



Falklands Conservation 30th Anniversary

Falklands Conservation, the charity taking action for nature in the Falkland Islands, celebrates its 30th Anniversary this year. The organisation was established in 1979, and has since become an integral part of the Falkland Islands and its community. In 1979 whilst visiting the Falklands Sir Peter Scott and other naturalists decided to set up a UK registered charity, The Falkland



Islands Foundation (FIF), to protect the Islands' wildlife and its historic wrecks. This organisation progressed to Falklands Conservation with many of the original advisory members still involved. This includes Robin Woods MBE whom achieved this honorary award last year through his dedicated work with the environment in the Falkland Islands.

100 years of Peter Scott

Sir Peter Scott could be described as a visionary and fore leader in conservation. Well before it was widely acknowledged Scott recognised threats posed to the environment by human activity and worked to safeguard habitats and inspired people. In his legacy Scott established the first wetland centre at Slimbridge, and working for the BBC he involved himself in many international initiatives. He was the founder chair of the WWF and developed the IUCN Red Data Books which defines the status of endangered species.



Sir Peter Scott whilst in the Falklands

Visiting Antarctica he was determined it should remain a wilderness, and his tireless lobbying paid off when in 1991 the Madrid Protocol was signed, designating the Antarctic wilderness a natural reserve land protecting it for 50 years. Scott was recognised for his services to conservation being the first person for this service to be knighted.

200 years of Charles Darwin



Charles Darwin as a young man

2009 marks the centenary of Darwin's birth (February 12th) and 150 years since the publication of *The Origin of species*. Darwin arrived in the Falklands in 1833, aged 24 years old, and was the first of two trips he would make to the islands aboard the *Beagle*. Whilst in the Falklands Darwin collected a range of zoological and botanical specimens and noted down wildlife he encountered. Descriptions included the behaviour of the curious Johnny Rook and of the then common but puzzling and soon to be extinct warrah. His fascination with the geology of the Islands was prominent from his personal notes and perhaps the most flattering of his accounts of the Falklands. Darwin's scientific discoveries and theories established the basis of modern evolutionary theories today.

100 years of the Cobb's wren

It is exactly 100 years after this little characteristic endemic bird of the Falklands was first named as its own species. Cobb's wren (*Troglodytes cobbi*) is found only on offshore islands free of introduced rodents, where it forages on boulder beaches. During Darwin's visit to East Falklands, no mention of this bird was described, as with other naturalists on the islands during the 19th Century. It is highly likely the Cobb's wren had already disappeared from the mainland with the prior arrival of rats, mice and the overgrazing of tussac.



The Falkland's endemic Cobb's wren

Today it is confined to some 57 rodent free islands in the Falklands archipelago, with an estimated population of 6,000 pairs. In 2008 a workshop addressing the action priorities of protecting this bird was held in Stanley with the result of a species action plan to be implemented from 2009 onwards.

Surveying the Edges of the Chart: Two Expeditions to Remote Island Groups

Distanced by 221 kilometers, it is hard to find two points of the Falkland Islands farther apart than the Jason Island and Sea Lion Island groups. Compared to the rest of the archipelago, these two clumps of islands are exceedingly remote and heavily exposed to oceanic conditions. These qualities make them of particular interest ecologically, and it was with great excitement that the Shallow Marine Surveys Group (SMSG) surveyed both in the past months.

Over thirteen days, a group of eleven people surveyed the shorelines and the shallows of the north-western Jason Island group. The crystal clear waters showcased towering kelp plants that cast shadows over rocks pink with coralline algae. Great numbers of crabs, snails, and sea urchins crawled over just one 40 square meter area, divers found 65 sea stars representing 6 different species.

a rainbow carpet of sponges and tunicates. Within just one 40 square meter area, divers found 65 sea stars representing 6 different species.

Though the Jasons are famous for the albatross that breed there in the summer, the warming waters also cue reproduction of the marine fauna. Scientists Judith Brown, Wetjens Dimmlich, and Dr. Vlad Laptikhovskiy all witnessed a female squid laying her eggs, an event never before observed and documented for this commercially important species.



A spawning female Loligo squid captured in action by photographer Jude

Several weeks after the expedition's return from the Jason Islands, Drs Karen Neely and Vlad Laptikhovskiy were invited to join the Antarctic Research Trust trustees on a weekend trip to Sea Lion Island. By using the same survey methods at both island groups, the fauna of these two extremes of the Falklands could be compared.



The superbly bright and colourful underwater world around the Jason Islands, pink and orange anemones sit camouflaged on carpets of pink algae

The comparisons revealed some interesting differences. Though dominated by large kelp stands as in the Jason Islands, the bedrock of the Sea Lion Islands is layered in algae of every colour and growth form, but the abundance of animals is much decreased. Where the sea stars of the Jasons were numerous and diverse, the same area in these south-eastern islands usually contained only 10 individuals representing 2 species. Also striking was the complete absence of sea urchins and brittle stars that often dominated the landscape of the Jason Islands.

These observations of community differences have provoked numerous ecological questions. Are the algae absent from the Jasons because of the abundance of grazing sea urchins?

Are the urchins and brittle stars missing from the Sea Lion Islands because of remoteness, or colder waters, or some other oceanographic factor? Answering these questions will be one of the goals of SMSG in the coming months.

The differences in marine fauna between the Jason Island and Sea Lion Island groups highlight the diversity of life and variety in habitats within the Falkland Islands' shallow marine environment. From opposite sides of the Falklands, they provide two snapshots of the animals and the ecology of this system.

