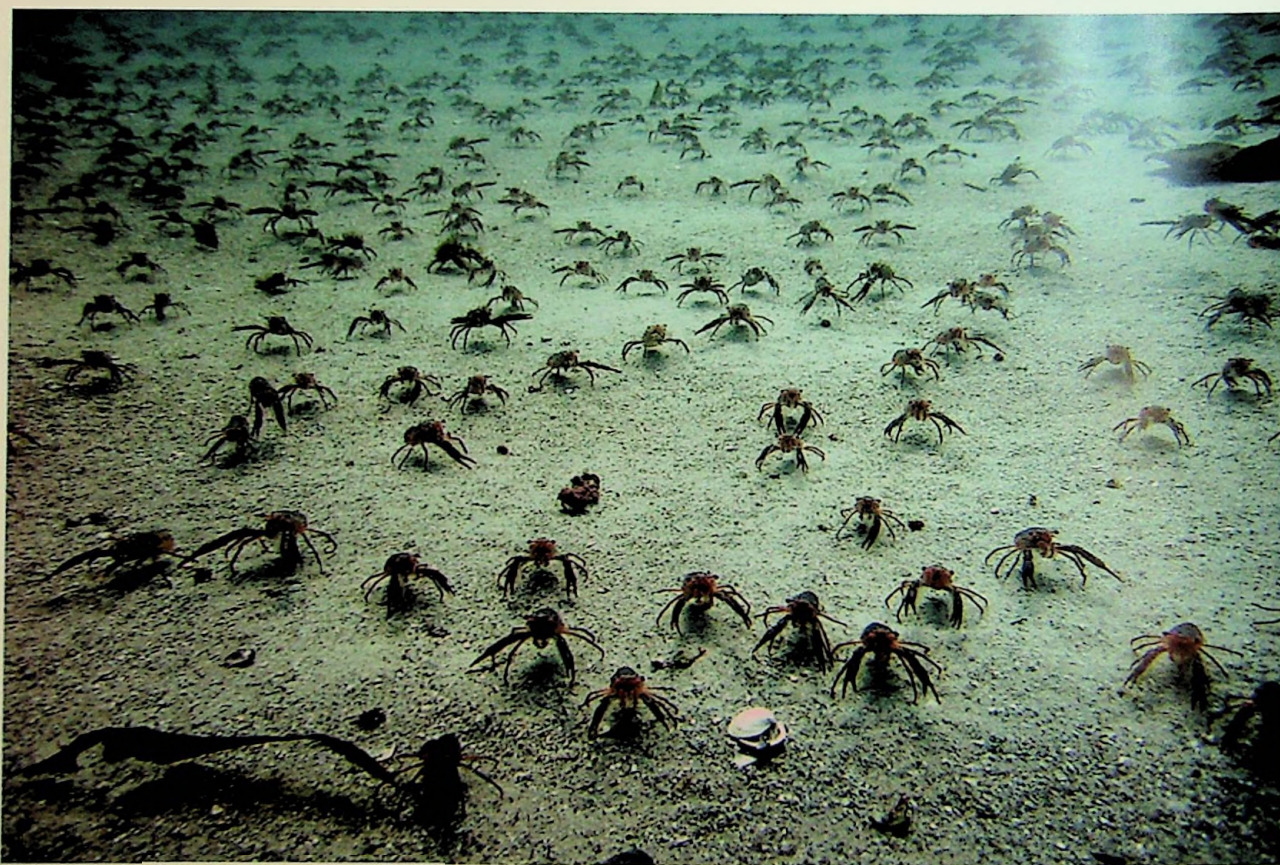
crustaceans collected, identified, catalogued and photographed. The second year will include a continuation of the work conducted in Year 1 by progressing through Porifera (sponges), Cnidaria (colonial free floating hydrozoans, swimming hydrozoans, jelly fishes, sea anemones and corals), Polychaeta, Ectoprocta (Bryozoa) and the Acidiacea (sea squirts) and by conducting the full marine survey of Kidney Island.

The group received a great boost earlier this year when Dion Poncet joined the team and offered the use of the steel-hulled ketch, *Damien II*, enabling us to dive further afield and greatly extending the scope of our activities. Our first extended expedition was conducted in March 2007. This trip included the southern parts of East and West Falklands and greatly increased our rate of specimen collection and

our catalogue of photographs. Three more of these ambitious, yet highly productive, trips are planned around the Beaver Islands, the Jason Group and the North Falkland Sound.

Our final challenge once this season is completed will be the careful identification of the many specimens collected, sorting the thousands of photographs and the publication of the field guide. Ultimately we would like to see the work that has been initiated by the Group continue in some form well beyond the current 2-year time frame as part of an ongoing programme of funded research into the ecologically important inshore marine waters of the Falkland Islands.

*Perhaps a sight never witnessed before. A massed army of lobster krill (*Alphega gregaria*) greet a descending diver. W. Dannisch.*



Ruedi
Abtuchil

ADOPT AN ALBATROSS
Help support our work on Steeple Jason
£25 per adoption

Includes newsletters, photograph, leaflet on
Steeple Jason and the colony

www.falklandsconservation.com

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Monitoring of Black-browed Albatrosses on Steeple Jason

Isaac Forster & Nic Huin

As part of a planned expansion of the annual Falklands Conservation Seabird Monitoring Programme, this year saw a considerable amount of effort invested in the establishment of a black-browed albatross study colony on Steeple Jason.

With population declines recorded from Falklands-wide censuses in 2000 and 2005, a new intensively monitored colony was required to find out which components of the birds' population are affected most adversely by fishing activities. Steeple Jason was chosen because it is the most important breeding site for black-browed albatross in the Islands, holding 43% of the total population.

After careful consideration, a small area on the western tip was selected for the study colony. The albatross here nest in two fairly continuous areas of 1 and 2.5 miles respectively, and we wanted to minimise the number of birds who could easily migrate out of the colony boundaries between seasons. The chosen site has a limited number of nests within its boundaries (~1500). More importantly is the fact that the boundaries are easily definable thanks to natural geographic features, so immigration and emigration of birds can be clearly determined.

In November 2006 Nic Huin, Anthony Bellamy and Ali Liddle marked 300 nests in this site, and in two weeks ringed 99.33% of all adult breeders. Returning in March 2007, Nic Huin and Isaac Forster ringed all the surviving chicks within the study colony, plus an additional 200 chicks from the surrounding areas, to boost numbers of known aged birds when they return to breed for the first time in seven years hence.

This project is a long term venture. Meaningful results will be some years in the future! However this year we can report that breeding success from the Island was 55.9%, the third highest on record, and for our study colony was an even better 68.6%, showing that despite the disturbance caused during ringing, we did not adversely affect their survival.

Our time on Steeple Jason was not just spent ringing albatross. Four satellite tags were cycled on breeding adults. This data set was collected for comparison with studies conducted on Saunders Island in 1999 and Beauchêne Island in 2000. Overall the birds from Steeple Jason favoured the same areas north of the



Isaac Foster ringing chicks in the new study colony.
Andrea Wright.

Islands as the other records. However, locally, each of the three colonies have quite specific foraging areas, with Steeple Jason birds feeding adjacent to, and west of, the Jason Islands group.

Three of the four satellite tags were then attached to dispersing juvenile birds in March 2007 to provide the first ever recorded tracks of fledgling albatross. In total, 295 days of tracking at sea were provided and results show that juveniles seem to individually favour three particular areas of the South American coast: the first off the coast of Argentina between 39 and 41 degrees south, the second on the Patagonian Shelf opposite the River Plate, and the third further north in Brazilian waters between 27 and 29 degrees south. The patchiness of coverage is undoubtedly due to the low sample size of 3 birds, but these results do give us an important insight into speed of dispersal of fledgling birds from the Islands, and their general patterns of at sea behaviour in the first few months after leaving the nest.



Rockhopper penguins are prone to being easily disturbed when fieldworkers are moving about. Only a small number of rockhoppers nest within the study area. Emma Philip.

This long term monitoring programme on Steeple Jason was made possible with support from the Falkland Islands Government, the UK Overseas Territories Environment Programme, and Northstar tracking devices. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

Beauchêne Island: One of the most important seabird islands in the world



This is the southernmost and most isolated of all the Falkland Islands, lying 80 km south off Porpoise Point on East Falkland.

Its nearest neighbour is Sea Lion Island, 51 km to the north. Access is strictly limited by the Falkland Islands Government, which owns the Island. Falklands Conservation has been permitted to visit Beauchêne at regular, but infrequent, intervals to record and report on its exceptional wildlife.

It is named after the French navigator Jacques Gouin de Beauchesne, who discovered it on 19 January 1701. Today it remains one of the few unspoilt islands in the archipelago as it has not been grazed or permanently settled, and is free of introduced predators. Since December 1964 it has been a wildlife sanctuary and is now designated a National Nature Reserve. Only a few visits have been recorded since 1900 and from the early 1960s most have been primarily for biological research.

The extensive and luxuriant tussac grass has a surprisingly rich invertebrate fauna including moths, crickets, beetles, spiders, flies, mites and springtails. A survey in 1980 found a number new to science, and identified a few thought to be unique to Beauchêne, but following Falklands Conservation's invertebrates

survey these are believed to occur elsewhere in the Islands. One spider *Emmonomma beauchenicum* is named after the Island. Around the margins, this habitat supports many tussacbirds, siskins and wrens. The endemic Cobb's wren is numerous, particularly where tussac borders on to boulder beaches. Burrowing petrels live beneath the large tussac pedestals. These have all flourished on an island without rats.

Beauchêne has been a seal reserve for over 60 years. Fur seals occurred on Beauchêne for 11,000 years but were exterminated nineteenth century. Southern Sea Lions breed here and it is a major hauling out ground for many non-breeders who are thought to have caused erosion of some areas of tussac. Elephant seals visit but do not breed.

Undoubtedly the outstanding feature of Beauchêne Island is its immense colonies of seabirds. It has one of the two largest known colonies of black browed albatrosses in the world with 103,341 pairs breeding in 2005. It is estimated that this population consumes about 55,000 tonnes of food per annum, much taken within a radius of 50 km from the Island. Counted here as part of a Falklands Conservation Islands-wide census of this bird, the latest figures show a sad decline of 56,000 birds (35%) since the first census in 1982. Old photographs in our library clearly show that there has been a reduction in both the area and density of the colonies. The black-browed albatross is classified as Endangered by BirdLife International and

The albatross colony on the western side of the Island is remarkable for its size, and has been described as one of the great natural spectacles on earth. Nic Huin.



Falklands Conservation is working hard to prevent further declines in the Falkland population.

Beauchêne holds the largest concentration (32%) of rockhopper penguins in the Falklands. A total of 71,343 pairs were recorded in the 2005 Falklands Conservation census. This is one of the few places where numbers appear to be increasing. The birds here were not affected by the Harmful Algal Bloom of 2002, which killed many penguins in other parts of the archipelago. As throughout most of the Falklands, they breed within albatross colonies in the spaces between the nests, which makes counting a challenging task. The 2005 count benefited from the use of a laser range finder and handheld GPS bringing increased accuracy to the results. Some of Beauchêne's steep cliff slopes have deep elongated grooves in the rock which have been worn by the sharp claws of the rockhoppers made over countless centuries.

Other breeding seabirds include gentoo penguins, a large imperial shag colony, diving and storm petrels. It is the only confirmed breeding site for the fairy prion in the Falkland Islands, with an estimated 10,000 pairs. The southern giant petrel, macaroni and Magellanic penguin are present in small numbers.

Striated Caracara (Johnny Rooks) prey on these seabirds colonies. Most of their nests are to be found within about 25 m of a major penguin or albatross colony. The fledglings are thought to be fed almost exclusively on penguin chicks. At 70 pairs (2005 count by Falklands Conservation) the Island holds the second most dense breeding population of these rare birds in the Falklands.

The high level of protection enjoyed by Beauchêne continues to safeguard this very special Falkland island. Specific visitor guidelines, in addition to the Countryside Code, are applied here by the Falkland Islands Government. Permission to visit is rarely granted. Due to its isolation and difficult access it continues to be free of accidental disturbance, visitor pressure or introduced predators. It is a jewel in the South Atlantic, and long may it remain so.



ABOVE: Exceptionally tall tussac grass (growing up to 3.5m) covers almost two thirds of the Island. Some of these plants are thought to be over 200 years old. Only three other vascular plant species have been recorded: wild celery, bitter-cress and Antarctic starwort. *Nic Huin.*

OPPOSITE LEFT: Beauchêne is very exposed to the South Atlantic Ocean. It is often battered by strong winds and lashed by massive waves. The entire island can be deluged with heavy spray. The western beach is littered with driftwood some of which has been there for centuries. Landings by boat are difficult! *Nic Huin.*

OPPOSITE RIGHT: This inscription, 'W Blinn, 1834', is thought to have been made by a visiting seal hunter. A number of other sealing relics have been found on the Island, which once had an abundance of fur seals. These were almost exterminated from the Falklands in the 1880s. Fur seals have not been recorded here since the 1930s.

Beauchêne Island is 3km long and 1km wide, covered in dense tussac grass in the north, with cliffs on the eastern slopes and boulder beaches on the western coast. Peat is 13m deep in places. The southern quarter is almost bare of any vegetation.
Derek Clarke.

Conservation in Action

Recent highlights from Falklands Conservation activities



ABOVE: Volunteers planting tussac grass in September 2007 to restore an area of eroded and degraded land at Elephant Beach Farm, East Falkland. Tussac 'tillers' were collected from an area near Gypsy Cove and taken to a headland on the farm which six years ago had been fenced off by farmer Ben Bernstein. *Isaac Forster.*

RIGHT: Flourishing young tussac shown here at Elephant Beach Farm was planted by volunteers a few years ago. It is transforming an area of bare, black peat into a valuable habitat for wildlife. A few of these plants are already over a metre high and producing a lot of seed heads with natural re-generation evident in some places. *Ali Liddle.*



ABOVE: In October 2007 a team (including Isaac Forster and Ken Passfield, who kindly provided his time and yacht for the task) visited Inner North West Island, off Port Sussex, in Falkland Sound to bait it for eradication of rats. This is the 19th island where Falklands Conservation has undertaken such restoration work, which will improve the habitat for many ground nesting birds. *Brian Summers.*



RIGHT: Falklands Conservation organised a beach clean at Hadassa Bay, a National Nature Reserve close to Stanley, on 1 September 2007. Two trailers were filled with rubbish (including bottles and bags, drink cans, nets, rope and broken glass) from the shore in an area where Magellanic penguins were soon due to return to their nesting burrows. *Penguin News.*



Rare and Vagrant Birds in the Falkland Islands 2006

Mike Morrison and Alan Henry

This report summarises the sightings of rare and vagrant birds submitted to Falklands Conservation or made by the authors, volunteers and employees of Falklands Conservation during 2006.



Chinstrap Penguin, Stanley (Alan Henry)

Chinstrap Penguin *Pygoscelis antarcticus*

Two reports both within a week, the first from Annie & Nick Pitaluga of one on the road by Plaza Creek Salvador on 31st August, and the second by Sally Blake of one on the shoreline near the 'Jhelum' on 2nd and 4th September and seen by the Capstan Gift Shop carpark, Stanley, over the next two days.

Erect-crested Penguin *Eudyptes sclateri*

The Erect-crested once again returned in mid October to the Rockhopper colony at Marble on Pebble Island (Allan White).

Great Grebe *Podiceps major*

A single bird a non-breeding adult at the Head of the Bay, Green Patch on 3rd November (Sharon Halford info Alan Henry) still in the same area two days later (Sue Morrison).

Spectacled Petrel *Procellaria conspicillata*

Single bird seen from a long line fishing vessel reported on 29th March.

Cocoi Heron *Ardea cocoi*

A single bird was seen on 7th April at Dunnose Head by Rosemary Wilkinson. Single bird reported by Shirley Knight at North Arm between the Fox Bay settlements also in April, possibly the same bird was seen during May and June at Fox Bay West by Norma Edwards. Tony Anderson saw a single bird in the creeks between the Estancia and Malo on 23rd October.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

All the sightings were in April – two birds at Bravo slip, Stanley on 1st (Sue & Mike Morrison and Alan Henry), single bird at Brookfield farm on 3rd (Jock McPhee), Another single bird on Philomel Hill, Stanley on 5th (Nic Huin) and three birds were seen flying west past 10 Fitzroy Road East, Stanley on 21st (Sue & Mike Morrison).

Chilean Flamingo *Phoenicopterus chilensis*

Roger Edwards saw a single bird at Second Bay, Fox Bay on 28th September photographed by Padre David Norfield.

Coscoroba Swan *Coscoroba coscoroba*

Seven birds on Big Pond, Whale Point, Fitzroy on 5th February (Sue & Mike Morrison) four were still in the same area a week later (Alan Henry). Six Birds in Kelp Lagoon, Fitzroy on 11th February (Nic Huin, Ali Liddle & others). Five birds in the Big Pond, Whale Point, Fitzroy and two birds on Bertha's Beach Pond on 27th March (Alan Henry). Two birds were seen flying over Darwin settlement on 14th September by Julie Granville. On 11th November Allan Eagle reported that a pair of Coscoroba's had four cygnets on Big Pond, Whale Point, Fitzroy. When visiting the area on 3rd December it was discovered that two pairs had young, one with four cygnets and the other with one cygnet (Sue & Mike Morrison). All cygnets surviving seen again 7th Jan and 11th Feb 2007. On 12th Feb Alan Henry observed the cygnet's practice flying on the pond in very windy conditions. This is the second recorded breeding in recent years – the other was on Pebble Island in 2000/01.

Red Shoveler *Anas platalea*

A pair on Ship Harbour Pond, Pebble Island, seen on 19th January and 8th February by Allan White. A single male was also seen on Big Pond, Bleaker Island on 2nd October (Mike & Phyllis Rendell).

Rosy-billed Pochard *Netta peposaca*

Just one sighting of a single male on Swan Pond, Cape Dolphin, on 1st October by Alan Henry.

