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FALKLANDS CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

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TRAGEDY AS 200 PILOT WHALES STRAND

On the morning of Monday the 23rd of June Falklands Conservation received a report that 150 Pilot Whales had been stranded on a beach near East Bay settlement West Falkland.

Knowing that time was of the essence, Falklands Conservation contacted the farm manager who kindly agreed to go and assess the state and extent of the situation and report back. Mr Findlay was back in touch within two hours and told how he had found that the Pilot Whales had stranded along a 6 kilometre stretch of coast, and he estimated that there were approximately 200 in total with only about 20 still alive. When asked what condition these remaining mammals were in we were told that they were very distressed and that there were many birds already on site.

The next step was to find away to transport a team consisting of a vet, assistant, two Falkland Islands Defence Force members, a scientist from the Fisheries department and a Falklands Conservation representative to this remote location quickly. The military were

contacted and agreed to fly them out by helicopter the next morning. Having gathered advice from the British Divers Marine Life Rescue and one of their vets the team were ready for the 7am departure to Mount Pleasant Airport where they were to meet the helicopter.

Unfortunately on their arrival at East Bay the team discovered 42 mammals were still alive but in a devastating condition. Due to prolonged exposure to birds, none of the surviving animals had their eyes and many had had their tongues partially removed. With the vet assessing each animal it was decided that the best course of action to take would be, as feared, to put the remaining Pilot Whales down.

In mass strandings such as this, attempts to re-float are not often an option, but with the skills learnt on the Marine Mammal Medic course (now taken by 37 people in the Islands), each situation can be assessed and it is now known what signs should be looked for to help identify the condition of the mammals. Unfortunately in this case none of the whales could be saved but 42 animals were

spared any prolonged suffering and this has to be seen as the most humane course of action.



East Bay Beach



The Sea King Helicopter dropping off the team.



Photos by Darren Christie of Falklands Conservation

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The scientist from the Fisheries Department collected over 50 samples and these will be used to assess maternal structure within the whole pod, looking at mother/infant relationships and also trying to discover which male sired the infants, which could be related to the species selection system. The genetic samples will also be used in a global database to assess stock relationships between Long-finned Pilot Whales in New Zealand, the North Atlantic and the rest of the world.

A group from the Falkland Island Fisheries Department and Falklands Conservation will be returning to the site for a period of three days in order to collect more samples. The team will collect genetic samples from each animal to help in assessing the age. They are also hoping to collect stomach content samples to ascertain feeding behaviour.

Falklands Conservation would like to thank the following people for their help in this situation- The Military for transporting the team, Vet Kevin Lawrence and Sue Halfacre from the Veterinary Department, Alan Webb and Adam Cockwell from the FIDF, the FIGAS pilots for always keeping an eye out, Andy Stocks from the Fisheries Department and Andy Findlay who was a tremendous help throughout. Thank you all.

Advance Notice of Annual General Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting will be in Stanley, Falkland Islands – on 22nd October 2003. Full details and formal notice of the Meeting will be sent to you in the latter half of September. A UK Members Meeting in London is being planned for later in the year.

Invitation for New Trustee Nominations

One third of our Trustee places will be vacated at the AGM when members are asked to agree new appointments. There are 12 Falkland Island Trustees, with 4 vacancies this year. If you are interested in becoming a Trustee or know someone else you would like to put forward it may be helpful to know that the following would be considered an advantage – knowledge of wildlife and conservation in the Falkland Islands, experience in being a charity trustee, and experience of directing a small organisation. If you would be interested in standing for appointment as a Trustee of Falklands Conservation please contact the Chairman, Nikki Buxton at Synergy Information Systems on 22051 or you can email her on nbuxton@horizon.co.fk for an initial discussion, and Carol (Hay) Miller (at FI office) for a nomination form. You will need to be proposed by a paid-up member and return the completed form to the FI Office no later than 24th September. FI Trustee Meetings are held **eight** times a year in Stanley and include joint telephone meetings with our 9 UK Trustees.

Critically Endangered Megapode Pulls Back from Brink of Extinction

In the first survey for 10 years of a remote Polynesian island by BirdLife International's Fiji Affiliate, Dick Watling, has uncovered a doubling of the estimated population of the Polynesian Megapode, *Megapodius pritchardii*, which until recently had only been found on one tiny island.

