

Falklands Conservation



Newsletter

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A busy Easter Weekend for Falklands Conservation

A WATCH Group trip to Port Stephens and the annual Falklands Conservation Campers' Bash held at Fitzroy all contributed to a busy Easter weekend.

The Falklands Conservation Campers' Bash held on the 15th April has yet again proven to be a great success.



Over eighty people turned out at Fitzroy on a rather cold evening, many of them staying on from the RBA Sheep Show which was held earlier in the day. People even arrived from Stanley by bus to enjoy the evening.

The evening kicked off a little earlier than usual which helped bridge the gap from the sheep show and the campers' dance. It all got off to a great start with everyone enjoying a hot bowl of stew to help ward off the cold which seems to go hand in hand with the event! All who came along were again treated to fantastic live music from Inferno which instantly got people up and dancing.

Falklands Conservation would like to thank the following people:

Hay Miller and Amanda Morris for preparing the food.

FIMCo for donating and preparing the meat, Darren Livermore for running the bar, Inferno for coming along and entertaining everyone, The sound guys, Martin Cant and Graham Didlick and a massive thank you to Alan and Bella and all at Fitzroy Farm for hosting the event. Finally a big thanks to all of you who came along and gave your support.



A small group of explorers from the WATCH group, accompanied by Eileen Davies and Linda McRae, had a busy weekend at Port Stephens beginning on Saturday 15th April. Their first activity after arriving at Port Stephens with FIGAS was cleaning Wood Cove and removing all the rubbish and debris that had washed up. That evening they relaxed by preparing their eggs for Easter Sunday by boiling and decorating. They then all participated in a wildlife quiz with Dion, Drew and Leigh managing to score 100%. The next day they were dropped off to explore Indian Village by Diane and Dion. They explored the amazing rock formations, had a picnic lunch and

posed for photos before beginning the five-mile walk back to the settlement.



On their journey back they stopped to paddle at the beach and to collect some shells and sea urchins. That evening they enjoyed a mad dash of a treasure hunt, rolled their eggs and then made a collage from all the things that they had collected that day. Sadly, all good things have to come to an end and as Monday morning arrived the Group reluctantly prepared to return to Stanley. The WATCH Group had a fantastic time and would really like to thank the following people for their great weekend. A huge thank you must go to Diane and Paul at Port Stephens for inviting the Group out. Also to Ann for the treasure hunt, Dion for helping to take the group to Indian Village, FIGAS for being so helpful and ensuring the children get the maximum out of their trips. To Standard Chartered Bank for the sponsorship that enables the children to go on the trips and last but by no means least to Eileen and Linda for taking the time to accompany the Group and for keeping them amused.

John Cromarty says Goodbye after another season

As another visit to the Falkland Islands comes to a close, the thing that strikes me is how varied and interesting the work has been. I was primarily concerned with surveying potential Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and each one I visited emphasised the great differences not only in terrain but also in flora and fauna generally.

The Narrows NNR was a site of great interest not only because of the many avian species (including an intriguing sighting of the endemic Cobb's wren, *Troglodytes cobbi*) but also because of its high abundance of native and endemic plants (due to low grazing pressures), something of a rarity on the Falklands mainland.

The potential Ramsar site covering East Bay, Lake Sullivan and the River Doyle was notable for its extensive

*areas of wetland and the presence of the native zebra trout, *Apolochiton zebra*. A migratory population is found in the River Doyle and a possible sedentary population is found in Lake Sullivan, which is the largest area of freshwater in the Falklands. Interestingly, large areas of the lake are lined with Canadian club rush, *Schoenoplectus californicus*, a nationally scarce "reed" of ponds and lakes limited to 8 waterbodies.*

Cape Dolphin NNR was different again being one of the few remaining mainland areas of maritime tussock with this area being dominated by tall tussac grass, *Poa flabellate*, the very tip being almost impenetrable. Mainland tussock has been identified as a priority habitat due to its habitat value and limited distribution which makes this area all the more special.

Race Point area was notable for large breeding colonies of imperial shag, *Phalacrocorax atriceps albiventer*, and magellanic penguins, *Spheniscus*

magellanicus, together with magnificent coastal views culminating with the superb sea cliffs of Fanning Head, home to extensive rockhopper penguin, *Eudyptes chrysocome*, colonies.

Other things I covered on this trip included counting gentoo chicks, taking part in the ongoing Breeding Birds Survey, collecting blood samples from gentoo penguins (with the avian pox virus), plus camping in remote and wild places, which made for (as ever) an interesting and enjoyable time.



