

## Who's out and about with Conservation?

Profile: Alastair Wilson.



**Occupation:** Ecologist.

**Where do you live?** Anywhere that work takes me.

**When did you arrive in the Falklands?** October

**How long are you here for?** End of February

**Why volunteer in the Falklands?** I like remote islands and am interested in S. hemisphere wildlife especially penguins and albatross.

**Favourite aspect of the Falklands?** The wildlife, and those rat free islands.

**Work done so far with FC?** Island surveys in Salvador waters, coastal bird surveys in Adventure Sound with SMSG, Botanical surveys on West Falkland with Rebecca Upson and joining the SMSG trip to Sea Lion/ Beauchêne Island.

**Global Conservation concerns?** Climate change and invasive species

**Dream job?** Working on Bird Island in South Georgia.

**Alastair, from Pembrokeshire in Wales is in between his job where he works in Shetland as a reserve warden at the Herminess and the Keen of Hamar Reserves which is home to 24,353 breeding pairs of gannets.**

## Last Minute Christmas Shopping.....

Pop into the FC shop



**NEW:** Neck warmers  
Black, navy and grey



**NEW:** Re-usable shopping bags

**Racy Pink is "this season's" colour, a must to be seen in at the races. Pink hooded zip up tops, long sleeved t-shirts, polo shirts and camisoles.**



**Perfect for the wife, girlfriend or daughters**



**NEW:** Performance outdoor jackets. Rainproof- windproof.  
Red, Black, Navy

**FC Shop will be open the week before Christmas during office hours and lunch-time at the Jubilee Villas.**



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9 & 10



# Newsletter

December 09



## Seabirds' summer progress

Throughout November and early December the seabird monitoring programme run by Falklands Conservation determines the numbers of seabirds breeding at selected colonies. The programme is led by Dr Alastair Baylis, FC's new conservation officer and assisted by a number of local and overseas volunteers. The study colonies include: Steeple Jason, Sea Lion Island, Volunteer Point and Berkeley Sound, Gypsy Cove, Berthas Beach, Bull Point, New Haven and colonies at Race Point and Walker Creek.

### Black-browed albatross

Breeding pairs at the study colonies at Steeple Jason declined by 8.5% from 2008 with numbers below the recorded average from the last 5 years. The Falklands is the strong hold of the global population with around 400,000 breeding pairs. The full Island census next year will give us more information on the wider trends of the Falkland's population.

### Gentoo penguins

Breeding pairs declined from a total 20,932 pairs in 2008, to 15,375 in 2009 (24.5% decline). Gentoo penguins have had remarkably high breeding success in the past few season and despite the drop in numbers from last year the number of breeding pairs in 2009 still remains above the average over the last six seasons.

### Rockhopper penguins

At the monitored colonies at Rookery Sounds, Fanning Head, Berkeley Sound, Sea Lion Island and Steeple Jason the total breeding pairs declined from 4229 pairs in 2008, to 3999 in 2009 (5.4% decline). Despite the small decline the number of breeding pairs in 2009 remains above the average derived from the last four seasons, which is an encouraging sign for this species that has shown serious global declines in the last century.

### King penguins (Volunteer Point)

The number of King penguin chicks counted in November (last years chicks) is 419. Whilst the king's have shown a steady increase in numbers over the years a number of chicks died

over the winter, (chicks are left to fast on land whilst the parents go to sea) and this may have been due to abnormal conditions, lack of parents returning to feed the chicks or higher predation levels to normal.

Year	Chick No.
2009	419
2008	594
2006	533
2000	275
1995	314
1990	206
1980	38

FC would like to thank the continued support and help from all the landowners who kindly allow access to the colonies. The FISMP programme acknowledges the continued support from the Falkland Islands Government.