Red-gartered Coot *Fulica armillata*

Single bird seen near the jetty at Goose Green settlement by Chris Taylor and reported by Diana Aldridge on 24th April, Diana phoned again on 21st July when the Coot had been seen again roosting in the wreck of the 'Vicar of Bray'. Photographed and identified on 23rd July.



Red-gartered Coot (Mike Morrison)

White-winged Coot *Fulica leucoptera*

Three birds seen on the pond in Elephant Point, Saunders Island on 14th October by Harriet Hall. In late December Janus Eliens and Felix van der Ouwelant found seven adult coots with chicks, (two of the pairs with three chicks, one pair with two chicks and a lone adult on the ponds in Elephant Point, Saunders Island (info Robin Woods). Alan Henry who visited the site a month later found five of the chicks all feathered and well grown (all three pairs had lost one chick from when first seen). This is the first successful breeding of White-winged Coots recorded in the Falkland Islands the only other attempt was on Bleaker Island in Dec04/Jan 05.

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*

Two birds at Yorke Bay Pond seen in flight on 10th November (Alan Henry). Three birds seen in the same area on 12th Nov (Mark Cutts & Steve Copsey), and all three again the next day by (Sue Morrison). Two birds were seen again on 23rd & 24th Nov, one seen on 6th Dec (Gavin Harrison, Jonathan Meiburg, Mike Morrison & Robin Woods) and two on 7th December (Alan Henry). One bird remained in the same area up until 30th December when it was last seen.

South-American Painted Snipe *Nycticryphes semicollaris*

Single bird flushed from tall, dense vegetation of *Carex trifida* & *Elymus glaucescens* on the eastern shoreline of Grand Jason Island, flushed several times over the next two days (14th to 16th November) but was only seen in flight because it remained hidden when on the ground (Giselle Boths, Gavin Harrison, Mike Morrison & Robin Woods). A dark slim bodied bird with two distinct gold-yellow stripes running down either side of the back to meet above the rump and a white 'halter'. Distant photographs show a fairly long, down curved and broad bill. Notably smaller than the resident Snipe *Gallinago paraguayae magellanica* which was also in the same area and with a noticeably different flight action, it did not



American Golden Plover (Mike Morrison)

call when flushed or in flight. The conclusion was that it is almost certainly this species, and if so, is the first record for the Falkland Islands. Confusion with other species is highly unlikely.

Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*

Most of the records are from Whale Point, Fitzroy that now seems an annual wintering site. Two birds near the wreck of the St Mary Whale Point on 5th February (Sue & Mike Morrison). Fifteen birds Kelp Point, Whale Point on 12th February (Alan Henry). Three birds in the same location on 27th March (Alan Henry). Three birds at George Island on 21st November (Chris May). Seven birds near the the St Mary Whale Point on 26th November (Alan & Trish Henry, Sue Morrison, Mark Cutts and Steve Copsey). Eight birds at Kelp Creek, Whale Point on 3rd December (Sue & Mike Morrison).

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*

Single bird seen at the north west end of Steeple Jason Island in early November by Anthony Bellamy. Another single bird was seen by David Rabbitts at Cat Cove, West Point Island on 22nd November.

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

Only the one record of a single bird seen by Allan White near the settlement at Pebble Island on 27th February the bird was identified by Chris Lehen.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Ten birds amongst lots of White-rumped Sandpipers and Two-banded Plovers on a tidal beach south side of Bertha's Beach on 5th February (Sue & Mike Morrison). Twelve birds seen on the same beach on 12th February three of which were immature (Alan Henry). Three birds seen at the end of East Cove on 13th November and two in the same location on 8th December (Steve Copsey & Mark Cutts).

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*

Two birds at Sand Hills, Walker Creek on 12th February (Sue & Mike Morrison). Two birds seen at Bertha's Beach on 8th November and five possibly seven on 21st November and three birds observed on 22nd November (Steve Copsey & Mark Cutts). Two birds just to the south of Yorke Bay Pond, Cape Pembroke on 6th December (Gavin Harrison, Jonathan Meiburg, Mike Morrison & Robin Woods).

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

Single bird seen near York Bay Pond on 28th & 29th October (Robin Woods, Steve Copsey & Mark Cutts). A single bird was also seen at Big Pond, Pebble Island on 29th & 30th October (Mark Finn of Birdwatching Breaks). One bird at Bertha's Beach on 8th and 23rd November (Steve Copsey & Mark Cutts). Two birds near the beach at Pleasant Roads, Fitzroy on 26th November (Alan & Trish Henry, Sue Morrison, Steve Copsey and Mark Cutts) still in the same location on 3rd December (Sue & Mike Morrison). A single bird at the ditch south of Yorke Bay Pond on 6th December (Gavin Harrison, Jonathan Meiburg, Mike Morrison & Robin Woods) (photographic identification indicates a different bird from that of 28th Oct Alan Henry). One was in the same area on 9th Dec (Steve Copsey, Mark Cutts & Robin Woods).

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*

Two birds seen and photographed at Sea Lion Island on 8th October (Mike Probin). Four birds at Sea Lion Island on 1st November (Mark Finn).

Arctic skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Single bird at Sea Lion Island observed in flight by Robin Woods on 12th December had previously been reported by (Andrew Clarke).

Chilean Pigeon *Columba araucana*

Single bird seen by Jay Moffat on 30th December in the garden at Cantera House and photographed by Jimmy Moffat. A report also of a 'Pigeon' previously at Port Howard been there for a while but had gone by 29th Dec (which may possibly be the same bird) (Simon & Susie Bonner).

Eared Dove *Zenaida auriculata*

One to three birds at Pebble Island settlement from 6th to 12th March (Arina Berntsen) identified by Allan White.

Fire-eyed Diucon *Xolmis pyrope*

Single bird at Fox Bay settlement reported and photographed by Ken Halliday on 11th August which had been about for a couple of months. A single bird was also seen at Sea Lion Island on 1st November. Single bird at 9 Jeremy Moore Avenue, Stanley on 21st December (Jane & Tim Cotter) seen again the next day on the Race Course and at the house and photographed close-up (Robin Woods).

Austral Negrito *Lessonia rufa*

Single male at Volunteer Point first seen down the Point then followed back to the shanty, reported by Rod Tuckwood on 18th October but seen about a fortnight before that.

Fork-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus savana*

Single bird at Carcass Island near the airstrip on 11th & 12th January reported by Tom Ulrich. A single male at Pebble Island settlement from 24th October until 6th November (Arina Berntsen), Photographed and identified by Allan White.

White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia albiceps*

Only one record, that of a single bird at Carcass Island on 10th April (Nic Huin).

Chilean Swallow *Tachycineta meyeni*

Single bird flying over tussac plantation at the end of Cape Dolphin on 19th February (Sue & Mike Morrison). A single bird with a Barn Swallow at Hookers Point on 28th March (Alan Henry). Four birds at Goose Green settlement in the early evening of 16th April (Hay Miller). Single birds were seen at different locations on Grand Jason Island (may have been one or more birds) on 14th November (Giselle Botha, Gavin Harrison, Mike Morrison, & Robin Woods). A single bird was also seen at Paragon House by Vernon Steen reported on 23rd December but seen about two weeks before that.

Blue and White Swallow *Natiochelidon cyanoleuca*

Single bird at Pebble Island settlement on 22nd to 27th October seen and photographed by Allan White and identified by Alan Henry.

Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*

One at the anchorage with other swallows about 8.45pm on 14th Nov (R Woods).

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Two birds at the south side of Hookers Point on 26th March and a single bird with a Chilean Swallow at the same location on 28th March (Alan Henry). Two birds seen at Brookfield Farm on 29th September (Jock McPhee). Single bird seen at New Island on 6th and 7th October (Tony Chater). Several birds were seen at Port San Carlos on 4th November (Steve Copsey & Mark Cutts). Nic Huin also sighted a single bird off Navy Point on 4th November.

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

Eight swallows appeared by the 'Condor' while at anchor at Grand Jason Island just at dusk on 13th November probably looking for a roost site, some may have been this species and possibly *Riparia riparia* (Bank Swallow), Cliff Swallows were seen the next day on Grand Jason Island; single birds were seen at different locations and may have been one or more



Mourning Sierra-Finch, Steeple Jason (Alan Henry)

birds. (Gavin Harrison, Giselle Botha, Mike Morrison & Robin Woods).

Patagonian Sierra-Finch *Phrygilus patagonicus*

A single female at Gypsy Cove on 4th June (Alan Henry) this bird remained in the same area until 29th September. A single male was seen in the gardens at New Island during the winter (Tony Chater).



Female Patagonian Sierra-Finch, Cattle Point (Alan Henry)

Mourning Sierra-Finch *Phrygilus fruticeti*

Single male bird on the north shoreline of Steeple Jason Island to the west of the shearing shed in early November (Anthony Bellamy) still in the same location on 29th November (Robin Woods & Mike Morrison).

Rufous-collared Sparrow *Zonotrichia capensis*

Several seen at New Island through the winter (Tony Chater). Two birds at Shell Point, Fitzroy on 3rd December (Fred Clark).

Our WATCH Group

The Falklands Conservation WATCH Group for young Falkland Islanders is going from strength to strength. There are 50 members based in Stanley, and a further 11 members in a new satellite group for the children of military personnel based at Mount Pleasant. Eight members are Rangers in a senior group of aged 13 – 16 years, who held their first meeting in June 2007. Here are some recent activities.

TOP: The WATCH Group in action on a field trip to Hookers Point, Surf Bay, in September 2007 exploring rock pools for creepy crawlies. Finds included starfish, worms, limpets and eels. Anna Shepherd.

MIDDLE: Cleaning up the 'forests' close to Government House. A group of younger WATCH Explorers (7-12 years) undertook to remove litter from one of the few areas of trees in Stanley on a winter's day in mid July 2007. Anna Shepherd.

BOTTOM: The WATCH Group showing off their newly made shopping bags sewn together from old clothes or those which no longer fitted. The Falkland Islands use over 900,000 plastic bags each year. This is all part of an effort in the Islands to say NO to plastic bags and start using reusable bags for a safer, cleaner environment.



NOTICEBOARD

Felton's Flower is not a Falkland Endemic Plant

Arthur Felton, the farm manager of West Point Island, found a plant with beautiful magenta flowers on West Falkland in about 1898. He sent specimens to the Swedish botanist, Carl Skottsberg in 1910, who identified and named the species in 1913. Felton's Flower *Calandrinia feltonii* was until recently considered to be an endemic Falkland plant that was protected by law and listed as nationally threatened and rare. Following extensive research, it has now been re-classified by Dr Mark Herskovitz at the University of Chile in Santiago. DNA analysis has shown that Felton's Flower is not a Falkland Islands endemic at all, but a weedy roadside plant of disturbed ground from California, properly named *Calandrinia menziesii*. Whalers or sealers from North America probably introduced it to the Falklands accidentally in the 18th or 19th centuries. Since 1997, many specimens of a similar sprawling *Calandrinia* species have been found thriving on six islands west of West Falkland by Robin Woods and on Tea Island by Jeremy Poncet. The pale pink flowers are half the size of "Felton's". This Falkland form has yet to be named but it could be an introduced hybrid between two southern Chilean species as similar plants have been collected in coastal southern Chile.

Falklands Conservation purchases Jubilee Villa

In July 2007, with the help of many generous donations from our members who contributed over £11,000, we purchased 41 Ross Road as our new Stanley headquarters. We are still in the Jetty Centre until buildings works have been completed. A further substantial contribution of £30,000 was made by the Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation. We are very grateful indeed to all supporters, who have enabled us to buy this historic building in the heart of town. We were also very fortunate to receive a legacy from the Will of Mr Arthur Chatham, which was also used for the acquisition. Legacies such as this are of enormous help to us.

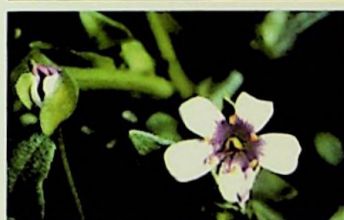
However, in order to obtain possession of this house there was a shortfall between raised monies and the purchase price. We have therefore had to make a loan from our financial reserves for the major renovation works. We will not be able to finish these unless more money is raised. Our fundraising efforts therefore continue, and further donations towards the property would be very gratefully received.

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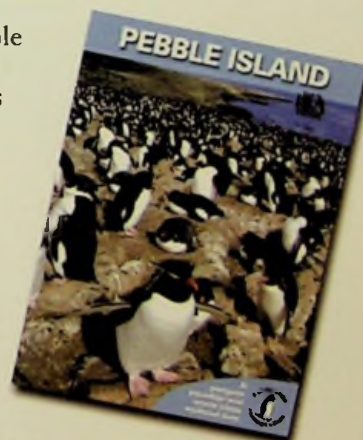
TOP: *Calandrinia menziesii* West Point Island 1997. Nick Woods.



BOTTOM: Unnamed *Calandrinia*, New Island 1999. Nick Woods.

A Pebble Island Leaflet

This new site leaflet, Pebble Island, has been published with help from our Grants Fund. Produced at the request Pebble Island Lodge, they will be made available to visitors to inform them of the wildlife to be found there. Pebble Island, an Important Bird Area, is an outstanding area for wildfowl and penguins.



Corrections to Issue 7

Page 9: We have been informed by Helen Otley, Environmental Officer, that the Kidney Island Management Plan has not yet been adopted by the Falkland Islands Government.

Back Page: Thanks to Dubi Benyamini for pointing out that the scientific name of the Queen of the Falklands Fritillary is now *Yramea cytheris*.

The National Flower of the Falkland Islands



Photo: Pale Maiden *Sisyrinchium jubatum*. Ali Liddle.

Described by the famous botanist J D Hooker (1817-1911, the most important British botanist of the nineteenth century and one of Charles Darwin's friends who eventually became director of Britain's Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew) as 'one of the most abundant and elegant plants of the Falkland Islands where the grass plains are in the spring month of November almost whitened by the profusion of its pendulous, snowy bells'. It may not be quite so common now, but is still widespread and can be found in white grass and diddle-dee heathlands from the coast and up into the hills.

This beautiful plant, a member of the Iris family, is a perennial which lies dormant through the winter months, coming into flower during the spring and early summer. Each plant will produce two to eight flowers in succession. The pendant bells open to cups of pure white, yellow at the base with purple veins.

Yellow Pale Maiden *Sisyrinchium chilense* is a close relative, but much rarer. There are only three known populations from East Falkland. It flowers slightly later. The delicate yellow flower is marked with brown lines on the underside. It is legally protected.



Pale Maiden



Yellow Pale Maiden



Wildlife Conservation In The Falkland Islands

Issue 9



Wildlife Conservation In The Falkland Islands

Issue 9 June 2008

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FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

Protecting the wildlife of the Falkland Islands for future generations

www.falklandsconservation.com

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Our Mammals are All at Sea

In the early days, even before farming, the Falklands were known for their marine mammals, a rich source of oil and skins to whalers and sealers from Europe and America. Whilst no one will ever know how many whales and seals were killed a century ago, these animals are now starting to recover and Falklands Conservation is working to improve our understanding of them.

Work by our seabirds-at-sea team documented the importance of the productive waters around these Islands to many species of pinnipeds ("seals") and cetaceans. Over the 3 years 6,550 marine mammals of 17 species were recorded including at least 14 species of cetacean and 3 species of pinniped.

Ashore, surveys of the Falklands population of sea lions show a slow population recovery. Elephant seals, sea lions and fur seals all use the Islands to breed. A project on Sea Lion Island has identified individual orcas and shown their seasonal reliance on elephant seal and sea lion pups. A volunteer Cetacean Watch now has almost 1000 observations recorded around the coasts of the Falklands. Whilst our Conservation Grant Scheme has assisted in analysing the age and genetics of stranded whales.

Falklands Conservation is also always on stand-by to respond to any cetacean stranding and a leaflet detailing how individuals can help is available. This year saw our first successful marine rescue when a stranded dusky dolphin, a rare species in the Falklands, was successfully re-floated (see page 10).

Commerson's dolphin, Peale's dolphin and Orcas can be seen year round in coastal waters whilst Minke, Sei and Fin whales are common sights in the late summer and autumn. Little is known of these species and additional research is vital if we are to better understand their distribution and conservation needs.

In the Falklands marine mammals are now our only native mammals (the Falklands only native terrestrial mammal, the Falkland Islands Fox or "Warrah", was considered a threat to livestock by the earliest settlers and it was exterminated by 1876) so following the early depredations by whalers and sealers we have a great responsibility to ensure that our marine mammals recover and we take measures to protect them to the best of our ability.



Grant Munro, Chief Executive
Falklands Conservation

Defining Important Bird Areas At Sea

Isaac Forster

Isaac Forster, previously our Albatross and Petrels Project Officer, reports here on a year-long project to define the most important areas for seabirds in the waters surrounding the Falkland Islands.

Scientific programmes have already studied the foraging ranges of penguins and albatross, but no analysis has co-ordinated all available information to highlight important bird usage areas and define these as Important Bird Areas (IBAs). This initiative will analyse all data that has been collected for foraging seabird species: rockhopper, gentoo, and Magellanic penguins during the breeding season, gentoo penguins during winter, and black-browed albatross during their chick-rearing period.

