



Stanley Office:
 Jetty Centre,
 P.O. Box 26, Stanley,
 Falkland Islands, FIQQ 1ZZ
 Phone: +500 22247 Fax: +500 22288
 email: grant.munro@conservation.org.fk
 www.falklandsconservation.com

Albatross Shield 2007

Falklands Conservation held their annual golf tournament at The Stanley Golf Club on Easter Sunday, with over 16 golfers teeing off at 9.30am.



Lucas Biggs preparing to start the tournament.

The three club stableford took a little over 4 hours for everyone to finish and thankfully the weather was very forgiving. There had been some fantastic prizes donated for the competition and the raffle. Raffle prizes had been donated by Falklands Brasserie, Malvina House Hotel, Shorty's Diner, The Gift Shop, The FIDF, Quark Fishing Ltd, British International, Seafish Chandlery and Warrah Design.

The Golf Tournament was won by Sarah Bowles who collected the



Graeme Hay, Troyd Bowles and Adam Granville.

beautiful albatross picture donated by Julie Bellhouse and the Falklands Conservation Albatross Shield from Grant Munro.

Rod Tuckwood collected second prize which was a fleece top donated by SeAled PR and Glen Ross came third in the competition overall. Cable and Wireless donated phone cards for the nearest to the pin and the longest drive which were won by Glen Ross and Troyd Bowles. Glen Ross and Adam Granville won the Birdie money. Falklands Conservation would like to thank all those who took part in the Albatross Shield; those who donated prizes, golfers and everyone who supported Falklands Conservation by purchasing raffle tickets. Over three hundred pounds was raised for the

Albatross and Petrel Programme. We would also like to thank the Stanley Golf Club for allowing us to hold the tournament and making the kind donation to the cost of the tournament charges.



Sarah Bowles being presented with her winning prizes by Grant Munro.



Rod Tuckwood, who won second place in the competition.

If any members would prefer to receive their Newsletter by email could you please contact anna.shepherd@conservation.org.fk

All newsletters will be sent in **PDF format** so any member receiving the newsletter must have **Acrobat Reader**.

Rat Eradication in South Georgia

South Georgia is now returning to normal after a six-week visit by the 'rat men', under the guise of GSGSSI Habitat Restoration Officer Darren Christie and New Zealand consultant Derek Brown. The purpose of the visit was to carry out fieldwork to better inform the planning of the Government's Habitat Restoration Programme, which aims to see the eradication of invasive species from the island.

The South Georgia Habitat Restoration Programme is specifically targeting invasive mammals (rats, mice and reindeer) that are all shown to have a significant negative impact on native flora and fauna. The presence of rats is particularly devastating to birdlife, with the endemic South Georgia Pipit completely excluded along the 65% of coastline that is home to rats, and burrowing petrels either excluded or limited in numbers by predation. Reindeer have a significant negative impact on tussac grass, which is the key habitat on South Georgia – it is in effect the 'oak tree' of the South Atlantic. In some areas grazing has led to the complete loss of tussac, which in turn has encouraged the spread of introduced grasses.

The fieldwork consisted of many aspects, including radio tracking of live rats, testing of blank biomarker bait (bait without poison) to assess the risk of non target poisoning of birds, visiting of potential preliminary eradication sites and observation of deer impact. It was important to visit as much of the island as possible, to assess rodent levels and to ensure that fieldwork sites were as representative of the island as possible.

A live trapping line of 30 traps at 25m intervals was set and baited, then monitored on a daily basis. For over a week, bait was taken from around the traps (placed there to accustom the rats to

the presence of the traps) but no animals were caught. This was anticipated, as rats are known to be neophobic (wary of new objects). However, after a patient wait nine rats were caught in one night, followed by average daily catches of about five rats. In total, fifteen rats were gently fitted with small radio collars, using a neck collar. Some rats managed to slip their collars over a two week period, and these were recovered and redeployed. The rats were tracked on a daily basis, and their positions marked with a GPS unit. This data will now be analysed to show the home range size of the animals, and allow the methodology of any potential eradication to be better informed.

The blank biomarker bait taken to South Georgia was spread around in easily observable areas, and monitored for any feeding by birds. During the fieldwork, bait was also offered to birds as and when they were encountered. Observations didn't reveal anything to be immediately concerned about, which is encouraging. Clearly more work will be carried out to ensure there is as minimal a chance of poisoning of birds as possible, should an eradication occur.

Preliminary observations on the ground imply that rats on the island are at relatively low densities compared to other eradications around the world, and that whilst they are fairly widespread there is an extremely high association with tussac. All this information is extremely valuable in informing the best way forward for the project.

In all, the fieldwork was a great success. Thanks must go to all on the island for their company and assistance, especially to Ainslie Wilson for her assistance continuing the tracking work in our absence, those offering to continue it over the winter and the boat crews for transport. Thanks also to the Gregory Michaev and MV Pharos

for their assistance in dropping us in more remote locations, and getting us back again. Darren Christie.



The Rat Men - Derek Brown and Darren Christie



A rat wearing a radio tracking device.



Darren Christie with the King penguin colony at St Andrew's Bay



Derek Brown admiring the view of St Andrews Bay

Turkey Vultures (*Carthartes aura*) in the Falkland Islands – Part I

Greetings one and all! Grab a cup of tea, settle down somewhere comfortable, and I'll tell you all a little bit about myself as well as my interest and research in the less-than-lovable Turkey Vultures of the Falkland Islands.



