



# FALKLANDS CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

Month/Year. 01.01  
01.01.2003

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## SEALION SURVEY BEGINS

Recently arrived in the Falkland Islands is a team of three, to carry out a survey on breeding southern sea lions around the Falkland Islands.

Two of the team, Mike Riddy and Callan Duck, work for the Sea Mammal Research Unit in St Andrews in Scotland and have both been to the Falklands on research trips in the past. They have been accompanied this time by Mr Tom Loughlin from Seattle, who is studying Steller sea lions and looking at possible reasons for their decline in the northern hemisphere. Tom has worked with Stellers sea-lions for over 20 years and there are hopes that the survey of the southern sea lion in the context of the Falklands and South America population will help lead to clues as to what is happening in the northern hemisphere.

It is thought that the project will take four weeks and will be running throughout the month of February 2003. Research will be undertaken with the *Penelope* and the able help of Michael Clarke.



*Pictured above, Nic Huin Falklands Conservation Field Science Officer and Callan Duck leaving for the project*

If all goes well the team will survey over 70 breeding locations of southern sea lions and 50 non-breeding sites. It will not be necessary to land on all these sites as much survey work can be carried out easily from a zodiac, resulting in less disturbance at the breeding sites. They will initially be looking at comparisons between this survey and that undertaken by the SMRU in 1995. From the results obtained in the very first week of survey, it would seem that there has been a 30% increase over the past 6 years, although this only covered a few of the total islands and will need confirming when complete.

The current survey will undergo an enforced break in the middle of survey work, whilst prior commitments by the *Penelope* are carried out around the Jason Islands. However the team are using this time to look at other valuable aspects of sea lion ecology, such as diet and general health.



*Sea lion on Coffin Island, photo by Debbie Summers*

As with all FC projects, the results of the census will be widely publicised locally and we would like to thank everyone who has already sent counts of sea lions in to us. We are hoping to produce a pack for use in the schools, relating to the sea lion work. We would also like to thank all the land owners who have given their permission for the team to carry out counts on their land.

## Public Notice - Imports of plants, fruits and vegetables

The Department of Agriculture (DoA) would like to remind persons intending to bring /import plant materials (e.g. vegetables, fruits or plants) to the Islands that they must apply to the DoA for a Plant Import Permit. This must be done before the consignment leaves the country of export e.g. U.K/ Chile. A permit is not required for an import of seed or processed plant materials.

### **The issue of a Permit is conditional upon;**

- the production of a Phytosanitary Certificate for the consignment. This certificate is usually issued by the government of the country of origin (e.g. DEFRA in UK, SAG in Chile) following an inspection to ensure the consignment is free from pests and diseases.
- the consignment being free from soil,
- the produce passing inspection by FIG plant inspectors on arrival in the Islands.

For further details and to make applications please contact the DoA on Tel: 27355, Fax: 27352 or email [doa.fig@horizon.co.fk](mailto:doa.fig@horizon.co.fk)

*Thank you for your co-operation in helping to maintain the relatively pest and disease-free status of the Falkland Islands.*

## Penguins in a spin in San Francisco

San Francisco zoo has had a population of Magellanic penguins for 18 years now, normally a happy and content bunch who took the odd dip through the summer in their designer pool and retreated to their cosy burrows during the long winter. Thoughts of migration were a long way from their minds, unlike their wild cousins along the coasts of South America, who migrate up to 1,600 miles annually to warmer climes, from the Falklands to Buenos Aires and Montevideo.



Photo by Alan Knight

On Christmas Eve 2002 however, all this changed when a new group of penguins were introduced from a theme park in San Diego. Immediately these new six penguins dived into the circular pool to show off their swimming skills and convinced all the other 46 birds to join them. Since then, none of the birds have returned to their burrows and zoo-keepers are starting to worry about the effects on the population. Jane Tollini, keeper for the Magellanic penguins, described it as a 'free-for-all' and suggests that she has become like a drive through restaurant! "The birds see me, see the fish, swim past me, grab the fish and keep going". It is not unusual for penguins to change character on meeting new birds, says Phil Trathan of the British Antarctic Survey.

"Penguins are very inquisitive and social and could well be that introducing new individuals to this group may have changed the social dynamics. There may be an instinct that says at a certain time of year it is good to swim a long way, which could be governed by the length of daylight." Penguin Island, San Francisco has one of the most successful breeding programmes of Magellanic penguins, with more than 148 chicks born since the first pair arrived in 1984. However, to mimic their usual migration they will have to keep going for a while yet, as Falklands Conservation and the Antarctic Research Trust discovered when they tracked wild penguins, the usual distance travelled by wild birds equates to 29,500 lengths of Penguin Island's 200 x 35 foot pool.

# Warden at Volunteer Point:

## *My first few months*

by Jim Woodward

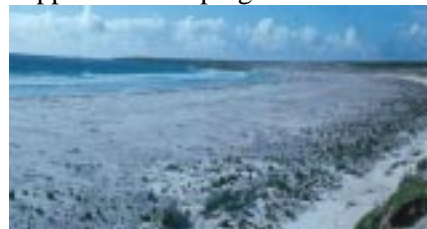
What have I done to deserve all this cold, wet and windy weather? After a couple of beautiful days when I started the job as Warden, the sun has been a rare sighting. However, I'm really enjoying it at Volunteer Point. That mile-long white sand beach all to myself for much of the time, plus a few penguins!