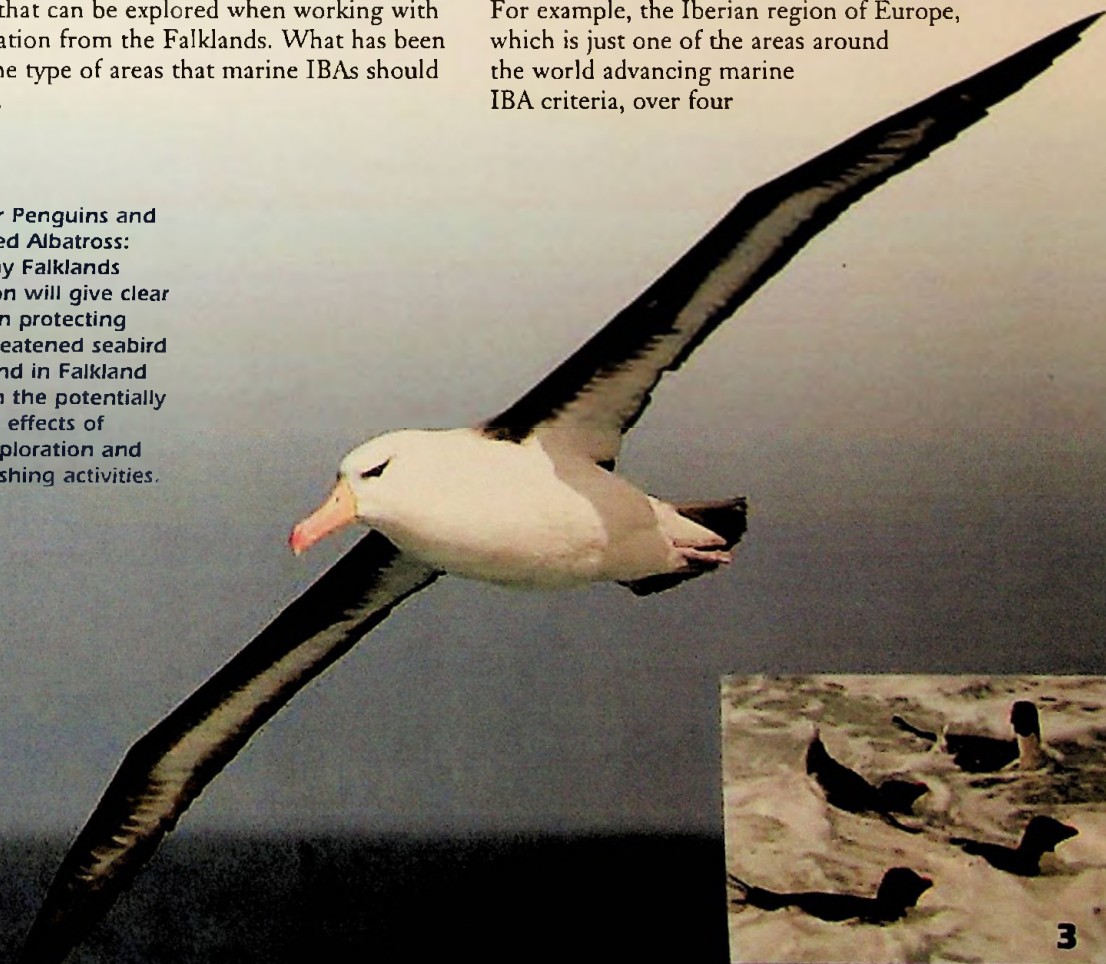
Birdlife International's marine Important Bird Area (IBA) programme is very much a work in progress around the globe, which makes the project on the Falklands area an exciting, and also at times a careful exercise in just how to go about it. As there is still yet to be an agreed global criteria on how to choose marine IBAs there are a number of options that can be explored when working with the information from the Falklands. What has been agreed is the type of areas that marine IBAs should encompass.

These include:

1. Coastal foraging areas adjacent to breeding grounds, especially during chick rearing phase of the avian lifecycle: in the Falklands this is particularly pertinent for many of the smaller petrels and for the Black-browed Albatross which forage close to their colonies whilst the chicks are small.
2. Coastal concentrations of non-breeding waterbirds: important in the Falklands for species such as the Logger Duck and Dolphin Gull.
3. Migratory hotspots: this is not so much of an issue in Falklands waters, as many of the breeding species tend to leave the area to go elsewhere during winter.
4. Important foraging areas for pelagic species such as upwellings, shelf breaks, and eddies: the Falklands area is a prime example of an important pelagic marine bird foraging site. The Islands sit on the Patagonian Shelf, one of the most productive marine areas on the planet.

Now if you imagined that to identify all of these areas, starting from scratch with no data collected, the size of the task would be pretty formidable. For example, the Iberian region of Europe, which is just one of the areas around the world advancing marine IBA criteria, over four

Rockhopper Penguins and Black-browed Albatross:
This work by Falklands Conservation will give clear assistance in protecting globally threatened seabird species found in Falkland waters from the potentially detrimental effects of resource exploration and industrial fishing activities.



years (and counting!) worth of effort has gone into the collection and dissemination of information. During this time they have collected seabird information from ships, aeroplanes, radio and satellite tracking devices and land based surveys.

Fortunately, in the Falklands we don't have to go through this process as many studies have already collected this information over the last 20 years. There is an excellent history of observer data from navy ships, fishery patrol vessels, and fishing boats, as well as satellite studies on albatrosses and penguins. Assimilating this data presents its own challenges though, mainly because of the large collection period. Have climatic changes affected

seabird distribution over that period through increases in sea surface temperature? Has the increase in fishing effort in the Falklands in that time encouraged more seabird attendance at vessels? These, and undoubtedly more questions will need to be answered along the way.

The results of this project should be a provisional map of marine IBAs in the Falkland Islands, drawn up under BirdLife International guidelines. It will meet a number of priorities under the Agreement for the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels (ACAP), which obliges the Falkland Islands and UK Governments to preserve and protect breeding populations of the listed species.

For more information on the Birdlife International Marine Important Bird Areas programme visit:
www.birdlife.org/action/science/sites/marine_ibas/index.html

And for further information on the Patagonian Shelf area and the species it supports visit:
www.patagoniansea.org

Funds to support this work have been provided by the Falkland Islands Oil and Gas Exploration Group, the Falkland Islands Government and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland. The University of Glasgow are providing technical support and expertise.

Conservation in Action



Penguin Monitoring 2007/08

Seabird monitoring to assess population trends has shown that 2007/08 was a good year for penguins, despite heavy rainfall early in the season. Gentoo penguins (shown here) had their highest breeding success since our records began in 1988, with an average of 1.44 chicks per pair. Magellanic and King penguins also did very well, with Rockhoppers having another average year. *Sarah Brennan*



Dolphin Rescue

A dolphin, stranded at the far end of Stanley Harbour in February, has been successfully returned to the sea by Falklands Conservation. The young male Dusky Dolphin was found in shallow water below a minefield. The dolphin was transported by Land Rover to Surf Bay where it was refloated. In all the operation took approximately 2 hours from first report to release.

Falkland Seeds for Millenium Seed Bank

Tom Heller (on the left), seed collector for the UK Overseas Territories at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Millennium Seed Bank, visited the Falkland Islands in February 2008 as part of our Plants Conservation Project. He led a series of workshops and field training in seed collecting. Seed was collected from 18 different Falkland plants, 16 new to the Seed Bank. Subsequent to the visit, two further seed collections have been made.



Efforts to Save Oiled Penguins

In April five gentoo penguins, covered in oil, were rescued from Bluff Cove. Their rehabilitation process involved a thorough cleaning in soapy water, as in this photo, then daily feeding with squid and sardines. They must remain in captivity for at least 14 days to allow their feathers to regain waterproofing. Unfortunately, prior to rescue, the birds may ingest the oil whilst preening and this can sometimes be lethal. In this incident sadly none of the birds survived. The oil was almost certainly a result of illegal dumping of oil at sea.



Albatross Research on Steeple Jason Island

Albatross work has continued on Steeple Jason Island for another year with many more chicks ringed as part of our long-term demographic study. Falklands Conservation also assisted the Wildlife Conservation Society (owners of Steeple Jason) with their research work.

Nic Huin, our Science Officer, on the right, is assisting a WCS veterinarian fit a GPS unit to the back of a black-browed albatross. *Sarah Brennan*

Environmental Education for Falkland Children

Ali Liddle

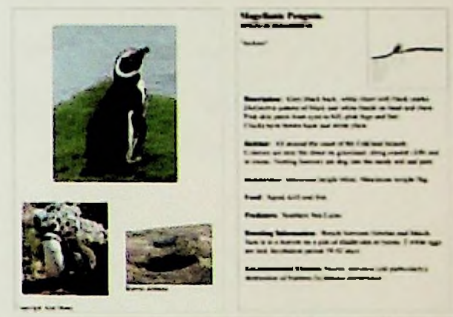
After three years, our Environmental Education Programme is coming to an end. Ali Liddle, our Education Officer; describes its achievements.

Teaching in the Falkland Islands has many fantastic benefits, not least the environment, which is a wonderful resource for children of all ages. But one of the drawbacks is that the schools here follow the National Curriculum for England and Wales. This undoubtedly provides a valuable framework for ensuring a broad and balanced education, but does not take into account the natural surroundings in which the children are living and learning.

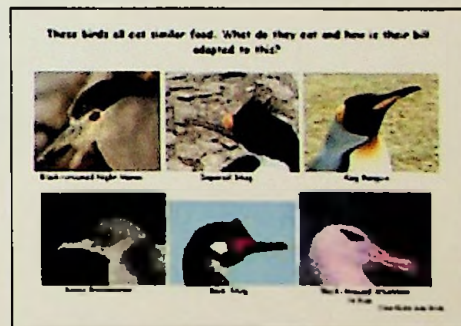
Falklands Conservation set up its Environmental Education Programme in order to develop resources based on the natural environment of the Falkland Islands and to introduce these into the school curriculum to ensure that children were learning about something that is relevant to themselves and where they live. Units of work in Science and Geography were selected and adapted to help both teachers and pupils.

One of the most successful additions to the school curriculum, particularly in the Primary School has been the development of Teaching Packs. These include lesson plans and all the necessary resources for teaching each lesson plus enough activity packs for the children to work in small groups so they can complete practical 'hands on' activities. Many of the packs include fact sheets for birds, mammals, plants and invertebrates with photographs, descriptions and information about their ecology. They can be used in a variety of ways including producing food chains and collections of species for the various habitats. For the older children they can be used alongside the photo database for research and classification.

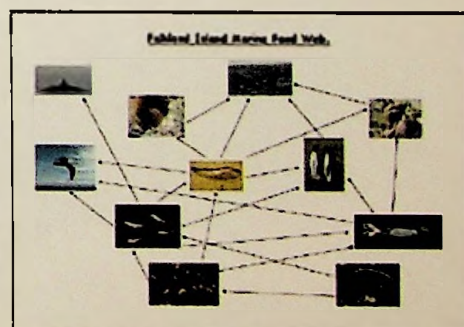
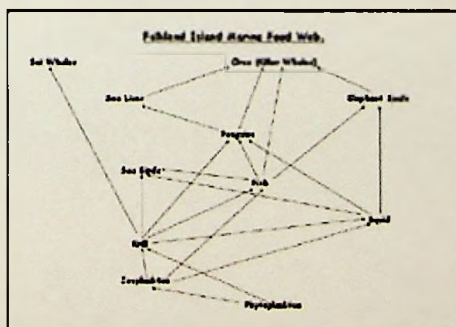
Other resources produced by the Programme include jigsaw puzzles of local animals and plants (30, 60 and 150 piece puzzles), an alphabet frieze, information posters and slide shows to support Work Units. There are plans for field trips including maps, laminated check lists for children to use when recording species, and follow up activities to be completed in the classroom.



A Science Unit on 'Habitat' no longer refers to foxes and badgers in a British woodland but looks at penguins and seals along the Falklands coastline.



Looking at birds and their diet: Projects and activities are all based on native Falklands wildlife.



When learning about food chains children can now look at the relationships between penguins, squid and zooplankton.



Smooth Falkland Ragwort. Height: 25cm
Senecio vaginatus

Endemic to the Falkland Islands.



Description:

Yellow flowered daisy.
Single flower stems that divide at the top with 2-3 flower heads.
Narrow, yellow-green, pointed leaves with curled edges.
Upper leaves are white due to fine hairs.

Flowering Season:

November to February.

Found:

In middle-dee heath, amongst tall ferns and in dry rocky areas.

Pollination:

Insects - Moths and Hoverflies.

Environmental Issues:

Possibly a biennial plant - grows one year, flowers the next then dies.



The children have examples of local plants and flowers to study as shown by this Fact Sheet on the endemic Smooth Falkland Ragwort – one of many produced by the Programme

A number of publications have resulted from the Programme including *Falkland Islands Penguins - Arts and Crafts for Children* and *Plants of the Falkland Islands*. The arts and crafts book includes paper mache penguins, mobiles, fridge magnets, felted penguins and clay models to name but



a few. All the ideas have been tried and tested with children in school and have easy to follow instructions and photographs to help - success is guaranteed!

The plant book is a field guide to the most common plants found in the Falkland Islands.

It includes photos, descriptions and habitats for 56 species to allow easy identification but also includes local information on each one and some Falkland recipes using some of the plants such as mutton casserole with herby fachine dumplings and teaberry buns.

Another arts and crafts book is in the process of being produced - this time using the black-browed albatross as a focus and stimulus for handicrafts and painting. As well as plenty to appeal to youngsters, it is hoped that the batik work and silk painting in this new book will appeal to older children.

Feedback from the school on these environmental resources and teaching packs has been very positive. One teacher has said that '*the resources are something that we have been desperate for in school for years*'. Both staff and indeed parents have commented on how much the children have benefited from being taught about their local environment and it seems that now the children are beginning to teach their parents a thing or two as well!

In order to ensure that both the teaching and the resources are monitored, updated and amended a new post of Environmental Education Curriculum Co-ordinator has now been established at the Infant and Junior school. This should ensure that this work continues to be an integral part of the Falkland Island school curriculum for many years to come.



Ali Liddle at the book launch in Stanley of *Plants of the Falkland Islands* (available from our website www.falklandsconservation.com or to personal callers to our Stanley office, price £10).

Falklands Conservation are very grateful to the UK Overseas Territories Environment Programme and the Falkland Islands Government their support which made this Programme possible.

Outer, Double & Harpoon Islands, Queen Charlotte Bay

Rat Eradication 2001: Excellent Results by 2006

Robin Woods

Donations from generous members allowed Falklands Conservation to buy Outer and Double Islands from Ron and Fiona Rozee of Spring Point in early 1998. An earlier visit had noted rats on both islands.

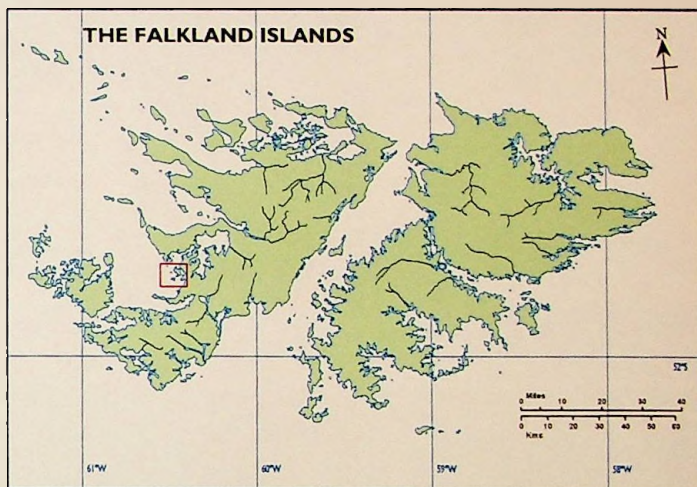
These islands had good tussac grass and a reasonable sample of breeding birds, though lacking almost all songbirds and it was decided to include them in our first rat eradication exercise. Work was done in September 2001 by New Zealand specialists with FC staff and volunteers who hand-broadcast bait across the whole surface of the islands.

The islands were visited during the first and second Striated Caracara surveys (1998 and 2006) and the Felton's Flower Project (2001) with different teams of observers, including Mike Morrison, Stacey Steen-Macdonald, Jonathan Felton, Jeannette Clarke, Giselle Botha and Gavin Harrison. A recent report shows the importance of this pioneering work.



The rats present were confirmed as *Rattus norvegicus* from specimen bones.

Location of this island group in Queen Charlotte Bay, off West Falkland.



Harpoon Island

Owned by Ron and Fiona Rozee, (area about 3ha)

51° 51' S 60° 32' W

is a low lying ridge 2 km north of Outer Island. Loose rock slab beaches make walking difficult. Ash deposits again show evidence of earlier burning. At high tide, Harpoon is about 1.25 km from Fox Island but at low spring tides, rocks reduce the gap to about 250 m. As rats may be able to swim this distance, eradication work was seen as experimental.

Outer Island (area about 20ha)

51° 52' S 60° 31' W

is about 2 km southwest of Fox Island and is the largest of the three islands. It lies northeast to southwest with cliffs up to about 10 m on the western coast. Some deep slumped holes in the peat below dense tussac grass and some ash layers indicate historic fires. Old bullock bones, including a long-horned skull show that the island was formerly used for fattening beef animals.



Double Island

(area about 9ha)

51° 52' S 60° 30' W

is 1.3 km southwest of Fox Island, and about 500 m east of Outer Island though separated at low tide by only 250 m. The main part contains two rocky hummocks with dense tussac, joined by a low sandy ridge with a white sand beach on the eastern coast. From the northern point a narrow tidal rock peninsula extends westward towards Outer Island.

ABOVE: Outer Island. Diddle-dee in a tussac clearing with view to Double Island, November 2006. Robin Woods.
BELOW: View to the south along the spine of Double Island, October 1998. Robin Woods.



Flowering plants

Tussac was dominant on all islands. We found 21 species (14 native, 7 introduced) on Outer Island, 16 (7 native, 9 introduced) on Double and 9 (3 native, 6 introduced) on Harpoon and collected several specimens.

No endemic plants were found. The high proportions of introduced plants indicate that the islands have been grazed, or visited by people, over many years.

Birds

On 30 October 1998 only three songbird (passerine) species were recorded in very small numbers. We watched from *Penelope* for an hour in the evening but did not see or hear any petrels or shearwaters around Outer or Double, which is not surprising given the evidence that rats were numerous on both islands.