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Plant Conservation Project: Dr Rebecca Upson  
Shallow Marine Survey Group: Dr Karen Neely  
Education Officer: Ali Liddle

[www.falklandsconservation.com](http://www.falklandsconservation.com)

Email: [info@conservation.org.fk](mailto:info@conservation.org.fk)



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Falklands Conservation Company Number 3661322 Charity Number 1073859



## Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

We look forward to sharing our news with you throughout 2010



# Kew Royal Botanic Garden Horticulturists in Stanley

By Marcella Corcoran

Just in case you saw us around and were wondering.....Kit Strange and I are from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UK, were in Stanley for two weeks to work with Falklands Conservation and Stanley Growers.



RBG Kew, Marcella Corcoran  
Collecting cutting material of *Bolax gummifera* (Balsam Bog)

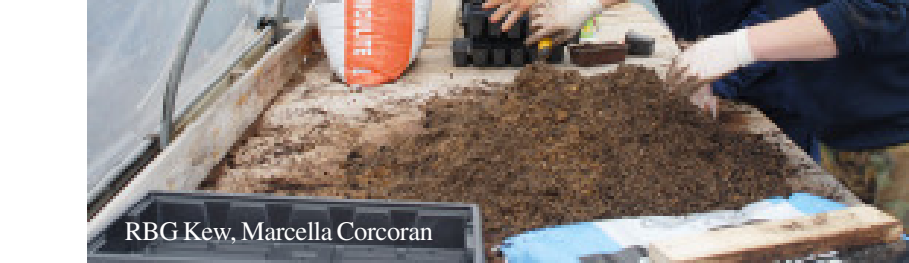
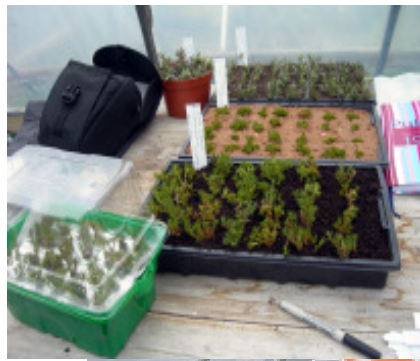


It was part of our on-going collaboration with Falkland's Conservation (FC), and part of the Falkland Islands Native Plants Programme, headed up by FC botanist, Dr. Rebecca Upson. Our work focused on the development of a partnership between Falklands Conservation and Stanley Growers Plant Nursery to propagate Falkland Islands' native plants. We hope that these will be available for everyone to use in their gardens as well as for any continuing or future restoration work within the Falkland Islands (e.g. tussac planting and restoring areas where mine clearance has occurred).

Seeds collected in the Falkland Islands 1-2 years ago, were delivered to Kew's Millennium Seed Bank (MSB) in the UK, where they were cleaned, tested for viability and stored.

The Seed Bank acts as a long-term insurance to protect and preserve plant species. Seeds from many countries around the world is banked at the MSB. The seeds can be used for conservation, restoration and research. One hundred seeds from 24 species originally collected in the Falklands were reunited with their home, when Kit Strange brought the seed back from the MSB. They have been carefully sown at Stanley Growers, and at our departure on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, there was already some germination!

Kit and I worked with Rebecca Upson, Cynthia Williams and Tim and Jan Miller to sow seeds, as well as



RBG Kew, Marcella Corcoran  
Kit Strange and Cynthia Williams making a seed mix prior to sowing seeds.

collect some cutting material from the wild which has also been placed into care at Stanley Growers. The germination of seeds and the growth from cuttings is being monitored. Amazingly we now have 38 Falkland Island species in cultivation at Stanley Growers, several of which are endemic - only found in the Falkland Islands. These include exciting cushion plants such as balsam bog, three Azorellas and stonecrop plants. Others include the wonderful fachine plant, mountain berry, Christmas bush, Falklands lavender and blue grass. We enjoyed the opportunity to discuss our work and the importance of plants during a radio interview, a presentation and a talk to the Year 9 class at the local school.