As future expeditions examine even more of the islands, these snapshots will combine into a mosaic of the life beneath the waves.



Falkland's Nature goes Audio

Arriving to the Falklands, just as most of us were recovering from our Christmas slumber, were two radio reporters from BBCR4. Keen to capture the sounds and stories of the Falkland's wildlife a number of local naturalists, conservationists and experts in their fields, including FC staff, were interviewed as part of the BBCR4's Living World Series in the Falkland Islands.

Presenter Lionel Kelleway and researcher Kirsty Henderson had a whistle stop tour of the islands recording a series of 5 documentaries highlighting some of the Falklands most notable wildlife: rockhopper penguins, black-browed albatross, striated caracara, seals, and tussac grass and it's associated fauna. The team visited a number of locations to record the sounds of the wildlife including Kidney Island, New Island and Sea Lion Island.

The series will be aired on BBCR4 throughout February and March. You can email FC for further information and for times and dates.

Email: info@conservation.org.fk

A new study published in Bird Conservation International this month has revealed that the Northern Rockhopper Penguin *Eudyptes moseleyi* – which is principally found on UK territories in the South Atlantic – has declined by 90% over the last 50 years.

Historical records estimate that millions of penguins used to occur on Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island but have dramatically reduced their numbers in the last half century. Declines at Gough since the 1950s are equivalent to losing 100 birds every day for the last 50 years.

The Northern Rockhopper Penguin population on Gough is estimated at 32,000 to 65,000 pairs, with another 40,000 to 50,000 pairs on Tristan. These two strongholds account for more than 80% of the world population, the rest are found on two French-administered islands, St Paul and Amsterdam in the Indian Ocean, and are declining just as rapidly.

Cetacean Watch 2009 needs your help

Falklands Conservation has been recording cetacean sightings around the Falklands since 2005, and to date have collected over 6000 individual sightings. The information is stored in a database held at FC, the only one of its kind in the Falklands. Because there is so little known about the whales and dolphins in the Falkland waters it is hoped that with the database we can build up a picture of their distributions, areas where they are frequently visiting and feeding or mating behaviours, something we do not know enough about.

Where and when to see cetaceans

Commersons - All year, inshore waters.

Peale's - All year, inshore waters.

Fin - Nov - Jan, Offshore waters.

Sei - Nov- Apr, Sea Lion Is, Cape Dolphin, Berkeley Sound, Saunders, Carcass Is.

Minke - Sep - Apr, East Falklands shelf waters.

Orca - Sep- Apr, centring around Sea Lion Is.

Pilot whale - Apr - Sep, Oceanic waters.



You can pick up cetacean recording forms from the FC office

The Cetacean Watch relies on the help of the public to pass on the sightings that you have seen... You can get involved in the work by collecting recording forms and calendars from the FC office or by emailing in your sightings to info@conservation.org.fk or by downloading forms from our website.

A Rocky Road Down



Northern Rockhopper penguin



Southern Rockhopper penguin

For further information visit Bird Life International www.birdlife.org

These findings are not dissimilar to the Southern Rockhopper penguin *Eudyptes chrysolome* found in the Falkland Islands.

At the most recent census in 2005/6 conducted by FC the total Falkland Islands population was estimated to be 211,000 breeding pairs with the three most important colonies on Beauchêne Island, Steeple Jason and Grand Jason.

The earliest estimate of numbers in the Falklands is 1.5 million breeding pairs, following reviews of data collected by the government naturalist in 1933. This would equate to the Falklands having lost 86% of the population to date, a startling similar trend to that reported for its northern counterpart.

The exact causes of the declines for both are unknown and thought to be a combination of factors including climate change, shifts in marine ecosystems and over fishing.

FC Beach Clean at Whale Bone Cove

In January FC held a beach clean at Whale Bone Cove, Stanley. The clean began in the morning with a good turn out of enthusiastic helpers, their dogs and even pets lambs. By mid day we had scoured all along the beach opposite the Lady Elizabeth wreck and all around up to the Narrows and more inland to clean the coastal greens and in roadside ditches.



Keen beach cleaners tidy up Whale Bone Cove

With one full skip of rubbish and debris by the end of the morning the hard workers were rewarded by a BBQ lunch and refreshments.

Amongst the rubbish and debris collected we found some of the more typical marine litter from the larger items like old tyres and oil drums, to plastic bottles, bags, beer bottles and cans to plastic and packaging and rope washed up. More unusually however were the hundreds of smaller plastic items hidden in amongst the washed up seaweed, and included toothpaste tube tops and plastic straws on ear cleaning buds!



Cotton Bud Ear Cleaners - 100's of them!!!



Finished with a BBQ lunch



After the morning's collection of rubbish we could surmise that a lot of waste on the coastal commons and in the road side ditches are either being blown there from town, (lots of plastic bags) or are a direct result of litter polluting by visitors to the area (cans, beer bottles, plastic bottles crisp packets), (locals and tourists). That plastic packaging materials, ropes, oil drums and marine related litter

are most likely washed down from FIPASS and boats in the harbour, and other docks and jetties in Stanley, and that the cotton buds are still a mystery.

The message to take home.... Please help keep Stanley clean and tidy and remember what you flush down the toilet is likely to appear somewhere on a beach soon near you.

FC would like to thank every one that came along and helped out, FIC for providing the skips, Andy Williams of Falkland Islands Tours and Travel for generously providing the BBQ food.

All in all it was a very productive morning with a great BBQ (thanks to Dan Fowler).

Falklands Conservation

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www.falklandsconservation.org.fk

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