In late December 2001, three months after eradication work, the Felton's Flower team visited each island in some very windy weather and were pleased that no signs of live rats were found on any island. There were still very few songbirds.

Eight months after the eradication work, in May 2002, Nic Huin checked all three islands. No signs of rats were found, though most chew sticks left in September 2001 had disappeared, probably removed by inquisitive Striated Caracaras.

Five years after eradication, there were great changes. We were delighted to find significantly more species of songbirds, clearly shown in the table below, although Tussacbird and Cobb's Wren were missing. The Falkland Islands are the only place in the world where Cobb's Wrens are to be found so it is important to take every possible effort to maintain their numbers. Tussac is not a suitable habitat for Pipits, but in 2006 it was good to see that all other songbirds were more numerous.

A review of this fieldwork has highlighted some important points. Where rats and/or mice have been completely eradicated, repeated visits to monitor the recovery of the fauna and flora are necessary. As a group, songbirds are the best indicators to use when assessing recovery of islands as they are easier to detect than small petrels.

Some species can survive in low numbers where rodents are established, but there are no known infested islands that still support a Cobb's Wren population. Tussacbirds are also badly affected, although a few may survive on a large island. Both birds are terrestrial littoral specialists and neither is migratory, so it is difficult to see how re-colonisation could



In contrast with Cobb's Wren, Grass Wrens (above) occur in suitable habitat on all known islands with rats. Black-chinned Siskins (left) and Long-tailed Meadowlarks (below) were not present in 1998 but have now returned. Alan Henry.



occur naturally if thriving populations do not exist within easy flying distance. Given the complexities, artificial relocation of these tiny birds would prove very expensive without any guarantee of success and it would be difficult to justify. For the effort involved, eradications of alien mammals from other offshore islands would be more beneficial for bird populations in general and for the recovery of damaged habitats. The success of the work at Outer, Double and Harpoon Islands is very encouraging.

SONGBIRDS present (X) or absent (0)

	Outer 1998	Double 1998	Outer 2001	Double 2001	Harpoon 2001	Outer 2006	Double 2006	Harpoon 2006
Hours surveying	4¾	3	2¾	2	1	2¾	1¾	1½
Total observers	2	2	4	4	4	4	4	4
Tussacbird	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dark-faced Ground-tyrant	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Falkland Pipit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
F. Grass Wren	X	X	0	X	0	X	X	X
Cobb's Wren	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Falkland Thrush	X	0	X	0	0	X	X	X
B-t. Finch	0	0	0	0	0	X	X	0
Long-tailed Meadowlark	0	0	0	0	0	X	X	0
Black-chinned Siskin	0	0	0	0	0	X	0	X
Total species	3	2	2	2	1	6	5	4

The Falkland Island Invertebrates Conservation Project

Dr Alex Jones

Over the past 5 years Falklands Conservation has been carrying out a huge project to survey the invertebrates of the Falkland Islands, for which I have been the project scientist. I have carried out surveys from the highest peaks to the coastlines of East and West Falkland, and on the following outlying islands: Carcass, Steeple Jason, Grand Jason, Bird, Beauchêne, New, Sea Lion, Kidney, and Pleasant.

A variety of sampling methods were employed depending on locality and habitat - active collecting including hand capture, sweep-netting, beating, dredging, and kick-sampling; trapping, including the use of Malaise traps (a tent that catches flying insects), light trapping, and pitfall trapping; and laboratory Tullgren funnels (a way of extracting tiny organisms from soil or plant material). As a result thousands of vials containing anything between 1 and thousands of individual specimens (in the case of mites), and thousands of pinned specimens have been returned to the UK for taxonomic analysis. Amongst this collection are approximately 150,000 insects. In addition, a considerable number of specimens have been contributed by Alistair Lavery (in the case of spiders), Andrew Wakeham-Dawson (butterflies and moths) and Andy Douse.

It will be some time before all collected specimens are finally described, but already many new species records have been made and over 100 new records added to previously known species lists. An updated checklist for Falkland Island invertebrates will be produced towards the end of 2008. Although data collection has officially ended, I will continue to work through the material until all the results have been completed, with a final collection deposited in Falkland Conservation's new offices in



Darwin's Black Beetle, first collected by Charles Darwin in 1834, is, through the work of this Project, now believed to comprise a number of separate but closely related species. A Jones.

Stanley. All the knowledge on species distribution will be used to advise conservation policy and help protect habitats important for native species.

Among the many scientific highlights, the description of two new scale insects for the Falkland Islands stand out, as this is also a new family record. Most invertebrate species in the archipelago are relatively widespread, and share close affinities with South American species. A genetic analysis, carried out in collaboration with the Natural History Museum (London), of Falkland beetles has shown that there is little variation within species across the Islands, indicating that most are relatively recent colonists.

This observation stands well with the known climatic history of the archipelago, as the Falklands would have experienced much colder



A salpingid beetle and a camel cricket which are both found in Tussac grassland and provide food for many Falkland birds. It has become apparent that Tussac grass is a particularly important habitat for supporting a variety of unique Falkland species. Salpingid beetles are generally associated with forests elsewhere in the world but have adapted to living deep within tussac grass in the Falkland Islands. A Jones.

periods between 10–20 thousand years ago, precluding the survival of many species currently present.

Exposed feldmark habitats (characterised by barren, stony ground, and often found at mountain peaks) are most important for perimylopid beetles. These live under and between rocks and stones, giving them the moniker of ‘stone beetles’. They are one of the few Falkland insect species likely to have survived cooler past climates. This supposition is supported by the observation that of all the Falkland insects they have the greatest number of closely related species and may have speciated (the process by which new species arise) within the archipelago as opposed to colonising from elsewhere. Stone beetles are arguably the most ancient of the Falkland insect fauna and global perimylopid biodiversity is centred on the Falklands.

One of the main aims was to raise awareness of invertebrate conservation issues. 34 people have attended three locally run courses on Invertebrates of the Falkland Islands. Publicity from radio interviews, newspaper articles, poster campaigns, a recording calendar, talks and lectures have all helped raise the profile.

Numerous classes and field trips have educated, and hopefully enthralled, children from the Falkland Islands secondary and infant/junior schools, Falklands Conservation ‘WATCH Group’ and the Falkland Islands Brownies. Not only will the children who attended these events grow up with a better knowledge and respect for their local biodiversity heritage, but through them many parents have become involved in the Project.

My personal highlights have been difficult to choose, because there have been so many. First and foremost must be the fantastic people I have had the opportunity to work with, including past and present staff of Falklands Conservation and numerous Falkland Islanders. A close second must be experiencing the beauty of the Islands and the local wildlife. I, like many before me, have become captivated by working in the Falklands, and look forward to continuing to support Falklands Conservation, and its invertebrate conservation, as the organisation grows from strength to strength.



Dr Alex Jones



Perimylopid beetles.
A Jones.



Studying creepy crawlies on a WATCH Group field trip.



The flightless tussac moth (*Borkhausenia falklandensis*) is one of numerous Falkland insect species that have lost their ability to fly as a result reduced wing size. This is a common island phenomenon – smaller winged individuals suffer less risk of being blown out to sea and thus being removed from the gene pool. A Jones.

This Project was primarily funded by the UK Darwin Initiative with additional support from the Falkland Island Government.

Rare and Vagrant Birds in the Falkland Islands 2007

Mike Morrison and Alan Henry

This report summarises the sightings of rare and vagrant birds submitted to Falklands Conservation or made by the authors, volunteers and staff of Falklands Conservation during 2007.

Chinstrap Penguin *Pygoscelis antarctica*

Single bird at Volunteer Beach on 20th December reported by Ian Coleman.

Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta*

Two birds were seen from a launch off Menguera Point on 11th April (Alan Henry).

Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*

Alan Henry saw three birds off Cape Pembroke Point on 25th March.

Cocoi Heron *Ardea cocoi*

A single bird at the small pond near the house at 'Hawkbit' on the morning of 4th April (Fred Clark). Rod and Phyllis Tuckwood saw another single bird at the head of Chubut Creek, near Johnson's Harbour on 5th May, and Sharon Halford saw a bird in the same location on 18th June, which was most probably the same one. Gonzalo Hobman also saw a single bird at the Chartres River in October. Single bird near the wreck of the St Mary flew over to Burnt Island in Kelp Lagoon 2nd December (Sue & Mike Morrison).

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

The first three were seen this year on 27th March on the rugby pitch south of the Bypass Road (Alan Henry). One seen the next day flying over the town and then heading east down the harbour (Sue & Mike Morrison). One on 29th March in a yard on James Street (Sue Morrison) and also one at the Market Garden the same day (Alan Henry). One seen flying west on Davis Street on the 11th April (Sue & Mike Morrison). A flock of five and another flock of nine were seen to the south of Stanley on the 13th April (Alan Henry). On 14th April one was seen at North Arm Settlement, fourteen at Bull Point, North Arm, and one at Nor-west Arm house

(Sue & Mike Morrison).

Two birds seen at a creek near Cattle Point old house site and one on the road half way between North Arm and Goose Green on 15th April (Sue & Mike Morrison). Two birds seen flying west on the morning of 17th May from Fitzroy Road East, Stanley (Sue & Mike Morrison).



Cattle Egret (Alan Henry)

Black-faced Ibis *Theristicus melanopis*

Single bird observed at the north end of New Island in mid February (Tony Chater pers. comm.). A single bird seen at the east end of Stanley Airport runway 17th October (Micky Reeves) and four birds at New Island 3rd December - Alan Henry (Tony Chater pers. comm.). One bird also reported from Carcass Island on 3rd December.

Coscoroba Swan *Coscoroba coscoroba*

The Coscoroba Swan can now be termed as a rare breeding species. All the records this year are from the population at Whale Point/Pleasant Roads area at Fitzroy. Two pairs, which bred earlier in the spring, successfully reared their cygnets (one with five young and the other with six). Another pair, seen with five young cygnets on 29th December, was not seen again when visiting the area. There are now a total of twenty-four birds in this area (Alan Henry and Sue & Mike Morrison).

Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera*

A single male was seen near Fitzroy settlement on 24th July by Allan Eagle, a single male Cinnamon Teal was also seen at Island Harbour creek (Micky Reeves) on 28th July and by Allan Eagle on 2nd August, and where the road crosses the Fitzroy River on 29th July (Sue & Mike Morrison). Seen by many observers and photographed at Fitzroy River over the next few months the last report was on 14th November (Brian Aldridge). It is probable that all of these sightings were the same bird. Alan Henry also saw a single male at the Big Pond in Whale Point, Fitzroy, on 25th November.



Coscoroba Swans (Alan Henry)



Pectoral Sandpiper (Alan Henry)

Red Shoveler *Anas platylea*

A pair was seen on the pond in Cattle Point, North Arm, on 3rd February by Sue & Mike Morrison. A single bird was also seen at Hawks Nest Ponds on 3rd December (Will Wagstaff).

American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*

A single male bird was seen at Dunnose Head Farm on 20th May by Rosemary & Clive Wilkinson. This bird stayed about the area for several weeks.

Red-gartered Coot *Fulica armillata*

A single bird seen at the ponds in Elephant Point, Saunders Island, with the White-winged Coots on 25th January (Alan Henry).

White-winged Coot *Fulica leucoptera*

The White-winged Coot is another species that can now be classed as a rare breeder. Two birds seen on Big Pond, Bleaker Island, on 30th June (Nick Rendell) and were still present on 16th September (Phyllis Rendell). Two pairs on the pond at Keppel Island were seen sometime in the early spring by Nigel Wyn (David Pole-Evans pers. comm.) and nine birds on the ponds in Elephant Point, Saunders Island, on 12th November by Mike Morrison. These Coots bred again as six young were seen later in the season (David Pole-Evans pers. comm.). A single bird was seen on Enderby Pond, Lively Island, on 26th November (Robin Woods and James St Clair).

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*

Just one sighting, which was probably this species, was seen on a field near Fitzroy settlement on 17th November (Allan Eagle and Isobel McLeod).



Cinnamon Teal (Alan Henry)



Baird's Sandpiper (Alan Henry)

Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*

All the sightings are from Whale Point, Fitzroy area, which now seems to be the favoured over-wintering site. Ten birds on 7th January at Kelp Point (Sue & Mike Morrison), nine at the same location on 11th February (Sue & Mike Morrison and Alan Henry), twelve birds at the wreck of the *St Mary* on 12th February (Alan Henry and Mark Cutts). Two birds at the same location on 25th November (Alan Henry). Six birds near the *St Mary* on 29th December (Sue & Mike Morrison and Alan Henry).

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

A single juvenile bird was seen at Double Pond, near Port Purvis on 21st January (Will Wagstaff).

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Six birds on the East Cove side of Bertha's Beach on 7th January (Sue & Mike Morrison), and a single bird at Shag Island Beach, Salvador, on 13th January (Sue & Mike Morrison.)

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*

Five birds on the north side of Cape Pembroke on 2nd January (Sue & Mike Morrison). A single bird at Whale Point, Fitzroy, on 8th January (Alan Henry & Vaughan Ashby). Two birds were seen by Alan Henry on 10th October at Cape Pembroke and a single bird at the small ponds on Cape Pembroke on 19th October (Alan Henry). A single bird at Bull Point, North Arm, on 20th October (Sue & Mike Morrison). Eight birds seen south of Yorke Bay Pond, Cape Pembroke, on 11th November (Alan Henry). Five birds on the gravel runway, Cape Pembroke, on 12th & 13th December (Alan Henry).



White-winged Coots (Alan Henry)



Wilson's Phalaropes (Alan Henry)

Pectoral Sandpiper Calidris melanotos

Single bird at the ditch near Penguin Walk, Cape Pembroke 6th & 8th January (Sue & Mike Morrison). Single bird at the ponds in Elephant Point, Saunders Island 25th January (Alan Henry).

Wilson's Phalarope Phalaropus tricolor

Two birds seen on ponds south of Stanley on the Common near the 'Clay Pigeon Range' on 4th February (Fred Clark). Two birds were also seen on the Big Pond in Whale Point, Fitzroy, with hundreds of White-rumped Sandpipers on 11th February (Sue & Mike Morrison).

Green-backed Firecrown Sephanoides sephaniodes

A single male bird was seen feeding from flowers of *Fuchsia magellanica* at 55 Fitzroy Road, Stanley, on 29th April (Graham Taylor pers. comm.); one week later (probably the same bird) was seen feeding from flowers in the back yard of 19 Fitzroy Road (Les and Jill Harris).

Austral Negrito Lessonia rufa

On 28th October a female bird was found freshly dead on the 'Elizabeth Boyd' which was docked at FIPASS after she had returned from Punta Arenas (Micky Reeves). A male bird was seen on Sea Lion Island from the end of October to about 6th November (James St Clair).

White-crested Elaenia Elaenia albiceps

Six birds arrived at New Island in mid February after some very strong winds (Tony Chater pers. comm.). Three birds were reported from Carcass Island on 21st February (Derek Clarke info Alan Henry). Five to six birds were seen at Lively Island in the second week of February (Terry O'Dwyer). A single bird was seen at Carcass Island by Alan Henry on 25th & 26th October and Rob McGill reported seeing it off and on through the winter, most probably one of the three seen in February.

Tawny-headed Swallow Alopochelidon fucata

A single bird was seen in flight at Sea Lion Island on 13th November (Christian Savigny).

Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica

A freshly dead bird was found in the yard at 19 Fitzroy Road on the 2nd October (Jill Harris). On 3rd October a single bird was seen on the south side of Hooker's Point feeding over the kelp on the boulder beach (Alan Henry). Sue Morrison saw a possibly immature bird on Davis Street, Stanley, on 5th October, and on the same day Alan

Henry saw a single bird at Moody Valley. Another bird was seen at Gypsy Cove on 6th October (Sue Morrison). Alan Henry saw the swallow at Fitzroy settlement on 17th October, which Allan Eagle had seen the previous day. A single bird at Carcass Island on the 25th & 26th October (Alan Henry) and a single bird at the west end of Stanley on 27th October (Alan Henry). Another bird was seen at Gypsy Cove in the early morning of 10th November (Sue & Mike Morrison). Three birds were seen at Port San Carlos on 21st and 22nd November, which were possibly this species (Andrew Smith).

Rufous-collared Sparrow Zonotrichia capensis

A single bird at New Island in mid February (Tony Chater pers. comm.) and a single bird at Gypsy Cove on 22nd July (Sue & Mike Morrison). This bird stayed in the same area until 12th September, when it was last sighted (Alan Henry).



Rufous-collared Sparrow (Alan Henry)

The following birds arrived on the cruise ship *Ushuaia*, which departed Mar del Plata, Argentina, on 24th October. The birds flew onto the ship soon after whilst sailing down the Argentine coast. They then stayed with the ship and only departed when the ship arrived at Stanley on 26th October and was docked at FIPASS overnight. It is understood that the Cowbird remained on board but was gone by the next morning, 27th. There were no reports of any sightings from anyone after their arrival. The nearby Market Garden would probably have provided a suitable habitat, although their arrival was unknown to local birders at the time. Thanks go to Christian Savigny for the report, to Mark Pearman for the translation, and Alan Henry for the information.

Crowned Slaty Flycatcher Griseotyrannus aurantioatrocristatus
Single adult. This is the first record of this species in the Falkland Islands.

White-banded Mockingbird Mimus triurus

Two birds. This is the first record of this species in the Falkland Islands.

Shiny Cowbird Molothrus bonariensis

A single juvenile bird. This species has been reported three times previously.

NOTICEBOARD



Falklands Office Moves into Jubilee Villa

In March we moved our Falklands office from upstairs at the Jetty Visitor Centre into our very own building, one of the historic Jubilee Villas on Stanley harbour front.

After months of work refurbishing the building to modern standards and converting it from a domestic house into an efficient working environment and public reception area, we now have a marvellous centre from which to promote the Islands' wildlife. In recent weeks volunteers have started to tackle the front garden to create a native plants display.

Falklands Conservation is enormously grateful to everyone who contributed donations to make this possible. Thank you so much for enabling us to buy the building outright. The cost of the refurbishment has largely been met from our reserves.