RBG Kew, Marcella Corcoran  
Kit and Cynthia potting *Poa flabellata* (Tussac grass) tillers at Stanley growers



It was a hectic two weeks but very rewarding for two horticulturists in this botanically fascinating country. We would like to thank all the staff at the Falklands Conservation Office for their hospitality and kindness, especially Rebecca Upson, who worked tirelessly to make our stay and the work flow smoothly. Sincere thanks go to Tim and Jan Miller at Stanley Growers as without their dedication to the project it would not have happened. Special thanks to Cynthia Williams who worked with us enthusiastically for the whole time. Many thanks also to Grant Munro and Martin Collins for their warm hospitality and sharing their houses and local knowledge with us. We look forward to returning to the Falkland Islands soon.

## Watch Group's summer programme starts

The Watch Group (Conservation's junior members) began their summer programme with a Christmas BBQ and treasure hunt at Cape Pembroke this month. The treasure hunt led them to the lighthouse and then ended with Santa stopping by to drop off some presents. The group of 50 children has a busy summer ahead of them with trips to Weddell Island, Port San Carlos, Bleaker Island Hill Cove, Port Edgar and Dunbar and George Island.



Standard Chartered Bank in the Falklands sponsors the Watch Group, and they kindly contribute towards the necessary funding for the children to get out and about on the trips over the summer.



Watch Group at Cape Pembroke waiting for Santa's sack of goodies

## Year 6 take on calafate

As part of the invasive species awareness programme running over November Year 6 at the Infant and Junior School have visited Kidney Island, Gypsy Cove and Port Sussex to learn about invasive species in the Falklands.

The trip to Port Sussex was the most hands on with the group tackling for themselves the job of controlling and cutting back calafate. Calafate, *Berberis buxifolia*, is a hardy evergreen shrub native to South America and widespread in Patagonia. The stems and branches have large thorns and the shrub produces a berry in the autumn. In the Falklands calafate is an invasive plant, at Port Sussex and Island Harbour plants, for example, have spread along the fence line as birds eat the berries and then use the fence lines as perches. The only effective way to remove calafate is to completely kill the plant by using a specific targeting weed killer or manually removing the plant and all root material.



Come on girls..get working!!

Year 6 took the second option putting in some serious elbow grease to cut down the branches of the calafate bushes and clear a small area at Port Sussex. The concept of the programme was to demonstrate the impacts of invasive species in the Falklands such as rats and calafate and how simple solutions such as island rat eradication programmes and calafate management can reverse the harmful effects and restore the natural balance to the ecosystem. The programme was funded by the Environmental Study Budget and run by Falklands Conservation and the Infant and Junior School. Thanks to Brian Summers from the South Atlantic Invasive Species Project for his input and everyone else that helped out.



Year 6 helping to clear calafate, an invasive plant, at Port Sussex in November.



# The Conservation of Rockhopper Penguins in the Falklands.

## Trends of the population in the Falklands

Southern rockhopper penguins breed at some 35 sites around the Falkland Islands, with colony distribution predominantly to the west and north of the islands. Rockhopper penguins breed on rocky cliffs and platforms with shallow simple nests, often in association with black-browed albatross or king shags.

According to historical data, the Falklands' population was at 1.5 million breeding pairs in the early 1930s. The most recent population census carried out by Falklands Conservation was 211,00 breeding pairs in 2005. This represents a massive 80% decline in the Falklands population over this time.

Since 1987, Falklands Conservations' FISMP, has undertaken annual monitoring at specific sites and 5-yearly census of the entire population (1995, 2000, and 2005), with the next census scheduled for 2010/11.

The long term monitoring of this species since 1987 has shown that mass declines have occurred due to events such as a harmful algae bloom (red tide) in 2002/03 and periodic mass starvations during the breeding period.

## Understanding the causes of population trends

The next important step in understanding rockhopper penguin populations is to investigate the causes of the declines. A two-year study began this November at Steeple Jason and will concentrate on tracking foraging routes and studying the diet at some of the largest colonies of rockhopper penguins in the Falklands. The study will tie in with the 2010/11 next full island census.



Studying rockhopper penguins at Steeple Jason in November (the head is covered by a hood made from an old sock to calm the bird)

## A Rockhopper penguins Workshop Report

In 2008 a number of experts from around the world met at Edinburgh Zoo to hold an International Workshop aimed at developing a conservation action plan for declining populations of rockhopper penguins around the globe, and particularly in the South Atlantic.