The caravan is still standing though the recent gales have tried to demolish it. At the end of my first week here we had over an inch of rainfall in less than 24 hours. This resulted in the caravan being flooded, with water dripping from the roof and a pond about a foot deep surrounding it. Most of my food and cooking utensils disappeared in the murky water, which had come from the shanty's cesspit. I can take a hint, so I moved into the shanty and used the caravan (once it had dried out) as an office and souvenir shop (*Nice souvenirs - Ed!*).

*Pictured right: Volunteer Beach*

With details only from the 8<sup>th</sup> December and poor weather, this month has seen 107 local visitors, 66 from MPA and 95 overseas visitors to the reserve. BFBS came to do a feature on penguins with Nic Huin on the 21<sup>st</sup> and a French film crew was due to stay overnight on the 28<sup>th</sup> but they failed to arrive in the Islands. Eleven tour guides have been responsible for bringing 129 of these visitors.

I wish to thank all tour guides for their help and support during the past month. Without them my food supplies and mail would have been few and far between. Thanks also to Sarah in the office for organising food supplies and keeping in touch.



# New locations for scarce plants

Reports have been received at Falklands Conservation of two plants in areas where they have not been reported in the past.

The *Chloraea gaudichaudii*, common name the Gaudichaud's Orchid, has been found by Bonita Greenland growing in Darwin settlement. This is a nationally protected plant.



Photos by Alan Henry

Also found was the Arrowgrass *Tetronchium magellanicum*, newly discovered at Volunteer Point by Jim Woodward and relatively rare around the Falkland Islands.



## *Spain counts the cost of Prestige oil disaster*

***More than 13,000 oiled birds found on Spanish, Portuguese and French coasts after the Prestige oil spill, says new report***

A total of 13,221 oiled birds (3,873 live and 9,348 dead) of 62 different species were recovered from the coasts of Spain, Portugal and France between 16th November 2002 and 16th January 2003 according to a new report from the Spanish Ornithological Society (SEO/BirdLife)

SEO/BirdLife estimates that the total number of birds affected during the first two months of the *Prestige* oil spill was between 65,000 and 130,000. The most affected species continue to be Guillemot (5,691 live and dead), Razorbill (2,248 live and dead) and Puffin (1,877 live and dead).

SEO/BirdLife, the Partner organisation of BirdLife International in Spain, said the *Prestige* oil spill is the most important oil spill in Atlantic Europe after the *Erika* spill in 1999.

So far, 15 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) have been affected by the oil in Spain in Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria and País Vasco.



## ***Major oil spills affecting birds in Atlantic Europe***

<i>Ship</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Birds recovered</i>	<i>Estimate of mortality</i>
<i>Torrey Canyon</i>	<i>1967</i>	<i>Cornualles</i>	<i>7.000</i>	<i>25.000</i>
<i>Amoco Cadiz</i>	<i>1978</i>	<i>Bretaña</i>	<i>5.000</i>	<i>22.000</i>
<i>Braer</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>Shetland</i>	<i>1.500</i>	<i>5.000</i>
<i>Sea Empress</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>Wales</i>	<i>4.600</i>	<i>10.000-15.000</i>
<i>Erika</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>Bretaña</i>	<i>77.000</i>	<i>150.000-300.000</i>
<i>Prestige</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>Galicia</i>	<i>13.221</i>	<i>65.000-130.000</i>

Source: World Birdwatch / SEO/BirdLife

## Falkland Islands Seaweed Survey

*Report by Professor Margaret Clayton (Monash University, Australia) on fieldwork carried out during four weeks in December 2002 – January 2003.*

I arrived in the Falkland Islands just after Christmas 2002 accompanied by another seaweed expert, Dr Louise Phillips. The purpose of our visit was to make as thorough and wide-ranging collection of seaweed species as possible in four weeks and then to prepare duplicate sets of herbarium specimens for the Falkland Islands National Herbarium and the Natural History Museum in London.

Seaweeds are a vital natural resource for the Falkland Islands. They are a key component of coastal ecosystems where they make a major contribution to primary production, providing the habitat and food source for a wide variety of marine fauna including juvenile fish, squid and crustaceans. The health and overall biodiversity of coastal ecosystems depends on the seaweeds.

I am very pleased with the number and range of species we have been able to collect. In fact there are only a very few of the 180 or so species of seaweed recorded for the Falklands that we have not collected. In addition, I know we have found some species that have never been found here before and it is highly probable that several of them are completely new to science. A few months further research will be needed before we can be absolutely sure that these are new species.

Our seaweed collections here will be the first step in a comprehensive and up-to-date account of seaweed biodiversity in the Falkland Islands. When we have examined the specimens in detail and identified them as far as possible, we will prepare a scientific check-list of the seaweeds of the Falkland Islands and an illustrated guide-book to the common species.

I am very grateful for the award of a Shackleton Scholarship that supported my visit and field work in the Falkland Islands. This would not have been possible without the enthusiastic encouragement and extensive logistic support I received from Falklands Conservation and the help of Ronnie Snyder, a volunteer and qualified marine biologist. I am also grateful to Monash University for funding a co-worker Dr Louise Phillips who worked with me on the seaweed collections. Many individuals went out of their way to help us during our stay in the Falklands. I am grateful to them all, including those who willingly granted us access to their land.

### **Thank you**

*Falklands Conservation would like to thank Mr Walter Felton of North Arm and Mr Peter Harrison for their generous donations, recently received. Without their tremendous support, Falklands Conservation would not be able to carry out vital conservation work. Our grateful thanks to them both.*

#### **FALKLANDS CONSERVATION**

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