Shallow Marine Programme Goes Ahead

In partnership with the Shallow Marine Surveys Group, Falklands Conservation is delighted to announce that it has been awarded funding by the Overseas Territories Environment Programme for a two-year programme to provide baseline data about wildlife of the inshore marine environment of the Falkland Islands, including a coastal bird survey. Such information will be important in informing any future developments that may adversely impact on these vulnerable areas. The Falkland Islands Government has also agreed to contribute funds.

Report on Turkey Vulture Distribution & Abundance

A study of the distribution and abundance of Turkey Vultures confirms that this bird is locally abundant and widespread in the Falkland Islands – in fact their distribution is so widespread that rarely does any portion of the land go long unseen by a Turkey Vulture. Found throughout North and South America, they are migratory at similar latitudes, but survive here as year-round residents.

The latest population estimate, based on survey work conducted in 2006 and 2007 by Hawk



Turkey Vulture flying over Cape Pembroke. Alan Henry.

Mountain Sanctuary and Falklands Conservation, is between 4,170 and 6,050 individuals. Its world population is in the region of 2 million.

Turkey Vultures have long been regarded as a pest by sheep farmers and a number of farmers in the Falklands still regard Turkey Vulture predation on sheep as a significant problem, particularly where there are high densities of this efficient scavenger. The report concludes that although culling cannot be justified, further research is needed to assess their impact on sheep, particularly during the lambing season, and to develop non-lethal management strategies. A copy of the report is available on our website: www.falklandsconservation.com.

Obituary – David Taylor

It is with sadness that we report the death on 8 November 2007 of David Taylor CBE, a Life Member and Trustee of Falklands Conservation from 1996 to 2001. Distinguished as the Islands' first Chief Executive (1983–87) in the aftermath of the 1982 Conflict, he played a key role implementing the second Shackleton Report and transforming the local economy. During that time in the Islands he developed a long-lasting affection for the Islands' wildlife. On his retirement he was keen to devote his considerable energies and skills to helping with its protection – and we were so fortunate that he chose to help us with his wise advice and support. His contribution was active and to the point, and he was always available to offer guidance and help when needed, a role which continued after he was no longer a Trustee. He continued his interest in the Falkland Islands and our neighbouring Territories as Chairman of the South Atlantic Working Party for the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum.

Southern Rockhopper Penguin



Rockhopper Penguins on Pebble Island. Allan White.

The Rockhopper Penguin has a circumpolar distribution. It has recently been divided into two separate species. The Northern Rockhopper *Eudyptes moseleyi* breeds on Tristan da Cunha, the Amsterdam and St Paul Islands. The Southern Rockhopper *Eudyptes chrysocome* breeds on islands off southern Argentina and Chile, on Marion, Crozet, Kerguelen, Heard, Macquarie and Campbell Islands, and in the Falklands. In all these places its population is in decline.

This is the smallest Falkland Islands penguin, named because it climbs up steep cliffs to its nesting sites by bounding with both feet together. It breeds at 35 different colonies around the coast, but 70% of our birds are on Beauchêne, Steeple and Grand Jason Islands. The latest Islands' census in 2005 counted 210,000 breeding pairs – in 1932 it is estimated that there were 1.5 million.

Rockhopper Penguins are migratory, arriving in the Falklands to breed in early October and leaving by the end of April. Some stay relatively close to their colony all year round, but one tracked penguin travelled a total distance of 2,119km (1,324 miles) in 75 days.

The reason for the decline in this attractive bird (it is our logo) is not known. Information collected by Falklands Conservation has shown that there is no direct competition between Rockhoppers and commercial fisheries in Falkland waters. There is a growing body of opinion that this bird may be particularly susceptible to changes in ocean productivity, temperature and currents, perhaps driven by climate change. Recent isotopic evidence suggests that shifts in the marine ecosystem, which may be climate related, could be associated with the decline of the Rockhopper. Small changes in the marine environment (eg a 1° increase in temperature) may now be threatening its very survival.

Falklands Conservation is supporting and taking part in an international workshop in June 2008 to address the causes of its decline and what we must do to help its populations recover.



www.falklandsconservation.com

Wildlife Conservation In The Falkland Islands

Issue 10



Wildlife Conservation In The Falkland Islands

Issue 10 February 2009

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FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

Protecting the wildlife of the Falkland Islands for future generations

www.falklandsconservation.com

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Our Precious Islands

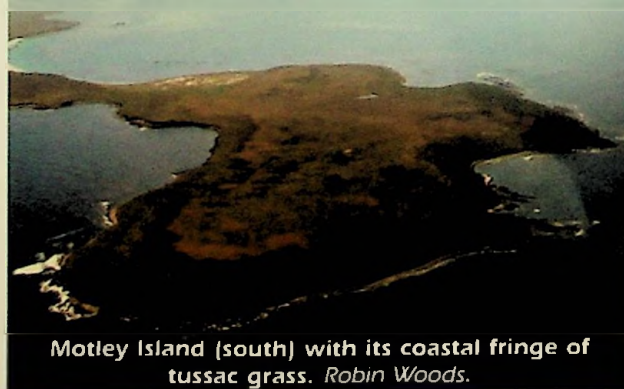
Apart from the two main islands of East and West Falkland, there are about 750 smaller offshore islands and islets in the Falkland archipelago set in an overwhelmingly marine environment. Rich coastal waters surround these islands, with the northerly Falklands Current to the east bringing cold, deep, nutrient-rich water from the Antarctic to provide the basis for the marine food web. Abundant productivity leads to a wealth of marine life, supporting vast colonies of albatrosses, penguins and seals. The seabird populations are of international importance.

It is no accident that of the 22 sites of global conservation importance within the Falklands, only 5 are on the main islands (one on West and four on East Falkland), the other 17 Important Bird Areas comprise 186 islands spread all around the Falklands. Some birds (Striated caracara, tussacbird and Cobb's wren) are now generally only to be found on rat-free offshore islands where human impact has been lessened by their inaccessibility.

It is because these islands are remote and isolated that their rich wildlife communities have survived. But the very existence of Cobb's wren remains somewhat precarious, open to being wiped out from any one of its island strongholds as soon as rats make their way ashore. In 2009 we are celebrating 100 years since this delightful (and tame) little bird was named as a separate species unique to the Falklands (see back cover). We need to make every effort to improve the odds on it surviving for another 100 years.

Last year we launched an appeal for raise funds for greater protection and management of Falklands Conservation's 18 island nature reserves. With many generous donations from our members, for which we are enormously grateful, a sum of £4,838 is now available. We are making a start on a programme to visit some of these sites, update our wildlife inventories and put in place management plans to address their conservation needs and the threats to which they may be exposed. Surveys are due to take place on Motley and Middle Islands (off Lively Island) this February. Later in the year we will be undertaking rat eradication work on Outer North West Island in Falkland Sound. This is a great start to an on going effort aiming to ensure the wildlife of these precious islands remains intact for future generations.

Ann Brown, UK Executive Officer



Motley Island (south) with its coastal fringe of tussac grass. Robin Woods.

To the Rescue of Oiled Penguins

Sarah Crofts

The Falkland Islands are home to diverse and abundant populations of seabirds and wildlife. Working to protect and minimise threats to these populations is a key role at Falklands Conservation, and indeed a heart felt issue within the community as whole. As part of this role, we attempt to monitor and record all oil spill incidents involving wildlife in the Islands and to rescue and rehabilitate any oiled birds caught up in these events. With only a few shipping disasters in recent decades, the occurrence of oiled wildlife in the Falklands has been very infrequent.

In 2008 however the Falklands Islands experienced an unusually high number of oiled seabirds, particularly after a trawler; Ocean 8, sank in Berkeley Sound in May.

When this fishing trawler started leaking heavy oil, Falklands Conservation conducted a survey of the affected coastline and set up a tireless programme of rehabilitating penguins seemingly caught in the path of the oil slick. Oiled birds almost certainly die from the effects of the toxic oil if not rescued. The oil and cleaning process also destroys the waterproofing of birds' feathers, and as penguins spend most of their time at sea, they are particularly vulnerable to water logging and hypothermia. But handling and caring for oiled seabirds is a challenging job particularly with a very limited number of experienced people and a coastline difficult to access. Our rescue operations relied heavily on keen volunteers who, under the supervision of FC staff, had their first experience of catching and handling wild birds.

From the early days of the vessel sinking we managed to bring back into Stanley a small number of the worst affected gentoo penguins. We set up a small facility at the Falkland Government's Agricultural Department, which became the main hub of penguin cleaning and the rehabilitation procedures. With little in the way of specialised facilities, the effort and help we received in installing and running this operation was truly remarkable and many thanks must be given to the Agricultural and Veterinary Department for their continued support throughout the whole



From August to October we continued to receive reports of a number of oiled king penguins from many locations around the Islands, from West Point and Saunders Islands to local beaches around Stanley. During September the migrant penguins (Magellanics and rockhoppers) returned to their breeding sites. In all we rehabilitated 10 gentoo, 5 king, 3 rockhopper penguins and one chinstrap (see above), who was found in Stanley harbour, far from his normal range south of the Antarctic Convergence. With our guidance, many more oiled penguins were rehabilitated by landowners at farms and settlements. Sarah Crofts.



Serious dedication was required with a twice daily feeding regime, food preparation, cleaning the pens - and the penguins. Here a rockhopper penguin is getting a good wash to remove all traces of oil from his feathers. Without the help and dedication of our volunteers we would have struggled to look after the penguins. Sarah Crofts.

rescue operation. This first group of rescued gentoo penguins was released in July, all successfully.

Penguin rehabilitation is mostly common sense, but a thorough and dedicated approach is essential for the birds' survival and their successful release back to the wild. We were keen to train as many volunteers as possible in order to establish a group of experienced handlers in the Islands. In all, a dozen people were trained to feed and look after the birds on a daily basis, with at least ten more involved in cleaning, erecting pens and catching oiled penguins. This was hugely successful and a truly rewarding experience for many of our helpers. Of course it was not all fun and frolics - volunteers were often called out in the evening and over weekends to search for reported oiled penguins on the shorelines around Stanley.

In addition, the Infant/Junior School raised money for the rescue effort through 'a black and white day' and we received many in kind donations, such as desperately needed towels, and the local fishing company, Polar Ltd together with the Island's Fisheries Department supplied us with over a tonne of fish and squid. Without all this help, it would have been next to impossible to rescue the penguins, and we are truly grateful for all the assistance and donations we received.

Because three to four months after the trawler sank we were still finding oiled penguins around the Falklands archipelago, oil samples taken from

feathers were sent to the UK to be tested against the oil leaking from the trawler. If we could determine the source of the pollution it would give us a better understanding of how many birds potentially could be oiled and the extent of oil pollution from the trawler. The surprising results showed that the oiled birds rescued from the beaches around Stanley and some from around the leaking wreck were not the same oil source as that leaking from the trawler. Although oil can rapidly weather and its properties change, this implied that there were more sources of oil pollution around Port Stanley apart from *Ocean 8*.

From this whole experience we have identified positive actions to carry through for the future. We need to make sure that the knowledge we have gained is not lost. As the last penguin of 2008 is released we think that this is not the end, but the beginning of a pro-active approach to dealing with future incidents involving oiled seabirds. Falklands Conservation and the Veterinary Department are now producing detailed husbandry manuals for the care of oiled penguins and are working on an oiled wildlife contingency plan for the Falklands Islands.

For Falklands Conservation it is important to help save a viable breeding wild bird, particularly rockhopper penguins which are globally threatened. But perhaps more important is the opportunity for many people to take part in the rescue, feel able to contribute to a situation out of their control, and get a once in a lifetime close up experience with wildlife.

With the kind assistance of the RAF Sea King Search & Rescue Helicopter and its crew, king penguins were flown out to Volunteer Point for release. This was a great contribution to the rescue programme and saved the penguins from a long and stressful overland journey. Captain Karen Ford, British Forces (Crown Copyright).





When release days arrived it was with great excitement at the thought of the birds returning to the wild with another chance at life. The birds were fitted with temporary tags in the hope that we could gain some post release information. The rehabilitated penguins seemed to have an instinctive longing for the freedom in the ocean waves, and most took off straight into sea, not surprising after such a long time in captivity. LEFT & BELOW Captain Karen Ford, British Forces (Crown Copyright); RIGHT Sarah Crofts.



It would be a hard thing for anyone not to become emotionally attached to the penguins. Many were with us for over 2 months. Each one had its own character and amusing behaviour. Sarah Crofts.



Charles Darwin and the Falkland Islands

Extract, by Patrick Armstrong, from *The Dictionary of Falklands Biography*, reproduced with by kind permission of the Editor, David Tatham.

This year we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin – one of the most influential thinkers of our time, whose hypotheses changed the world. In the development of these, his two month-long sojourns in the Falkland Islands played a significant role.

Darwin made two visits to the Falkland Islands (1 March – 6 April 1833 and 9 March – 7 April 1834) during the second voyage of the *Beagle*. He explored a good deal of East Falkland (he probably did not land on West Falkland, although others from the expedition did, and provided him with information). He beachcombed along the shores of Berkeley Sound, explored well to the north and to the south of Port Louis, and rode across East Falkland with a group of gauchos to a bay named Darwin's Harbour after him (now Darwin, by Goose Green).

His experiences on East Falklands, where he spent more time than at many of his ports of call, and covered dozens of pages with his notes, were in some respects pivotal. A few examples must suffice. He had with him Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, which espoused a 'gradualist' or 'uniformitarian' view of the world's development, rather than a 'catastrophist' (sudden dramatic change – an interpretation then widely accepted).

On East Falkland Darwin was betwixt and between the two extremes: he observed the processes of gradual erosion and deposition, but also (in the privacy of his own notes) speculated that the stone-runs might have been created by earthquakes shaking rock masses from the nearby mountains! He noted that the foxes (or warrahs) from East

and West Falkland were different, long before he made comparable observations on the birds of the Galapagos. He did not describe the kelp-beds of Berkeley Sound as 'ecosystems' (but described the tight network of relationships of the organisms within them in a remarkably integrated way) and considered them to be 'as rich as a tropical forest.'

The folded strata of the Islands confirmed in his mind that he lived in a dynamic, changing world. He compared the barren moorlands of East Falkland with the richness of the warm shallow seas of the Palaeozoic, evidence of which he found in fossiliferous strata near Port Louis, understanding, therefore that the climate and environment must have changed. He described the behaviour of birds (penguins, caracaras) at a time when morphology and appearance were considered more important, opening the way for his later psychological studies (eg his *The Expression of Emotions in Animals and Man*). He noted that some invertebrate forms he found in Berkeley South produced tens of thousands of eggs, and yet were not numerous – just a step away from the ideas of competition and natural selection expressed in *On the Origin of Species*. He observed the appearance and behaviour of the feral cattle and horses: one of his entry points to evolutionary ideas, much later, was through the study of domestic animals (*Animals and Plants under Domestication*). He wondered about the mechanisms of dispersal of plants and animals in the Islands, noticing that some of the forms found in the Falklands were similar to those of South America.

It would not be true to say that Darwin's Falkland experiences were all-important, any more than his Galapagos experiences were of overwhelming significance. But his Falklands sojourn, along with his visits to so many other islands, provided important opportunities for him – some of them unique.

Darwin's Black Beetle

The first recorded specimens of Darwin's black beetle *Lissopterus quadrinotatus* were collected in March 1834 by Charles Darwin on the outward journey of *HMS Beagle*. They were found under a dead bird on the seacoast of East Falkland. Darwin initially supposed these to be a species of *Sphodrus* showing that even he was not infallible. However, it was not until 1843, after Darwin returned from his voyage around the world to the Galapagos, that



Artwork by
Richard Lewington

the animal was described as a new species, only found in the Falkland Islands.

Darwin's black beetles are flightless and are the largest predatory ground beetles in the Falkland Islands, reaching close to 2 cm in length. Their strong legs enable them to run quickly across the ground where they actively hunt small invertebrates such as fly larvae, killing them with bites from their powerful jaws. A degree of morphological variation is present within the Falkland Islands and it is now thought likely that there are actually a number of very closely related species within the same 'Darwin's Beetle' group.

Alex Jones

Conservation in Action



More tussac planting took place in September to restore the coastland habitat at Elephant Beach Farm, East Falkland.



Claudia Mischler on Steeple Jason, continuing our long term demographic studies at the largest black-browed albatross colony in the world. *Sarah Crofts.*



A team of volunteers counting penguins as part of our annual Seabird Monitoring Programme *Lewis James.*



More than 40 volunteers took part in a beach clean at Whalebone Cove, near Stanley, on 24 January 2009. A large amount of marine debris and domestic rubbish was collected.



Kevin Payne, a Falklands Conservation volunteer, with Project Manager Frin Ross, undertaking a freshwater fish survey of creeks and streams (here at Dunbar), to look for populations of the native zebra trout to determine its status. They are using electro fishing, to stun fish for identification and counting. The fish are not harmed by this process. *Carissa Turner.*



Derek Brown, a pest control expert from New Zealand, who undertook a survey in Choiseul Sound, East Falkland, with Robin Woods, to assess islands there for potential rat eradication work. *Robin Woods.*

Marine Scientists Explore the Jason Islands

Karen Neely

Falklands Conservation is partnered with the Shallow Marine Surveys Group on a two year project to study the marine habitats around the Falkland Islands. From 24 October to 4 November 2008 an international team of SCUBA divers, scientists and conservationists explored the remote Jason Island Group to survey its underwater environment for the first time.

BELOW left to right: Firmly affixed to a kelp plant, a cluster of *Loligo gahi* squid eggs is added to Jude Brown's tally sheet. Jude and fellow surveyors Vlad Laptikhovsky and Wetjens Dimmlich also witnessed a female *Loligo* laying her eggs at dusk; this was the first time this behaviour had ever been observed and photo-documented within this commercially important species.