Gentoo penguin and chicks

Tussac Planting At Elephant Beach



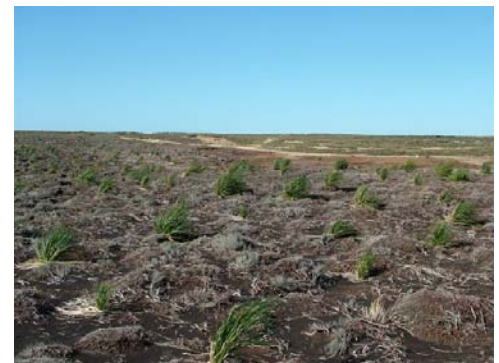
It is planned to have a weekend in September to plant tussac on the North coast of Elephant Beach Farm and we are looking for volunteers.



The work undertaken by volunteers in the past has been very successful with nearly every plant surviving and showing considerable growth.



The owners of the farm Ben Berntsen and Riki Evans appreciate the work that has been carried out and with YOUR help we can expand the plantation even further.



At this stage we are trying to find out how many people would be willing to come along and give us some of their time and have a fun weekend. Please contact Falklands Conservation, Jetty Centre on 22247.

Tim Reid saying goodbye to the Falklands Islands

I arrived in the Falkland Islands in October 2001 from Tasmania where I am returning at the end of April.

Initially I began working for Falklands Conservation as a seabird observer with the Seabirds at Sea Team (SAST), spending most of my time out at sea on fishing boats observing the interactions with seabirds. For the last two years I have been working as a seabird ecologist with the albatross and petrel programme. The work involved with the albatross and petrel programme has been slightly more varied than that of SAST, including visiting a number of offshore islands for the censuses of the ACAP albatross and petrels that FC has conducted over the past two summers.

I have had a number of highlights in my time in the Falklands. Getting to visit some of the islands with large seabird colonies has been a fantastic experience. Islands such as Beauchêne Island, Bird Island, and the Jason Islands are all spectacular, and visiting them was a very memorable experience. Also I have been on a couple of yacht trips, that were both fantastic experiences, one from Stanley to the Azores and one from Montevideo to Stanley. Personally, I am a keen sea kayaker and have enjoyed kayaking around the west and south coasts of West Falkland.

When I return to Tasmania I plan to study for a PhD on the flesh-footed shearwater, investigating how they make their foraging. I consider them to be a particularly important species to study, because of the thousands that are being killed each year by tuna longline fishing boats off the east coast of Australia. Normal mitigation attempts, such as tori lines, have failed as the birds have the ability to dive deeply. The main aim of the project is to be able to predict in real time and at small scales where the birds are most likely to be feeding, and from this it should be possible to recommend small-scale area closures for the tuna longliners in order to minimise the number of shearwaters that are killed. It is likely that most or all the birds come

from one island off the east coast of Australia called Lord Howe. Lord Howe Island is a small island 375 miles east of Australia and it is where I will be conducting my fieldwork. It is 11 km x 2 km in size, has 350 residents, is surrounded by a coral reef, is mostly covered in forest, and its highest point is almost 900m. The study part of my PhD will be based in Hobart, Tasmania with the University of Tasmania and the CSIRO Marine Research Labs.

I would like to thank all of those people who have worked with me over the years I have been at FC and have contributed to the success of the various projects that I have been involved in. I would particularly like to thank Nic Huin who has been hugely involved in all of them, and given a lot of invaluable advice on all aspects; without him the projects would not have been as successful. Also Oli Yates, who is currently heading the albatross and petrel team, and Ben Sullivan, who was the head of SAST, have been really helpful. A number of people at the Fisheries Department, especially Paul Brickle, have also made a number of invaluable contributions over the years. Thank you also to Hay Miller and all of the office staff at Falklands Conservation.

And of course thank you to all of those people around the islands who I have met and socialised with who have made the Falklands experience what it has been.



Not entirely sure what is happening here!