### Concern over populations

Over 3 generations (37 years) the numbers of the southern rockhopper penguin has declined by 34% and northern rockhopper penguins by 57%. The southern rockhopper penguin is listed *Vulnerable* and a current world estimate of 1.23 million pairs. The Falklands host 20% of the world population.

### Causes of Decline

The workshop identified a number of potential causes that maybe contributing towards declines - tourism, land-based predation, pandemic disease, pollution, fishery interactions, shortage 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 that may lead to increased competition between food resources or increased predation at sea. It is likely that a combination of factors are at work, rather than just one single cause, although food shortages are involved at many of the sites.

### Action in the Falkland Islands

Specific actions for rockhopper penguins in the Falklands include the continuation of the 5 year full island population survey, and in addition the need to monitor wildlife health and have an updated oil contingency plan for the Islands is emphasized. Also the continuation of research, such as the demographic study at New Island and that new study sites should also be established. Foraging and diet studies are also highlighted as important areas of research.

### Species Action Plan for rockhopper penguins in the Falklands

With current research aimed at filling data gaps in foraging and diet studies by both New Island Conservation Trust and Falklands Conservation, this will lead to a Species Action Plan for rockhopper penguins in the Falklands being developed. The plan will help to identify and priorities conservation measures that are needed to help protect this species in the future.



Rockhopper penguin colony at Steeple Jason

## Historic threats to rockhopper penguins

In the Falklands the penguin oil industry started in 1862-63 and reached its peak in 1864. Rockhopper penguins were the main quarry with birds reportedly taken from Steeple Jason, New Island, Bird Island and Pebble Island amongst others. The numbers of penguins killed for oil is not recorded, but during 1864-66 some 63,000 gallons of penguin oil was produced (8 rockhoppers = 1 gallon), and it is likely that some 2 million penguins in the Falklands were killed overall, and those mostly where rockhopper penguins.

The ending of the oil trade meant a respite for the rockhoppers, although additional threats included eggging that has long been a historic tradition and source of food for the Islanders. Although it's impacts on populations, if any, is not known some records suggest large numbers historically have been collected. In 1920, some 85,000 rockhopper eggs were collected from Kidney Island alone. Egg collecting of rockhoppers is now prohibited since they were graded as a globally *vulnerable* species. Today a different suite of risks are threatening the rockhopper penguins.



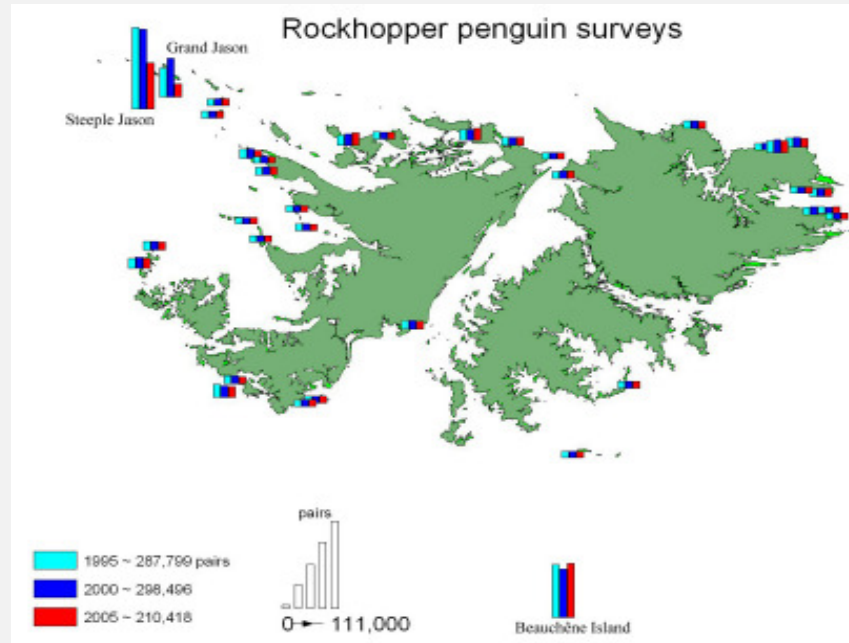
A tri-pot for rendering oil, examples can still be seen today on islands such as Steeple Jason.