Vlad Laptikhovsky and Paul Brickle examine a recently-collected sea star. At least two species of sea star and two species of nudibranch that have not been found before in the Falklands were collected. A closer look at the specimens and the literature will determine whether they are species new to science.

Paul Brickle and Claire Goodwin examine a limpet species in the yacht's saloon. Claire and her colleague Jen Jones travelled from the UK to join the 12-day expedition as sponge taxonomists in order to help identify this highly variable group of animals.

RIGHT: With a giant stride into the waters of the Jason Islands, Steve Cartwright temporarily departs from the yacht *Golden Fleece*. The *Fleece* served as home, transportation, and dive platform for the eleven members of the ten-day expedition to the Falkland Islands' most north-westerly regions.



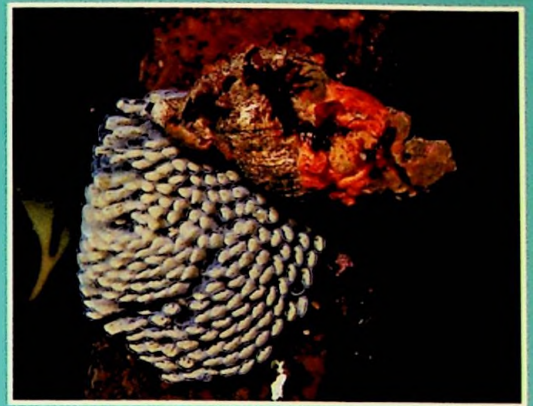
The expedition comprised two sponge taxonomists, two coastal bird observers, and seven marine biologists and photographers. Back row: Jen Jones, Claire Goodwin, Jude Brown, Steve Cartwright, Vernon Steen. Front row: Karen Neely, Dion Poncet, Wetjens Dimmlich, Paul Brickle, Vlad Laptikhovsky, and Sarah Crofts.





Members of the Shallow Marine Surveys Group use a small boat to access a cave. Though predominantly ringed with kelp forests, some areas of the Jason Islands offered sand, rubble, or cave habitats that were surveyed for different species.

All photographs courtesy of the Shallow Marine Surveys Group.



A triton snail (*Fusitriton magellanicus*) lays a whorl-shaped pattern of eggs on a kelp stalk. Warming waters affect reproduction within the marine realm as well as among the Falklands' seabirds and mammals.



Working her way towards a cave in the cliff face, Project Officer Karen Neely surveys the marine life in a scoured gully. Pairs of divers counted the fauna and photographed the benthos at over thirty sites throughout the Jason Islands.



WATCH Group Activities



RIGHT The Falklands WATCH group, and local school children, visiting rescued oiled penguins. They were all lucky enough to see not only penguins that regularly breed in the Falklands, but the much more unusual chinstrap penguin. *Sarah Crofts.*



ABOVE 11th October 2008 saw the WATCH Group at Surf Bay for beach combing, exploring rock pools and walking along the coast to visit the rock shag colony nesting on the cliffs.

BELOW The Christmas barbeque at Bluff Cove Lagoon, 6 December 2008: a perfect summer's day on the beach with gentoo penguins in the distance. *Ali Liddle*



Tackling exotic invaders: the South Atlantic Invasive Species Project

Clare Miller, South Atlantic Invasive Species Project

The Falkland Islands tend to be thought of as remote and unspoilt. But while the Falklands are still a haven for many spectacular birds, plants, and invertebrates, they are no longer as isolated as they seem. With at least three incoming flights every week, and around 80,000 cruise ship visitors in the summer season, the Islands are more connected to the rest of the world than ever before.

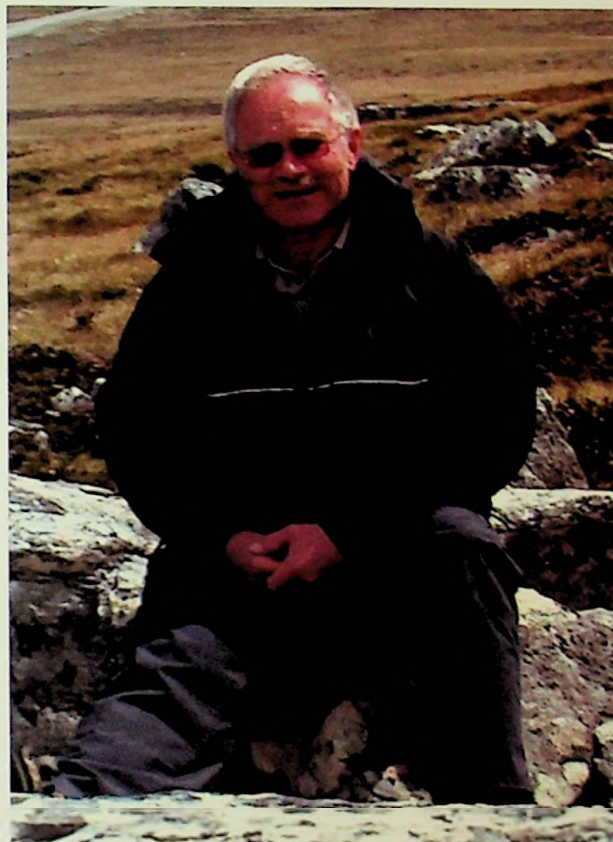
With increased travel and trade, comes an increased risk of introducing new species to the Islands.

In fact, scientists working on invasive species have coined the term “the Homogocene” for the current time period, to reflect the homogenisation of global biodiversity – ecosystems worldwide are becoming dominated by the same suite of successful invaders, with unique characteristics (and sometimes species) being lost.

Falklands Conservation has recognised the problems caused by invasive species for some time. Since 2001, it has led many successful rodent eradication operations, and the skills developed in these projects have now enabled some landowners to pursue eradications on their own. It has also worked on invasive plant control, with significant success in clearing thistles from many areas.

Since December 2006, Falklands Conservation has been a key partner in an EU-funded project tackling invasive species in all of the UK's five Overseas Territories in the South Atlantic – in fact, the enthusiasm of Ann Brown from Falklands Conservation contributed to getting this project underway. The South Atlantic Invasive Species (SAIS) project has now been running for two years, and has one more year of operation to go. It has received almost €2 million in funding from the European Commission's EDF-9 regional fund – the first time that UKOTs have accessed this funding line.

An Action Plan setting out local priorities for the project was developed during a stakeholder workshop in July 2007. This included a variety of activities: from the preparation of education materials, to training of border staff, to control of some specific problem species. Actions in the past two years are described below.



Brian Summers is the full time SAIS officer based in the Falklands and sharing office space with FC at Jubilee Villas. RSPB is leading implementation of the project. Ann Brown

Biosecurity Review

With the help of the Agriculture Department, the Project Team have reviewed implementation of the *Biosecurity for the Falkland Islands* report that was produced in 2004. There has been a huge amount of progress with this in the past 3½ years, with congratulations due to the Agriculture Department for their efforts with this issue. Another review of progress will be carried out before the Project ends.

Risk Assessment

Using information previously collated by the UK's Joint Nature Conservation Committee along with personal observations, a risk analysis was carried out to assess which introduced species currently present in the Falklands should be the top priority for control activities. Unsurprisingly, rats, mice and foxes topped the list for vertebrates. Calafate, gorse, and broom were considered the highest risk.

Education

Ali Liddle at Falklands Conservation has produced school education materials related to invasive species. These materials will slot into the current environmental education programme in Falkland schools, and will include activities for schoolchildren that highlight the potential impacts of invasive species.

Training for Falkland Islands border staff took place in November 2008 with a second training session arranged for May 2009.

Rats

Brian participated in our rat eradication attempt at Inner Northwest Island in 2007. The Project funded the purchase of bait for a planned operation on Outer Northwest in 2008. However, due to logistical difficulties, this could not take place in 2008 and is now scheduled for 2009. The project has also provided some support to the Beaver Island Restoration project, which is attempting to clear rats from several islands in the Beaver group.

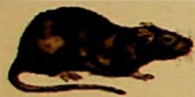
All participants considered that eradicating rats is worthwhile, and noted that from islands already cleared of rats there is evidence of increasing



In September 2008, the SAIS Project gathered stakeholders from the Falklands and experts from further afield for a meeting to consider the future of the rat eradication programme in the Islands.

numbers of Falkland songbirds. A list of revised priorities for the short to medium term was agreed. Survey work to identify presence/absence of rats from key islands was confirmed as the top priority, as nothing is known about the status of rodents on many of these.

An example of an activity sheet for Falkland Island schoolchildren, produced by Ali Liddle, for the project.



Rat Activities!



1 Design an information leaflet for commercial shipping companies and tourists warning of the need for vigilance when visiting rat free islands in the Falkland Islands. It should include a picture, reasons for not transferring rats from one island to another and methods they need to adopt to ensure they don't take unwanted visitors with them.

2 Produce a Food Chain Mobile showing the feeding relationships between rats and other species living on a tussac island.

For example: Short eared owl – Rats – Tussac bird – Sand hopper – Kelp

You need to draw and label each species then hang them from a piece of string with the owl at the top of the food chain.

3 Design a poster or logo that could be displayed at a port or dock to remind people to be vigilant about putting up rat lines etc to stop rats coming ashore from their ships or boats.

4 Make a rat infested tussac scene using clay to model the rats and real grass and pebbles to create the authentic setting.

5 Design a rat trap to capture a rat. You need to make it effective and humane so that there is no cruelty involved. Decide what it will be made from and if you will be using bait and if so what type.

6 Design a board game for children with the object of the game being for a Cobb's wren or a Tussac bird to travel from one part of the tussac island to another collecting food and maybe laying a clutch of eggs. You could add in challenges along the way. For example: Rat takes one egg miss a turn or fly to the next tussac bog move on 3 places. Think about the challenges that some species face with the presence of rats in their habitat. The final square could have something along the lines of Falklands Conservation Rat Eradication Team visit the island move to the finish. You have survived!

7 Design a rat guard that can be placed on the ropes of a ship to prevent rats either going ashore or going on board. Explain how it works, what it is made from and think carefully about a decorative design.

Invasive Plants

In cooperation with Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and Falklands Conservation current plants programme, the SAIS project has carried out surveys, mapping and control of invasive plant populations. The focus of efforts has been on thistles, calafate, ragwort, and gorse.

A large area of Calafate (Magellan barberry, *Berberis buxifolia*) at Port Sussex, East Falkland (*below*).

This is a hardy, spiny, evergreen shrub from South America which is very invasive in the Falkland Islands where, if left unchecked, can completely dominate the vegetation. An Islands-wide control strategy for this plant has now been drafted, and will be implemented in summer 08-09.

Landowner-specific plans for management and control of gorse are also under investigation. A summer contract to survey garden plants and undertake awareness work in Stanley started in December.

It has been particularly good to have a high level of engagement with the Project from the Environment Officer at MPA, where Brian has been able to assist with pest plant control actions on the military base over the last season.



Brian Summers clearing thistles on East Falkland.

With one year to go, we are having a very busy summer. In May 2009, the project will hold a regional meeting on Ascension Island, which will aim to produce a regional invasive species strategy and early warning system. The overall aim of the SAIS project is to build regional capacity to deal with invasive species – and with the range of people and activities involved, we are sure that there will be increased capacity in the Falklands at least!

Calafate at Port Sussex, East Falkland



For more information on the project, please contact Clare Miller at RSPB (clare.miller@rspb.org.uk) or Brian Summers in the Falkland Islands (bsummers.sais@horizon.co.fk).

About the Patagonian Fox and other introduced Mammals

Robin Woods

*The Grey Fox of Patagonia, known as *Lycalopex griseus* was introduced in the 1930s by a sheep farmer and owner of several islands off West Falkland.*

There were plans to sell shares in a fox fur farming project publicised in Penguin a local newsletter of the time, on 2nd, 5th, 17th and 24th December 1935. Messer TETZLAFF, PISANO & Co. of Criadero "EL ANTARTICO", Magallanes, Chile advertised shares at £100 each for the proposed Falkland Islands Fox and Fur Company Ltd.

They advocated people starting with a few good quality foxes for quality not quantity. I don't know how many takers they had, but in Penguin of 17th December it was stated that the FI Government had allowed the proposed company to acquire land on West Falkland. They also advertised that the shares had been reduced to £10 each, I would guess because not enough had been sold at £100!!

On 24th December 1935 they reported on the 'big demand for shares' and gave glowing accounts of the potential riches people could acquire through fox farming for fur. For instance, one paragraph reads as follows: "Where in the world can everybody, with only a small outlay of capital, rear a few pairs of silver foxes in his backyard and make a good living? As there is no outlet of surplus sheep, fox farming will be the future sideline of the sheep-farming." Apparently this project did not take off but it is definite that John Hamilton, a sheep-farmer who had interests in Patagonia and had bought Weddell, Beaver, Passage Islands and others, did import Grey/Silver foxes and established them on Beaver and Weddell.

I have seen the remains of the traps on Weddell Island (about 98 square miles) and seen foxes on Beaver, Weddell and also on Split Island to the north of New Island in recent years.

They are also said to exist on River Island, south of Pebble Island. Probably at the same period, these foxes were also introduced to Sedge Island, North of Carcass Island. The owner from about the 1960's spent years shooting them and managed to kill all in something like 30 years. There have been

several attempts to shoot all the foxes on Beaver Island and I believe this is still the aim of the owners, Sally and Jerome Poncet. On Tea Island in September 2008, Sally recently reported to me that 32 had been killed and there was only one fox remaining. About 500 were poisoned on Weddell in about 1998-9 and an area cleared was fenced off with electric fencing. Baiting continued for a while afterwards, but the fencing was not maintained and the foxes multiplied again. This island is not farmed now, and most sheep were removed ten or more years ago. The foxes will be widespread still I'm sure.

In our Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Falkland Islands (Woods, RW & Woods, A 1997), we also asked observers to report on introduced mammals, especially, rats, cats, mice, hares and rabbits. Many observers recorded the presence or absence of introduced mammalian predators and/or herbivores. "Cats, potentially the most damaging to birds (Moors & Atkinson 1984), were recorded in 73 10-km squares and Patagonian Grey/Silver foxes were recorded on Weddell, Beaver, Chain, Tea and Staats Islands and on Split Island south of West Point Island. Rats were recorded in 47 squares, mice in 37, hares in 14 only on East Falkland and rabbits in nine squares mostly on the West. Guanacos were present on Staats Island. Altogether, introduced mammals are widespread on East and West Falkland and occur on several offshore islands." The extract copied here is slightly out of date now, but does illustrate how widespread such animals were and mostly still are.



Patagonian Fox on Weddell Island. Ann Brown

NOTICEBOARD

Staff Changes

Grant Munro left Falklands Conservation in September to take up an academic course in the UK. His successor as Chief Executive Officer, Craig Dockrill, takes up his appointment in early April. Nic Huin departed as Science Officer in July, but has continued to help us this season with albatross surveys and demographic work. Dr Pierre Pistorius from South Africa has been appointed Conservation Officer.



Pierre Pistorius

Trustees

It is with great pleasure that we report the award, in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2008, of an MBE to Robin Woods for his services to the conservation of wildlife in the Falkland Islands. This is so richly deserved after more than 50 years of interest and practical work devoted to the natural history of the Islands.

On a much sadder note, we report the death of Colin Phipps, chairman of Falklands Conservation from 1989 to 1992. Despite being a very active man with many interests his leadership and commitment to our small charity was an enormous asset. Julian Fitter, Vice President, recalls: *'Colin was the one who first introduced me to the Falklands back in 1977; he had just spent a week on one of my boats in Galapagos and by chance I sat next to him on the flight in to Quito. He complimented me on the operation and asked what I thought of the Falklands, being a sucker for new ventures I said, cold, windy, tell me more! So I have a lot to thank him for, he was one of those people who could cross the divide, business man, politician, conservationist, a man with a mind of his own.'*

At the 2008 AGM held on 10 December in London Darren Christie (based in the Falklands) was elected a new Trustee.

FC Website gets New Look

Our website has been completely redesigned and expanded. It now includes reports published by Falklands Conservation, outlines our key programmes, provides an excellent resource on Falklands wildlife and much more. It still has sections under construction, but we hope to complete these during 2009. The website address remains the same – go and have a look: www.falklandsconservation.com.

A Biodiversity Strategy for the Falkland Islands

In December 2008 the Falkland Islands Government adopted a Biodiversity Strategy for the Falkland Islands with a vision to 'conserve and enhance the natural diversity, ecological processes and heritage of the Falkland Islands, in harmony with sustainable economic development.'

This is an important document, which sets out measures required over a 10-year period to protect the Islands' key environmental assets, and those species and habitats most at risk of extinction. There are 38 action tasks outlined to address priority threats. It recognises that dedicated action will be required to implement this ambitious strategy with a reliance on organisations such as Falklands Conservation to play a major role in some areas. This will be challenging, not least in acquiring funding to do so, but with such clear guidance on priorities we hope it will encourage a partnership approach, not just with the Government but with other environmental bodies working in the Islands.

To view a copy of the Strategy go to www.epd.gov.fk where you can find it in the Environment section.



The Magellanic penguin, along with the rockhopper and gentoo penguin, have been identified as priority species within the Strategy. Tim Mason.

Cobb's Wren – A Special Falkland Bird



Cobb's Wren: a small brown bird (13.5 cms in length) with closely barred wings and tail. Adults fade to dull brown above during the summer, when newly fledged juveniles have a dark head and bright chestnut back.

Sarah Crofts

Cobb's Wren (*Troglodytes cobbi*) is unique to the Falkland Islands and found nowhere else in the world. It was first recognised as a species 100 years ago in 1909 and named after Arthur Cobb from the type specimen he provided from Carcass Island.

It is usually seen feeding along rocky coastlines with large boulder beaches and accumulated kelp (seaweed), where it searches out small invertebrates. Nests are made in the tussac grass bordering such beaches. Totally restricted to outer islands that have remained free from introduced predators (cats, rats, mice and foxes), to date it has been confirmed present and probably breeding on 70 islands with an estimated population of 6,000 pairs. Islands with Cobb's Wren include Lively, Sealion, George, Speedwell, Bird, Carcass and all of the Jason Islands, except Steeple Jason which has mice.