I'm from the U.S.A. and I received my bachelor's degree in Biology from a small college in the New England state of Maine. My fascination with birds first began during birding hikes in the forests of Michigan with my dad as a boy, was strengthened by the environmental education I received in the 6th grade, and was cemented by an ornithology course I took, which was taught by a flamboyant, humorous, and inspiring professor at the local community college, while I was in high school. Since graduating college in 2003, the bulk of my jobs have been short-term field research projects ranging from a California Condor restoration and monitoring project to a Brewer's Sparrow demography and nesting success study. On the more personal side, I enjoy whiling away my hours with a smattering of outdoor activities such as hiking and camping, in addition to reading, writing, travelling, and the occasional game of chess. But enough about me, I'll move to the periphery of the spotlight and share the illumination with my study subject.

The Turkey Vulture is the most widely distributed vulture in the New World, and breeds from southern Canada down to the southernmost portion of South America. It is almost exclusively a scavenger, weighing in at only about 2 kg despite its large size, and tends to forage solitarily and opportunistically

on a wide range of both wild and domestic carrion. The Turkey Vulture forages while soaring at >30-50m above ground and finds its food using its highly developed sense of smell as well as sight. The species is generally believed to be a beneficial scavenger due to:

- (1) the large numbers of animal carcasses they remove each year.
- (2) the role of their powerful digestive tract in destroying pathogens before they produce spores or are passed alive by other scavengers.



Turkey Vulture - Alan Henry

The ecology of the Turkey Vultures of the Falkland Islands has never before been studied, and is interesting on multiple fronts. This species is typically migratory at high latitudes, yet is essentially imprisoned on the Falkland Islands due to the high degree of danger inherent in long water crossings for a soaring migrant such as the Turkey Vulture. The occurrence, then, of this bird in an environment that it would normally vacate during the winter raises questions about its ability to survive here, the answers to which may hold clues to our understanding of other widespread or migrant species. Furthermore, knowledge of the ecology of Turkey Vultures in this fringe environment may expand the frontiers of what is known about this versatile species.

My research this winter (from end of April to end of July) adds to six weeks of field work last summer, and focuses on:

- (1) providing a Falkland Islands popu-

lation estimate.

(2) beginning work on a pilot banding programme to determine home ranges and dispersal.

(3) learning from and speaking to farmers about raptor interactions on their farms.



Turkey Vulture - Alan Henry

This represents the initial phase of Turkey Vulture research, and future research will likely look more deeply into foraging, among other topics. The population estimate will be based on three survey methods. Firstly, I'm conducting road surveys on both East and West Falkland. Road surveys, as expected, entail counting vultures and recording their distance from the road while driving at a constant speed. Secondly, to sample vulture density on farms away from main arteries of travel, I'm conducting point counts where I walk to several locations in the course of one day and record the number of Turkey Vultures I see during three five-minute intervals at each point. Lastly, to protect against any inland or coastal bias to Turkey Vulture numbers, I'm collecting data on vulture density with shoreline walks.

So if you see a muddy, red land rover moving exasperatingly slowly in the camp, then it's probably me in search of my prey. Say hello, I'll be happy for some non-scavenger interaction.

Updates on research to come later...

Brandon Breen

Falklands Conservation “Camp-Smoko” Tours

In May Grant Munro, Falklands Conservation’s Executive Officer in the Falklands, and Brian Summers, representing the European Union funded South Atlantic Invasive Species Project, took the opportunity to catch up with farmers on both East and West Falklands.

Grant and Brian flew out to Port Howard on the 8th May and proceeded down to Port Stephens to stop the night with Paul & Diane Robertson. Over the following two days they made their way slowly back north visiting South Harbour, Albemarle, Fox Bay, and finally Hill Cove before returning to Port Howard. At Port Howard there was an informal meeting with residents at turn to and a brief visit to Bold Cove.

The drive around on the East was undertaken a week later with two days covering Lafonia (Goose Green, North Arm and Walker Creek), Port Sussex, San Carlos and Port San Carlos before returning to town. Douglas, Hope Cottage and Estancia and finally Brookfield and Long Island where covered by day trips from Stanley.

Grant Munro explained that the trip was an ideal opportunity to meet with farmers informally over a cup of tea and to discuss general issues of concern.

“We went more to listen than to talk and discussed general concerns in camp as much as conservation issues. It is sometimes easy sitting in an office in Stanley, or only getting out in the summer weather to count seabird and marine mammal colonies, to lose touch with the issues of day-to-day life in the camp. But if conservation efforts are to be successful this will not occur in Stanley, or just within the restricted confines of national nature reserve but will rely on the cooperation and assistance of farmers. Landowners are on their farms year round and are in the best position to know what is happening on their land. They have a personal interest and pride in the wildlife and want to see this thrive. However conservation must be placed against the daily workload and financial concerns of running a farm. Most in camp are running fast to just stay still and time and resources are just not there to deal with the non-essentials further down the list. In some instances there is conflict for example with turkey vultures and Johnny rooks or with upland geese and ruddy-headed geese on forage crops and pasture improvement. But if a realistic compromise, that is fair and sustainable for both the farmer and conservation, is to be achieved, we need to know the context and also the limitations that people are working to. This was an important step to gain a better understanding.”

Brian Summers took the opportunity to introduce the South Atlantic Invasive Species Project, an initiative run through the EU Economic Development Fund. The priorities of the project are still to be set, and this will be done at a workshop held just before farmer’s week, however Brian took the chance to gather the views of individuals as to how they saw the priorities on their land, get initial indications on the distribution of some species and understand better the practicalities of control or eradication. Thistles, calafate, earwigs and methods for better checking the spread of settlement gorse were all touched upon.

Falklands Conservation are grateful for the time taken to chat and the hospitality of everyone we visited, especially those with who we stopped the night. In addition a special thanks to Port Howard for help with the flights, Mike and Jacqui for the use of their rover on the West and Lisa for assistance with the logistics. I now know who has the best “buns” in camp!

Falklands Conservation

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The Newsletter is edited by Anna Shepherd

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