Historic photographic account of eggging from a rockhopper colony.



Rockhopper penguin partner returns from sea to the nest site. They advertise their presence to each other by loud calls followed by head shaking reaffirming the pair-bond.



Distribution of southern rockhopper penguins in the Falklands and Island population trends 1995, 2000 & 2005

## ICCAT leaves albatross conservation dead in the water

BirdLife reports that after a 3-year seabird risk assessment that found tuna and swordfish longline fishing has significant impacts on Atlantic seabird populations, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) failed to act at a recent meeting in Recife, Brazil.

Albatrosses and petrel populations in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea are undergoing some of the most severe decreases anywhere in the world according to the BirdLife Global Seabird Programme, based at the RSPB, but each year hundreds of millions of longline hooks are set in the Atlantic. The impact of longline fishing on albatrosses and other seabirds has been a source of concern for scientists and conservationists for decades.

More than 40 fishing nations are members of ICCAT, and they gathered recently in Recife, Brazil for the annual meeting of the commission. Collectively they control longline fishing effort in the Atlantic Ocean that is conducted on a massive scale. "In Recife we recommended that fishers use a few simple, cheap but effective measures to reduce the rate at which seabirds get caught and drown", added Dr Small. "However, ICCAT refused to endorse our recommendation which is a big blow for Globally Threatened seabirds".

**"... a big blow for Globally Threatened seabirds" —Dr Cleo Small, International Marine Policy Officer for BirdLife's Global Seabirds Programme**



Andrew Carroll from DEFRA's Sea Fish Conservation Division who attended the meeting on behalf of the UK Overseas Territories said: "To put it politely, I am immensely disappointed and frustrated that ICCAT has failed to make progress". The UK Overseas Territories are home to around one third of the total breeding pairs of albatrosses. The declines of some of these populations are among the fastest in the world. "Many parties worked hard to take effective action to reduce the bycatch of these declining species, but ICCAT is plagued by the necessity to gain consensus of all parties, and the work of many can be blocked by a very few", said Dr Ross Wanless, Africa Coordinator for BirdLife's Global Seabird Programme. "This is a major problem not only for tuna populations but also associated species such as seabirds, sharks and sea turtles".

## Proud of seabird conservation in the Falklands' fisheries

When Falklands Conservation identified seabird deaths in the Falklands' trawl fisheries in 2001, subsequently action was taken to tackle this problem. Mitigation measures were already being well addressed on the few longline vessels that fish in the Falkland waters.

By 2004, tori lines were mandatory on all licensed fin-fish trawlers as part of a National Plan of Action (NPOA-trawling) to reduce seabird deaths. Mitigation measures are now extended to all stern trawlers operating in Falklands' waters, with

Falkland- flagged vessels extending this to the high seas.

The NPOA-trawling, recently updated by Falklands Conservation, is due to be reviewed and adopted in the early part of 2010.

The work that has been accomplished in the Falklands demonstrates how fishing companies, fishing crews, scientists and conservationists working in collaboration can achieve huge differences to the conservation

of seabirds. The Falkland Islands were one of the first nations to adopt tori lines and with all vessels fishing in the Falkland waters deploying some type of mitigation, the Falklands are still recognised as one of the best examples of seabird mitigation in the world, something that all in the industry should be proud off.

It is important that the Falklands should continue to be viewed as striving as hard as it can to reduce seabird mortalities to its best efforts and be credited with this achievement.

2009 Sakamoto et al.



## In the Eye of an Albatross

Although albatross fly thousands of miles across the open ocean to find their prey, relatively little is known about how they actually locate their prey. To find out a group of scientists attached tiny cameras (the size of lipsticks) to four black-browed albatross from Bird Island in South Georgia. The still images that were recorded revealed that some albatrosses follow killer whales possibly to feed of the food scraps that are left at the surface.