BirdLife International rates it as a threatened species with **Vulnerable** conservation status primarily because of the destruction of its tussac grass habitat, the introduction of predators and the small geographic range of its scattered population.

In September 2008 a workshop was held in the Falkland Islands with 16 stakeholders to formulate a Species Action Plan (put together by Robin Woods, for Falklands Conservation, with the FIG Environment Department), which aims to secure and increase its current population and distribution. The most important priority in the Plan is to investigate more unsurveyed offshore islands. The programme of eradicating rats will continue to restore islands to increase suitable habitats and so ensure a more secure future for this special bird.



Wildlife Conservation In The **Falkland Islands**

Issue 11



Wildlife Conservation In The Falkland Islands

Issue 11 October 2009



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FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

Protecting the wildlife of the Falkland Islands for future generations

www.falklandsconservation.com

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: South American Tern. This international bird is a summer resident in the Falkland Islands, but common from Cape Horn north to Peru and southern Brazil. *Tim Mason.*

Conservation and the Farmer

Craig Dockrill, Chief Executive Officer

While political hopefuls in the Falkland Islands position themselves here for the November election and planning commences for the first de-mining programme, hundreds of thousands of seabirds are returning to their favoured nesting sites. Falklands Conservation is in the midst of it all, representing the interests of the wildlife in political, conservation and economic development discussions.

The promise of summer ahead has the Falkland Islands teeming with activity, reminding me of how broad the scope of our work has become. Programmes include invertebrates, invasive species, seabirds, marine mammals, habitat restoration, botanical inventories, education, advocacy and agriculture. Though our relationship with the agriculture sector is still developing, our monitoring and research programmes have long relied upon the support of landowners. The link between wildlife conservation and agriculture cannot be denied as one walks along the beaches of the Falklands in the spring. For instance, areas preferred by sheep benefit from steady deposits of guano each summer. The fertilizer from the seabirds results in more nutritious forage that nursing sheep rely upon each spring.

A common interest in maintaining a healthy environment is the foundation for cooperation

between Falklands Conservation and farmers. Through our Small Grants Scheme, we actively support projects that benefit both agriculture and wildlife. Important coastal plant communities, such as tussac, are now being fenced to support farmers in exercising greater control over the timing and duration of grazing, benefiting nesting birds and improving forage quality. Habitat restoration is increasing in popularity, as farmers approach us to assist with stabilizing eroded areas and replanting tussac around the islands. To carry out this work we rely on the voluntary efforts of our members and the WATCH youth group. Lastly, our participation in the South Atlantic Invasive Species Project has enabled us to work with landowners on invasive species that impact heavily upon livelihoods and Falkland Islands flora and fauna.

Our Plant Conservation Project has partnered us with one farmer to evaluate the role of rotational grazing systems in sustaining native plant assemblages. This addresses key issues of habitat conservation, agricultural science, and people's livelihoods. It has the potential to improve habitats elsewhere in the Falklands as lessons learnt are incorporated into policy advice, education programmes and are shared with other land management partners.

The next time you are beachside in the Falklands, take a moment to consider how the wild plants and animals are getting on with the farmer and his livestock, and how Falklands Conservation might be working to improve the land beneath them all.



Tussac plantation at Elephant Beach Farm. Ann Brown.

Conservation in Action

Planting Tussac



Tussac planting continues at Elephant Beach Farm, 19 September 2009 (BELOW), and established tussac planted four years ago (ABOVE). *Ali Liddle*

Volunteers continue work started in 2005 to transform a once eroded, blackened piece of camp. Ben Berntsen, who owns the farm, has also begun to fence off other areas in an attempt to 'green up' the north coast of his farm. Not only does the tussac increase the number of birds and invertebrates, it is hoped that it will eventually, with controlled management, provide valuable winter feed for livestock on the farm.



BELOW: The WATCH Group planting tussac on Stanley Harbour front, March 09. This July the Group celebrated its 10th anniversary – it was founded in 1999. Tussac planting has been a regular activity for the young members from the beginning. *Ali Liddle.*



ABOVE: Planting tussac on an eroded area of West Point Island, off West Falkland (BELOW). This was undertaken as a special Falklands Conservation members expedition *Rebecca Upson*



A Special Day Out on Little and Big Samuel – A Volunteer's Tale

Maryanna Ryan

All I had to do was get from the shore into the boat, taking about two steps into the sea in order to reach it, yet inevitably, the moment my foot entered the water a dormant hole in my welly suddenly jumped to life and my boot was flooded with freezing cold water. Stalled at the first step I thought. Great start. Although the sun was out I knew it would be absolutely miserable having to tramp about a windy island with heavy buckets and a wet foot, so, although mortified for holding everyone up and exposing myself as a complete girl who couldn't cope with a welly full of seawater, I begged keys to the Land Rover and drove quickly back to the house at Walker Creek to remedy the situation and get dry socks. My male co-workers, four seasoned rat-poisoners, very kindly pretended not to mind.

A curious thing to do on one's day off: killing rats; and even more curious when I discovered it involved getting up at 4am to drive there! Falkland Conservation had spent the past few weeks working on different sites throughout the islands laying down poison to kill the masses of rats that have been breeding here for years, thought to have originated from the old shipwrecks washed up along the shores. These rats are killing the native small bird population and devastating the eco-system by destroying the natural order within the food chain and reproductive cycles.

As a nurse in my normal life I am well acquainted with the properties and effects of rat poison: warfarin, which I give out almost daily to people at risk of clots, thins the blood and, if not monitored closely can lead to severe haemorrhaging. Almost without fail, every patient who starts taking this drug comments bitterly that we are forcing them to take 'rat poison.'

Therefore, on a beautifully rare sunny day, myself and four members of FC and the South Atlantic Invasive Species Project, set off to spread wax pellets of this poison over every square metre of land on the islands of Little and Big Samuel in Choiseul Sound, East Falkland. Three of them had arrived the day before and done the initial preparation so our task now was just to walk in specified directions across the islands with buckets of the poison and distribute them systematically in all directions. In this way there should be enough poison to eradicate the rat population in one go: it would only need two rats to survive for the operation to fail. However thanks to the efficiency of the ground work, done the day before, and the speed and resilience of my co-workers we covered both islands easily within the day.

The wonderful sunshine helped hugely to spur us on, especially after the 12th bucket or so, as did the endless rations provided by FC, lunch on the beach with a Magellanic penguin, and the advent of a perfect windless afternoon (although this did just make me want to lie down in the diddle-dee and sunbathe). Above all, it was the breathtaking views and sheer isolation of these islands that stunned me the most; islands that one can only reach by boat, yet facing potential devastation by our migrations across the planet - their beauty is almost overwhelming. I felt privileged to be there with people who have grown up in these islands and for whom their remoteness is part of the way of life. The mere witnessing of such landscapes and how they have responded to the world around them is a huge education for one new to this part of the world.

We did not arrive back at the house until nearly 7pm when we were tired, sunburnt, hungry, and cold. However, again, thanks to stunning forward thinking the evening's meal had already been prepared the night before and within the hour we were all sat around a table feasting on spaghetti, meatballs and red wine and listening to stories of illicit penguin egg omelettes in bygone Falkland days. Wind was by now howling at the rafters, rain battering against the windows and I felt exhausted, yet also genuinely deserving of the food and rest and above all hopeful in the thought that we may have done some good in preserving the natural beauty of these extraordinary islands.



Intrepid volunteer, Maryanna Ryan, prepared for a long day out in Falkland sun and wind on Little Samuel Island. *M Ryan.*



FC boat arrives on Big Samuel Island with supplies of bait. *M Ryan.*



Craig Dockrill and Pierre Pistorius study plan for bait distribution. *M Ryan.*



Bucket of wax blocks rat bait. *M Ryan.*



Brian Summers of the South Atlantic Invasive Species Project spreading bait on Big Samuel. *M Ryan.*

Saving Rockhopper Penguins

The findings of an international Workshop, which met to develop a conservation action plan for declining numbers of rockhopper penguins, particularly in the South Atlantic Ocean, are about to be published by BirdLife International. Held in 2008, at Edinburgh Zoo, Scotland, twenty-one expert delegates participated from nine countries. Falklands Conservation played an active part in the proceedings.

Concern over Populations

The Workshop set out to identify the causes of historical and current population changes to rockhopper penguins, and to develop action plans to address knowledge gaps and threats. Over the past 37 years (= 3 generations), the number of southern rockhopper penguins has declined by 34% and northern rockhopper penguins by 57%. Birdlife International (2008) lists the northern rockhopper penguin as Endangered and southern rockhopper penguin as Vulnerable. The Workshop produced a current population estimate for all known breeding sites: total population for northern rockhopper penguin is 240,000 breeding pairs and just over 1.23 million pairs for southern rockhopper penguin.

Causes of Decline

The potential causes of decline were identified as: tourism and land-based predation, pandemic disease, pollution, fisheries interactions, shortages of food either from climate change causing a drop in primary productivity that reduces prey availability or causing bottom-up food web shifts that reduce prey availability, and changes in the food web structure leading to increased competition or increased secondary predation.

The Workshop concluded that no single factor, acting across all sites, is responsible for the population declines. It seems likely that prey availability (a shortage of food) is involved at many sites, but that other factors may also be operating and may differ between sites.

Action Plans

Recommendations have been split into a plan for international and a plan for regional action. International recommendations include research and co-operation to address key knowledge gaps in taxonomy, global population, demography, foraging and diet, and actions to address threats which are common to both northern and southern rockhopper penguins. A global census is proposed for the 2010/11 breeding season to reevaluate the conservation status of the rockhopper penguin. Long-term studies of individual birds are needed for both the northern and southern species to assess survival, age at first breeding and breeding frequency. Regional plans focus on issues at particular sites for the northern rockhopper penguin in the Tristan and Gough region and for the southern rockhopper penguin in the Patagonian region (including the Falkland Islands), in the Pacific Ocean and in Chile.



Action for the Falkland Islands

There are specific actions outlined for the Falkland Islands. It is recommended that the rockhopper penguin population here is counted every 5 years and monitored annually. In addition, the need to monitor wildlife health and have an updated oil contingency plan for the Islands is emphasized.

The Report stresses the importance of continuing the current rockhopper penguin demographic research on New Island, and that a second research site should be established in the northern part of the Falkland Islands. Falklands Conservation has now started a project to do just this on Steeple Jason Island. Foraging behaviour and distribution (both in winter, on migration and in the breeding season) will be studied here with the use of satellite transmitters. Diet and breeding behaviour will be researched over a two-year period in an effort to fill knowledge gaps and so understand links between foraging areas and diet. The study will identify and prioritise conservation measures for inclusion in a Species Action Plan for conservation of the Southern Rockhopper Penguin in the Falkland Islands. More funds are urgently needed to ensure the completion of this work.

Implementation Elsewhere

This Workshop was generously hosted by the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, at Edinburgh Zoo. Zoos such as Edinburgh, which specialise in penguins, are particularly encouraged to develop a public understanding of the problems facing rockhopper penguins, and raise awareness about their needs for research and conservation.

It is recognized that implementation of this Report requires long-term funding, particularly to support demographic research, and international collaboration. These elements are crucial to our understanding of the rockhopper penguin and must be addressed if we are to halt the serious decline in its populations.

Workshop Report: Rockhopper Penguins - A Plan for Research and Conservation Action to Investigate and Address Population Changes.

Proceedings of an International Workshop,
3-5 June 2008.

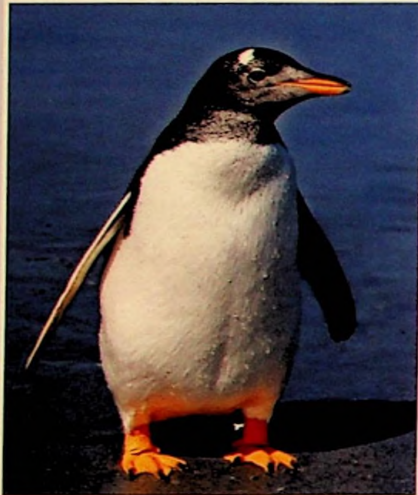
To be available on

www.falklandsconservation.com



Bull Point:

Remote and rich in Falkland wildlife



Falklands Conservation regularly visits this little known but outstanding wildlife area on mainland East Falkland as part of its annual Seabird Monitoring Programme.

Bull Point is at the southernmost tip of East Falkland in a remote part of Lafonia. It is a working farm, part of North Arm, owned by Falkland Land Holdings. There is no road to the Point so access is challenging involving a two hour overland journey from the nearest settlement - but this does protect the site from disturbance. There are extensive sand dune systems and wide areas of coastal greens interspersed with permanent and seasonal pools. The point itself, Porpoise Point, has been fenced and cleared of stock.

Notable Plant Life

Tussac is scattered across Porpoise Point and the flora here has improved where grazing pressure has been removed. The Bull Point beaches are botanically rich sand dune habitat and are home to the largest known Falkland Islands population of the sand dune indicator species, Southern Dock. Nearby greens hold a large population of Eyebright, a scarce native. Altogether 101 species have been recorded at Bull Point including a small population of the rare and protected Dusen's Moonwort (nationally rated as vulnerable) and only known to occur at three other localities in the Falkland Islands. There are four endemic plants present here: clubmoss cudweed, lady's slipper, coastal nassauvia and vanilla daisy.



An Important Bird Area (FK18)

Bull Point has a number of gentoo penguin colonies. These seabirds contribute to its qualification as an area of global ornithological importance. During the 2008/2009 breeding season 2,966 breeding pairs were counted with breeding success of 1.06 chicks per pair. The 2002/2003 Harmful Algal Bloom (resulting in paralytic shellfish poisoning) heavily impacted on this colony and it declined from 3,753 prior to the event to 1,371 the following year. It has generally been increasing since 2003/2004 and numbers now

TOP: Gentoo penguin Tim Mason; MIDDLE: Coastal nassauvia Alan Henry
BOTTOM: Vanilla daisy Ali Liddle; BELOW: Bull Point gentyoo colony.



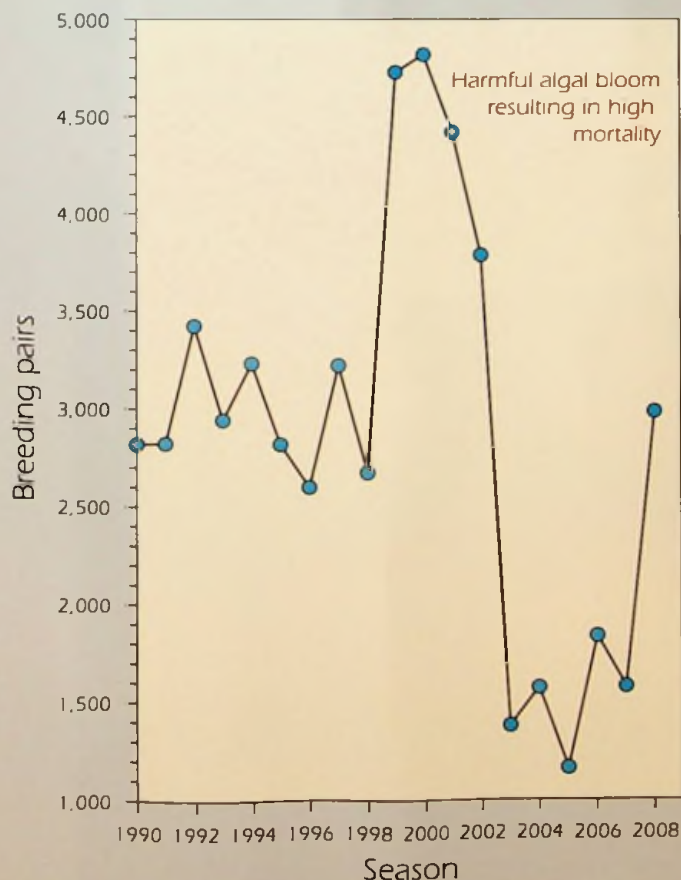
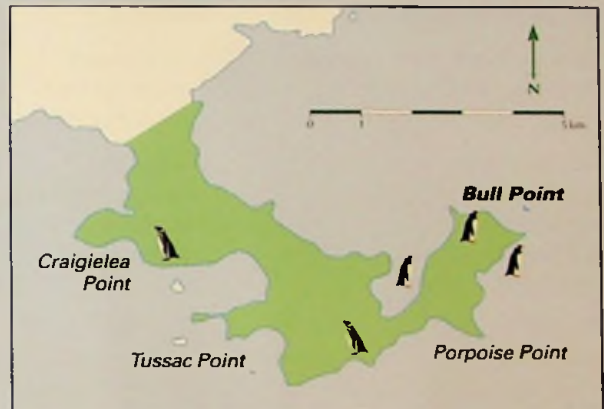
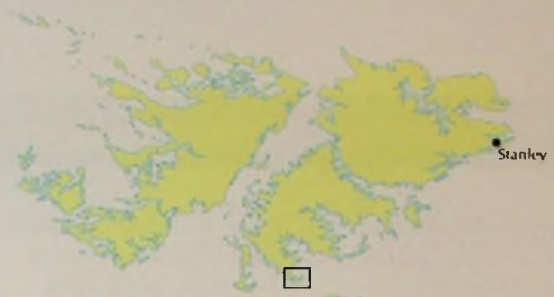
surpass the 2,801 breeding pairs counted at the onset of monitoring numbers at this site in 1990.

Many rare and visiting birds including Coscoroba swan, ashy-headed goose, cinnamon teal and breeding black-necked swan have been recorded in the pool areas. Chiloe wigeon and all resident duck species are frequently seen. Many penguins and geese (including ruddy-headed geese which are numerous on the greens) assemble at the southernmost tip in the summer months. Feral cats and rats are present and these undoubtedly affect the bird populations.