Watling's visit to the remote island of Fonualei in the Kingdom of Tonga means that estimates of the megapode's population have been doubled, with an estimated 300–500 on the island, possibly now surpassing the number found on its last native island, Niuafu'ou, where a 1993 survey had revealed a population of only 188–235 pairs. Until now, the Polynesian Megapode, also known as the Niuafu'ou Megapode, or locally as the Malau, has been teetering on the brink of extinction and classified as Critically Endangered. The revelation, which has been reported first in June's issue of BirdLife's award-winning quarterly magazine, World

Birdwatch, vindicates the translocation of megapode eggs from Niuafu'ou to Fonualei in 1993/4 by Dr Dieter Rinke of the Brehm Fund for International Bird Conservation in Germany.

Following 1993's survey, Rinke took eggs and chicks from Niuafu'ou, where the south west Pacific's last megapode faced extinction from over-harvesting by humans and predation by introduced animals, to Fonualei. This 2–km-wide island, some 20 hours journey by boat from Niuafu'ou, was selected for being uninhabited, little-visited and providing the perfect egg-laying conditions for the megapode, which does not incubate its own eggs but lays them in



thermally-heated soil near volcanic vents.

Watling's visit to Fonualei, initiated by the IUCN Species Survival Commission/BirdLife International/WPA Megapode Specialist Group and funded by the Dutch Van Tienhoven Foundation for International Nature Protection, is the first to gauge the progress of the translocated megapodes. In 10 hours, the ornithologist observed 56 Malau on a small fraction of the island, and estimated a total adult population of 300–500 birds. "The establishment of a new population of the Malau on Fonualei is a remarkable conservation success and demonstrates the Tongan Government's determination to conserve its unique wildlife heritage," says Watling. "This is a wonderful success story for conservation in a region where conservation is only beginning to emerge from the era of rhetoric and paper parks. It is a tribute to vision and action."

For further information, please contact Gareth Gardiner-Jones at BirdLife International in Cambridge, UK: tel. +44 (0)1223 279903; (0)7779 018 332 (mobile); gareth.gardiner@birdlife.org.uk

*pictured left a Megapode taken from the birdlife website www.birdlife.org
Information from RSPB press release*

More Plant species now protected

Executive Council has approved a proposal put forward by Falklands Conservation to the Environmental Officer to add ten more plant names to the protected list. The following plants have been added-

Antarctic Cudweed-*Gamochaeta antarctica*

Chilean Tall-Fern-*Blechnum cordatum*

Patagonian Hawkweed-*Hieraceum patagonicum*

Fuegian Whitlowgrass-*Draba magellanica*

Spider Flower-*Arachnitis quetrichuensis*

Skullcap-*Scutellaria nummulariifolia*

Mudwort-*Limosella australis*

Moore's Plantain-*Plantago moorei*

Tasselweed-*Ruppia filifolia*

Fuegian Violet-*Viola magellanica*

Kew Gardens

Herbarium volunteer, Lilian Kidd has been training in Kew Gardens, London since early May and has been thoroughly enjoying herself. She is pictured here next to the biggest flowering lilly in the world. This Titan Arum can be viewed in the Princess of Wales Conservatory, Kew Gardens, London. Falklands Conservation wish Lilian all the best with the remainder of her course and look forward to seeing her back in action in the Falklands Conservation Herbarium soon.



The Gorgeous Grey!

In a recent article in the Evening Standard David Beckham was compared to a Patagonian duck! Perhaps the only real interest in the article is that it contained some interesting facts about the Patagonian duck or as it's known locally, 'Grey duck'. Apparently the Real Madrid managing director Jorge Valdano tried insulting the England Captain saying that he lived the lifestyle to that of a Patagonian duck which "leaves a mess with every step". There are 20,000 Grey ducks in the Falkland Islands and they are known for their striking red eyes and distinctive crest. Perhaps it is not David who has been insulted in this comparison!

Falklands Conservation Sale

only available from the Stanley Office



Falklands Conservation still has on sale a small amount of sale items, clearing room for new stock due in a couple of months. If you are looking for a bargain why not pop in a see us above the Jetty Centre, Ross Rd.

Receiving your Newsletter

Do you receive your News Letter in the post but would like to get it via email? If so please fill in the cut out section below or email your details to FC and become an environmentally friendly member today! If you have an email address and can download Pdf files then why not give it a go? If you find that you prefer to receive a hard copy then you can always revert back to the posting system.

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A full list of Trustees is available from our offices
The Newsletter is edited by Sarah Clement & Becky Ingham
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Email address-

UK based members need to send this form to the UK Office.
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