Thank you Tim from all at Falklands Conservation

During the 5 years that Tim has worked at Falklands Conservation the conservation of albatross and petrels in the Falklands has taken huge steps forward. Tim arrived in 2001 when the focus of the Seabirds at Sea Team (SAST) changed from mapping at-sea distributions of seabirds to observ-

ing and quantifying the interaction with the fishing industry. This was in an effort to identify causes for the large decline in albatross numbers that had been shown through the 2000/01 census and to find simple solutions that would prevent them from being killed accidentally during fishing operations. Incidental mortality in the longline fishery was observed, however the main focus of the work was in obtaining an estimate of the newly identified trawl related mortality. Over 750 hours were spent observing trawling operations and the first estimate for any fishery in the world was obtained. Similar effort was spent developing and then trialling a number of mitigation techniques that led to the adoption by the industry of bird-scaring lines in 2004. Since 2001, when Tim arrived, mortality in the longline fleet has reduced 4-fold and mortality associated with trawlers has been reduced by 90%. The Falklands are now at the forefront of such work world-wide. This has been due to the enthusiasm and innovation of Tim and the many others that have worked with the industry. Other landmarks have been the adoption of the National Plans of Action for longlining, trawling and jigging in 2004 and the more recent island wide censuses of southern giant petrels, white-chinned petrels and black-browed albatross. The census of southern giant petrels was the first time that an island-wide survey had been conducted and showed that the Falklands were far more important for this species than had been anticipated with potentially 42% of the world population. Tim will be missed and we wish him all the best in the future and for his work with the flesh-footed shearwaters of Lord Howe Island. G Munro.



Strap-toothed Whale at North Arm

Following the reporting of a beaked whale at Beach Park, North Arm in September 2005, a small team from Falklands Conservation went to visit Ian and Eileen Jaffray, who discovered the whale to find out what they had found.

FC staff along with Ian and Eileen identified the animal was a Gray's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon grayi*) from descriptions in Ian Strange's wildlife guide and other books. This was based on the shape and size of the jaw, the lack of teeth and other features. However the carcass was badly damaged and the confidence of the identification was low.

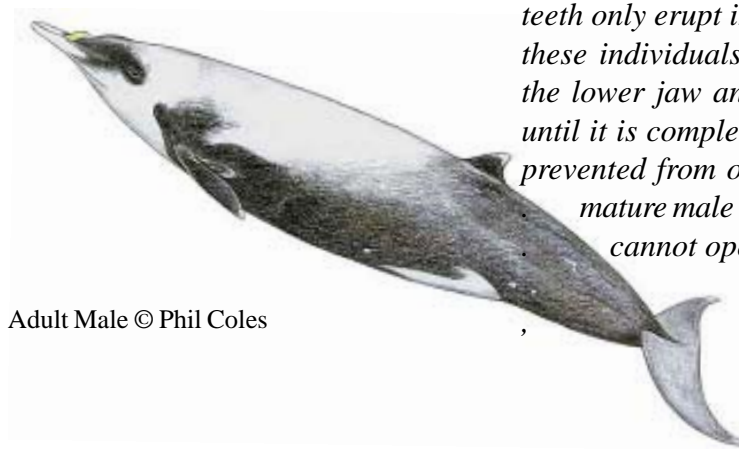
Due to the uncertainty several tissue samples were taken and after the appropriate CITES forms were completed, were sent away to the National Marine Fisheries Service in California. Kelly Robertson, the Marine Fisheries Scientist there works with a large collection of DNA data from all around the world and kindly volunteered to analyse the samples.

After a couple of months the results came back to FC identifying the whale as a strap-toothed whale (*Mesoplodon layardii*) and added "In fact it is an exact match to one of the haplotypes in the sequence library" whatever that means... Essentially the skin tissue we sent matched the DNA of other samples of strap-toothed whales from other parts of the world, in this case New Zealand. This means that the confidence in the ani-

mal being a strap-toothed whale is much higher than by attempting to identify it from a poor condition corpse.

So thanks to Ian and Eileen at North Arm for the report and to the National Marine Fisheries Service for adding the information to the global database. There was a lot of interest generated about the whale and FC received over 30 e-mails asking for samples/measurements or just general remarks of interest!

Ian and Eileen have said they hope to use the skeleton to construct a display so that everyone can enjoy the sight of the elusive animal. Oli Yates



Adult Male © Phil Coles

Strap-toothed Whale Facts

Average Length: 5.5 - 6.2m

Distribution: Circumpolar in the temperate waters of the southern hemisphere.

Weight: 1.3 tons

Identification: Bold black and white markings are distinctive. Long beak. Teeth very exaggerated in adult males swept back and rising over the top of the upper jaw.

Diet: Mostly small squid.

Threats: Unknown

Group size: 1-3+

The strap-toothed whale has one of the most unusual sets of teeth of any mammal. As with many beaked whales the teeth only erupt in adult males, but in these individuals they grow up from the lower jaw and around the upper until it is completely encircled and is prevented from opening fully. In fact mature male strap-toothed whales cannot open their jaws more than 11-13cm.

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Along the Ice front: Orca Whales

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