On the extensive beach and dune areas white-rumped sandpipers congregate in large numbers with two banded plover, rufous-chested dotterel and the two species of oystercatchers. Endemic subspecies recorded here include white-tufted grebe, upland goose, short-eared owl, Falkland grass wren, dark-faced ground tyrant, Falkland pipit, Falkland thrush and long-tailed meadowlark. This is also a site of special interest for watching seabirds passing by the Point.

And marine mammals too

There is a breeding colony of southern sea lions on the far eastern point (though now has fewer than 5 pups per year). It is a haul out site for southern sea lions and southern elephant seals.



ABOVE: Gentoo breeding pairs at Bull Point.

RIGHT: Black-necked swan Allan White (top); Chiloe Wigeon Allan White (middle); Southern sea lion Alan Henry (bottom).



Falklands Conservation and BirdLife International

BirdLife International is a partnership of people for birds and the environment. Made up of over 10 million people in 120 countries, BirdLife is committed to preventing bird extinctions in the wild, maintaining and improving the status of all bird species, conserving sites and habitats important for birds, sustaining ecological systems, and striving to ensure sustainability of natural resources.

In May 2009, after many years association with BirdLife, Falklands Conservation stepped up to a closer relationship and was approved as a Partner.

We have joined 73 other Partners around the world, each one representing their country, working together on shared priorities, programmes and policies learning from each other to achieve real conservation results.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is the BirdLife Partner in the UK and through the BirdLife network has worked closely with Falklands Conservation for more than a decade:

'We are proud to work in partnership with Falklands Conservation on projects to conserve the unique and wonderful wildlife of the Falkland Islands, and will continue to do so in the future.'

Although this is very appropriate for the Falklands as a UK Overseas Territory, bio-geographically we relate to the South American continent. Now, as a BirdLife Partner, we will be able to play a more

'BirdLife Council acknowledges the conservation work of Falklands Conservation and your tremendous contribution to the fulfilment of the BirdLife Strategy, and warmly congratulate you on your achievements'

– Peter Schei, Chair, BirdLife International Council, May 2009.

active role in their Americas Region (based in Quito, Ecuador) and hope to attend the next Americas gathering of in 2010, provisionally in Panama.

As part of BirdLife International, Falklands Conservation actively supports its strategy to protect the world's birds. Some elements of this, such as safeguarding native forests, are not appropriate, but as a place of international renown for its birdlife, particularly seabirds, birds are and will remain high on our agenda. Under the four main policies of Saving Species, Protecting Sites, Conserving Habitats, and Empowering People we will be working with BirdLife for many years to come caring for the birds of the Falkland Islands.

Saving Species:

BirdLife has 5 Falkland birds rated as **Globally Threatened Species**.

These include the endangered black-browed albatross (**right**). Falklands Conservation actively undertakes work to improve the status and protection of those birds struggling for survival and make an important contribution to BirdLife's Global Seabird Programme.



Andy Swash

Protecting Sites: BirdLife focuses its site protection work through its Important Bird Area system, which is internationally recognised. Falklands Conservation has identified 22 IBAs in the Falkland Islands. The Jason Islands Group (FK07) includes Steeple Jason Island (**below**), site of the largest colony of black-browed albatross in the world and also the Falkland stronghold for the rare striated caracara.



Together for birds and people



Conserving Habitats:

BirdLife seeks to actively manage and restore habitats for birds to ensure that they are safeguarded for the future. Falklands Conservation owns 18 offshore nature reserves, undertakes annual seabird monitoring, produces management

plans and has successfully guided the introduction of measures to reduce the mortality of seabirds at sea. At Volunteer Point (**below**), with advice from Falklands Conservation, measures to limit visitor disturbance have minimised the risks to breeding king penguins.



Tim Carr

Empowering People: BirdLife wishes to empower, mobilise and expand a world-wide constituency of people who care for birds. In the Falklands, our WATCH Group (**right**) encourages local children to care for their environment.

For further information: www.birdlife.org



Rare and Vagrant Birds in the Falkland Islands 2008

Mike Morrison and Alan Henry

This report summarises the sightings of rare and vagrant birds submitted to Falklands Conservation or made by the authors, volunteers and staff of Falklands Conservation during 2008.

Snares Crested Penguin *Eudyptes robustus*

A single bird was seen at the Settlement Rockhopper Rookery on New Island on 30th November and 1st December. A second bird visited the same colony on 24th and 25th December. Significant differences were noted to identify them as two separate individuals. Laurent Demongin, Maud Poisbleau, Georgina Strange and Ian J Strange, in press. Second and Third Records of Snares Penguins (*Eudyptes robustus*) in the Falkland Islands. *Wilson Journal of Ornithology*.

Chinstrap Penguin *Pygoscelis antarcticus*

A single bird was seen on the north coast of Elephant Beach Farm on 8th January by Ali Liddle. On 30th September an oiled bird was found in Stanley Harbour on the slipway at PWD dockyard by Dominic Watson. It was then cleaned and rehabilitated by Falklands Conservation and released.

Great Grebe *Podiceps major*

Kevin Payne saw a single bird offshore in an east-facing bay in Fox Point, Fitzroy, on 19th November.

Sooty Albatross *Phoebastria fusca*

A single bird was seen by Rafael Matias on 1st and 2nd December at the Black-browed Albatross colony on New Island.

Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta*

Alan Henry saw five birds off Cape Pembroke point on 19th March.



Snares Crested Penguin (Laurent Demongin)



Great White Egret, Stanley (Alan Henry)

Soft-plumaged Petrel *Pterodroma mollis*

A single bird was seen by Alan Henry on 19th March off Cape Pembroke.

Georgian Diving Petrel *Pelecanoides georgicus*

A Georgian Diving Petrel was found on the 'Princendam' and handed over to the veterinary department on 7th February. This bird was released in the evening by Alan Henry.

Cocoi Heron *Ardea cocoi*

A single bird was seen on a tussac island in Kelp Lagoon, Fitzroy, on 2nd March by Sue and Mike Morrison.

Great White Egret *Ardea alba*

A single bird was reported by Bernadette Paver on 17th May in the vicinity of Moody Brook. Alan Henry saw it again the next day in Stanley Harbour, landing near the shipwreck the 'Jbelum' before flying over to Fairy Cove. A single bird was seen at Estancia on 13th July by Wayne McCormick.



Georgian Diving Petrel, Stanley (Alan Henry)

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

The first sightings this year were on 18th March of ten birds flying east from the Market Garden by Sue and Mike Morrison. Also on the same day Tom Eggeling saw eight birds flying over Jersey Road towards Tenacres. The next day, Alan Henry saw five on the Rugby Field and seven down the Airport Road. On 5th April Alan saw one at Swan Pond, Cape Dolphin. Fourteen were seen by Les and Jill Harris at Murray Heights, Stanley, on 17th April. Also in April, a flock of twenty to thirty were seen by Hay Miller by the Junction near Falkland Farmers, Stanley. Sue and Mike Morrison saw one bird at North Arm settlement on 20th and 21st April. One was seen at Cape Pembroke by Alan Henry on 10th May, and the next day one was seen at Boxer Bridge by Sue and Mike Morrison. One was seen flying west from Fitzroy Road East by Sue Morrison on 15th May and four birds were seen flying east from FIPASS on 17th May by Mike and Sue Morrison.

Black-faced Ibis *Theristicus melanopis*

A single bird was seen on Sea Lion Island on 10th March by David Morton. This bird was seen again the next day again by David and Simon Neve.

Coscoroba Swan *Coscoroba coscoroba*

Eight birds were seen on Bertha's Beach ponds on 28th April by Steve Copsey. Sue and Mike Morrison saw two birds on an unnamed pond south of the Mare Harbour Road opposite Gull Island Pond on 10th May. All other reports are from the Whale Point/Kelp Lagoon area where there is a small breeding population. Two pairs were successful in rearing young again this season: one brood of six and another of four, despite a very dry summer and the big pond in Whale Point drying out. Kelp Lagoon and Pleasant Roads Pond provide good alternative habitats. Observers - Alan Henry, Sue & Mike Morrison and Micky Reeves.

Cinnamon Teal *Anas cyanoptera*

Alan Henry and Steve Copsey saw a male bird on 26th April on a pond south of the Mare Harbour Road, opposite Gull Island Pond. Margaret Carr also saw a single Cinnamon Teal on a large pond at Fox Point, Fitzroy, on 19th November.

Red Shoveler *Anas platalea*

Three birds were seen on a pond in Cattle Point, North Arm - two males and a female, on 23rd November by Sue and Mike Morrison.

Apomado Falcon *Falco femoralis*

On 31st January Yonatan and Tali Wischnitzer saw a juvenile bird chasing and hassling a Short-eared Owl on Sea Lion Island.

White-winged Coot *Fulica leucoptera*

Alan Henry saw an immature bird on Swan Pond, Cape Dolphin, on 5th April. Another immature was seen on Big Pond, Pebble Island, on 18th and 22nd May by Allan

White. An adult and an immature were seen in the same location on 9th August also by Allan White.

Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*

Tony Chater reported that a single bird arrived on New Island after a very strong wind on 25th November.

Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*

All the reports this year are from their seemingly favoured over wintering spot at Whale Point, Fitzroy. Ten birds near the St Mary on 1st January by Alan Henry, ten birds at Kelp Point on 10th February and three birds on 12th February by Alan Henry and Micky Reeves. Five birds at Kelp Point on 2nd March and five birds on 30th November seen by Sue and Mike Morrison.

(Hudsonian) Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*

Single bird at Kelp Point, Whale Point, Fitzroy, seen by Andy Clark and Alan Henry on 8th December. This bird was seen again on 14th December by Pierre Pistorius.



(Hudsonian) Whimbrel, Kelp Point (Alan Henry)

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

Two birds at the Big Pond, Bleaker Island on 14th and 15th September were reported by Mike Rendell. Two birds were also seen on floodwater at Bertha's Beach on 28th September. They were still in the same location on 30th November, seen by Sue and Mike Morrison and on 8th December by Alan Henry and Andy Clark. Jenny Luxton also reported two birds at Sea Lion Island on 2nd and 3rd October.

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*

A flock of seventeen birds was seen in the evening of 28th October, to the south east of Stanley Airport runway by Alan Henry. They probably had only recently arrived. A few were still present the next evening and a single bird was seen on 2nd November (Sue & Mike Morrison). A single bird was in the same location on 13th November and 3rd December, with two birds on 22nd, 23rd & 29th December (Alan Henry). Nine birds were observed at a peaty pond on the north side of Cape Pembroke on 10th December by Sue and Mike Morrison.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

Alan Henry saw a single bird just through the gate into Cape Pembroke on 29th October. Two birds were seen at Yorke Bay Pond in the evening of 16th November by Alan Henry. These birds were seen again the next day and again on 19th November. Two birds at the ditch by Pleasant Roads Beach on 30th November were sighted by Sue and Mike Morrison. Another bird was seen near Yorke Bay Pond on 3rd December, and on the 5th December a single bird was seen on the ground in the same location and another two birds in flight by Alan Henry. Two of these birds remained in the area and were seen again on 8th Alan Henry and Andy Clark, and 10th and 12th December by Sue and Mike Morrison.

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

On 15th November Manpow Speri sighted and photographed a single bird on the big pond on Carcass Island. This was confirmed by Cliff Walton of Naturetrek.

Eared Dove *Zenaida auriculata*

A report of an Eared Dove on Carcass Island in November. On 30th November Alan Henry saw a single bird near Cape Dolphin house. This bird was still present at the old house site at Cape Dolphin on 7th December and seen by Sue and Mike Morrison, and on 9th December by Alan Henry.

White-crested Elaenia *Elaenia albiceps*

On 2nd March Alan Henry saw the now resident bird on Carcass Island. Two more birds joined the resident bird in November staying until 2009.

Fire-eyed Diucon *Xolmis pyrope*

Allan White reported a single bird at Port Howard settlement in Les and Lena Morrison's garden on 2nd June. It had been seen about the area for the previous three weeks.

Fork-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus savana*

An immature bird seen by Arina Berntsen at Pebble Island Settlement was reported on 11th March but had been about for a couple of days associated with the Dark-faced Ground Tyrants. Sara Berntsen saw a single bird at Albemarle Settlement on 28th November. A bird was also reported from Carcass Island in November.

Chilean Swallow *Tachycineta meyeni*

Tom Eggeling saw a single bird hawking over tussac grass at Cape Dolphin, on 9th March. An immature bird was seen by Alan Henry at Moody Valley Farm on 20th March. The same day, Micky Reeves saw another immature bird at the north end of Surf Bay Beach, and probably the same bird observed feeding over a tidal pool on the beach the next day. Alan Henry saw a single bird flying over kelp beds near the lighthouse at Cape Pembroke on 13th November. Two birds were seen at Gypsy Cove on 15th November and possibly the same two birds were seen in Jersey Road, Stanley, the next day by Keith & Heather Warmington and Jacqui Bailey.



Eared Dove, Cape Dolphin (Alan Henry)

Also on 16th November Margaret Carr saw two birds flying along the beach between Boxer Bridge and FIPASS.

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

On 23rd November Keith & Heather Warmington and Jacqui Bailey observed a single bird at roost at the Lodge on Sea Lion Island.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

A single bird was seen by Alan Henry along the Airport Road on 27th September. Allan Eagle saw two birds at Fitzroy settlement in October. One was later found dead by the manager's house. There was a report of a single bird on Carcass Island.



White-crested Elaenia, Carcass Island (Alan Henry)

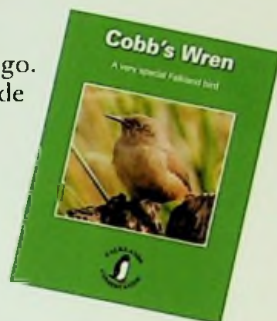


Chilean Swallow, Cape Pembroke (Alan Henry)

NOTICEBOARD

Cobb's Wren

Cobb's wren was named 100 years ago. To celebrate this event and to provide information about this unique Falkland bird, there is to be a special stamp issue, with the first day cover featuring Falklands Conservation. In addition, as part of a grant provided by the Flora and Fauna Flagship Species Fund, there will be a leaflet produced packed with Cobb's wren facts. Both are expected to be available towards the end of the year.



Falkland Pyraloid Moths

A new paper on Falkland moths, co-authored by Dr Alex Jones (up to recently our Invertebrates Officer) and Dr Andrew Wakeham-Dawson has been published. It describes three of our resident pyraloid moths (common and widespread throughout the Islands during the austral summer) and some migrants from South America. One species, *Crambus elongates* is a Chilean species previously unrecorded from the Falklands. Work is continuing sorting out many samples collected over the past five years and more papers on butterflies, moths and hoverflies will be published soon, along with a revised checklist of Falkland insects.

Lepidoptera of the Falkland Islands: (1) Pyraloidea. Andrew Wakeham-Dawson and Alex G Jones. *Entomologists' Record. J. Var.* 121 (2009).

New Native Plants Project

This project, funded by the Overseas Territories Environment Programme, follows on from our Plants Conservation Project. We are delighted that Dr Rebecca Upson will be continuing her work with us to undertake this new initiative which will concentrate on the conservation action necessary to protect the native plants and habitats of the Falkland Islands, in particular those that are threatened or endemic.

It will focus on 18 identified Important Plant Areas, at the same time setting up monitoring systems and implementing both species and habitat action plans. It will develop a national vegetation classification system to enable improved co-ordination and understanding between the conservation and agricultural communities. There will be a special effort made to encourage restoration of native plant habitats supported by a small-scale plant and seed nursery. A long-term monitoring programme of tussac grass will also be set up at sites, which

Thanks for your Support

We are enormously grateful to all our members who contributed to the recent Wildlife Appeal. This raised a total of £2,300 which will be used to support fieldwork in the coming season.

We also thank everyone who came to our recent Art Exhibition in London and particularly those who purchased a picture!

New: Set of 4 Falkland wildlife pin badges: Cobb's wren, Striated caracara, Orca and Black-browed albatross. £5 from our webshop: www.falklandsconservation.com



have been replanted, sites used as winter-feed for livestock and also where natural recovery is taking place after removal of grazing. It will take forward the study of lower plants, notably lichens, which are an exceptionally rich part of the Falklands flora and generally aims to develop a greater awareness of the Islands' native plants.



Dr Rebecca Upson makes a herbarium collection of the scarce endemic, silvery buttercup, on Mount Osborne. M Carr.

Falkland Steamer Duck – Unique to These Islands



Falkland steamer duck: large, loud and unmistakable. Both male and female are scaly grey above with a white belly. The adult male has a grey-white head (old males have a completely white head) with a large orange bill. The smaller female (see photo) has a dark brown head, a white stripe behind the eye and a greenish-yellow bill. *Tim Mason.*

The Falkland steamer duck *Tachyeres brachypterus* is only found in the Falkland Islands. It is a bulky duck, with disproportionately short wings, incapable of sustained flight but expert at swimming and diving. When it wishes to move quickly it 'steams' over the water, paddling rapidly with its large feet, beating the water with its wings and making a lot of spray and noise.

The logger duck, as it is known locally, is resident throughout the year around the coasts of the Falklands, especially where large kelp beds occur in sheltered harbours or creeks. It has been seen up to 3 miles (5 km) offshore. Freshwater ponds are often used in the evenings, and immature birds will gather in flocks of up to a hundred or more at favoured promontories and in bays. It feeds on marine invertebrates, including crayfish and mussels. Nests are made in a depression in vegetation, lined with down and grass. Usually 5–8 buff eggs are laid though as many as 12 ducklings have been seen in one brood. The mortality rate of young ducklings is high from attacks by kelp gulls and skuas, and adults are sometimes taken by sea lions.

The estimated population is up to 16,000 breeding pairs. However, because it cannot fly, it is vulnerable to pollution and oil spills, poisonous algae, and marine debris. Keeping the waters around the Islands free of these threats will ensure the continued and charismatic presence of the Falkland Steamer Duck.