The camera images together with depth profiles showed that the birds dived only occasionally, but that they actively dived when other birds or the killer whale were present. The association with other birds at sea and diving predators such as killer whales may help explain how albatross find their prey more effectively in an apparent featureless ocean. The cameras also recorded the albatross following fishing vessels and encountering icebergs.

## Surveying Adventure Sound with the SMSG By Alastair Wilson

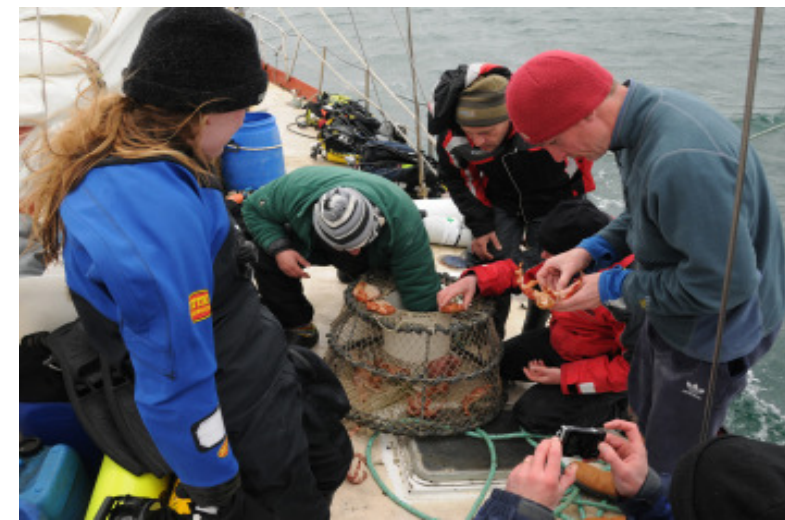
On the 13<sup>th</sup> November Susan Campbell and myself joined up with the Shallow Marine Survey Group (SMSG) to carry out a shorebird survey of Adventure Sound. At the head of the sound we launched the FC RIB, and headed out to meet the Damien II, skippered by Dion Poncet who sailed round from Stanley the previous day. From our floating base we were able to sail to different areas of the sound where SMSG carried out their underwater surveys, and we were dropped ashore to survey the coastal birds in the same area. This process involved recording features such as the beach width, coastal habitat and slope, vegetation, land use, extent and density of kelp, and of course the bird species, their age, behaviour and number. Every 50m we also had to stop and take a photograph of a quadrat on the shore to record the substrate.

For the first two nights of the expedition we were able to stay at Sound House, but after then we had moved further down the sound so made the Damien II our home. Through some clever sleeping arrangements we were all able to find space to sleep without resorting to a tent, quite a relief with it being so cold, and the boat being very cosy!

The weather wasn't very kind to us on the trip, wind, rain, sleet, hail, snow, we seemed to have it all! On two days we weren't able to get out to do any work at all. The changing wind also made finding a suitable anchorage difficult, on a couple of occasions the anchor started to drag as the wind swung round, and we had to move to a more sheltered location.



Adventure Sound onboard Damien II



SMSG divers enjoying a snack with a difference around the crab pot

In total we surveyed over 40km of coastline and found a good variety of birds. Some of the highlights included good numbers of white rumped sandpipers, two pairs of black-necked swans with cygnets, white tufted grebes, Hudsonian godwits and striated caracara.

We also surveyed Halt, North Point, Turn and Third Islands. North Point and Turn Islands both had Cobb's wren and good numbers of other small birds. Third Island had plenty of signs of rats, no Cobb's wren and few other small birds. Halt Island was also rat free after being eradicated in 2006 and had good numbers of small birds but Cobb's wren have yet to return.

SMSG and FC would like to thank all the landowners for the kind access to conduct the coastal bird surveys.

Below: Some of the bird life encountered along the coast: Logger duck chicks, Cobb's wren and wintering Hudsonian godwits.

