

# Falklands Conservation



## Newsletter

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## GOING INTERNATIONAL

Ann Brown, UK Executive Officer, reports here on her recent participation representing Falklands Conservation at an international level.

April 2005 saw the Annual Meeting of the UK members of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. This is part of a global network, which brings together a broad range of environmental organisations, both governments and voluntary bodies. Amongst many other roles, IUCN is responsible for the 'red data' lists of wildlife under threat throughout the world. Falklands Conservation is a member. Held at the Royal Geographical Society in London (where our Visitor Guide was launched), it was a lively day (confusingly chaired by another A Brown!) especially important for meeting the cream of the UK conservation movement including Department of the Environment, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, RSPB, and Plantlife International. Its focus however was mostly on the broader scene with presentations on 'Countdown 2010' – the vision for a sustainable Europe, and

'Speaking a Common Language' – developing an international system of protected area categories. The importance of including the UK and European Overseas Territories within these topics (they contain more endemic species than the whole of Europe) was taken on board.

In May, hotfoot from an FC Trustees meeting and accompanied by UK Vice Chairman Mandy Shepherd, it was off to Hamburg, Germany, for the annual meeting of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators. This had the practical purpose of consulting on and drumming up orders for the next edition of our *Visitor Guide*. With Debbie Summers also there, we successfully generated a lot of interest.

We also wanted to foster closer links with the cruise companies who visit the Falklands. A presentation was given encouraging IAATO members to join us as corporate supporters, and asking for support for producing a Wildlife Resource Pack for Expedition Leaders. Meeting ship owners, ship captains, tour leaders, and key managers in the cruise industry was enormously helpful and will, I hope, pave the way for a closer relationship developing sustainable eco-tourism for the Islands. It was particularly nice to see Klemens Putz again, who gave a presentation on the latest projects of the Antarctic Research Trust.

In June I headed off to a more exotic location, Belize, for the BirdLife International Americas Regional Partnership Meeting. Such meetings are held every 18 months-2 years, so it was a rare and important opportunity to share and exchange information relating to birds and their conservation in the Americas. It was particularly relevant to benefit from and contribute to sessions on the Important Bird Areas programme, where in the Falklands we have now identified 22 IBAs. Site Support Groups and habitat protection, a Critically Threatened Species Conservation Programme, effective monitoring, and last but not least the Global Seabird Conservation Programme were topics of considerable interest to FC. The death of over 1m seabirds in Canada from oil pollution at sea was a terrible eye-opener, but was accompanied by the hot news and heartening announcement of a law passed on the last day of the Meeting which sets out stringent punishments for such polluters, with fines specified as having to be donated to bird organisations! For the first time Falklands Conservation was able to play an active part in a BirdLife Americas Council meeting, as a Partner-designate.



**IUCN**  
 The World Conservation Union

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This, and indeed the Meeting itself, enabled us to contribute significantly on a larger stage, but also to benefit from others and to pass on our own experiences. It is clear that we are a world leader in seabird conservation.

Informative papers, reports, and publications from all these events will be winging their way with me to the Falklands when I visit in July, though the very heavy Spanish version of Important Bird Areas of the Tropical Andes published at the BirdLife meeting has been deposited here with Robin Woods!

## Island Restoration Project

Falklands Conservation has been carrying out rat eradication projects on islands since 2001, and have successfully cleared 18 islands. This is a total of 481 acres of land cleared. The largest project attempted to date was North East island in 2003, at 305ha it is one of the largest islands ever to be cleared by hand anywhere in the world. In terms of number of islands cleared, the Falklands are fast becoming one of the most experienced countries in the world at this type of work.

preparing a camp site



Rat eradication is part of a field of conservation known as Island Restoration, and aims to restore the ecology of islands to as close to a pristine state as possible. Native species normally vanish off islands because they are either predated on, or out competed by introduced species. Native insects and birds in the Falklands have evolved in the absence of terrestrial vertebrate predators, and have not developed strategies to avoid being preyed on by them. Native species in this situation are described as naïve, as they have no fear of the predators and are therefore vulnerable to them.



Rat tracks

Of the 18 islands cleared in the Falklands so far, big differences have been reported already. Rat-vulnerable species such as Cobb's wrens, Tussac birds and White-chinned petrels have been found returning to islands where they were previously absent. Future work aims to try and establish exactly what the impact is of rat eradication on the diversity of flora and invertebrate fauna as well as on birds.

This year's work will try to clear the remaining islands in the North-West Island group, creating a collection of rat free islands in that area. Future islands targeted will be focused in areas designated as Important Bird Areas (IBA's), aiming to create more rat free habitat and to prevent invasion on rat free islands.



Brown rat

If you would like to be involved in the project work, don't mind camping on islands in winter and feel you may be able to spare the time, please contact Darren Christie in the FC office for more information.

*Project leader Darren Christie*



## Falklands Conservations Small Grant Scheme

three new awards made

The Falkland Islands Conservation Grants Scheme was first introduced in March 2004 as part of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Falklands Conservation. The scheme is funded from a legacy left by the late Mrs Joan Kenneally for the purposes of conservation, education and protection of wildlife around the Falklands.

Now in its second year the scheme has previously awarded grants to 5 projects ranging from fencing of sensitive areas, to gorse control to a cetacean photographic database. In this round a further 3 grants have been awarded.

A full grant has been awarded to a research project on Pilot Whales seeking to establish the pod structure, age and diet of stranded pilot whales in the Falklands. This project is being undertaken by Helen Otley, a former volunteer for Falklands Conservation now working at the Department of Fisheries and Dr. Sasha Arkhipkin.

A further 2 partial grants were awarded to two eco-tourism projects:

The first to Roddy and Lily Napier on West Point Island to establish a new walking route to the Devils Nose albatross colony with a viewing platform above the colony. This will reduce potential disturbance whilst at the same time improving the experience for visitors.

The second to Kevin Kilmartin at Bluff Cove to provide a leaflet with site specific wildlife guidelines to visitors to Bluff Cove Lagoon.

The Falkland Islands Conservation Grants Scheme is available to all those normally resident in the Falkland Islands, anyone who wishes to apply should contact the FC office for an application form.

# Members meeting

The Falkland Conservation 3rd members meeting went well with 30 people coming along and taking part. Grant Munro, Director of Falkland Conservation, started the proceedings with a presentation on FC and projects that are currently being run. The presentation also gave an insight into the organisation, how it is run, who does what and our hopes for the future. After a short interval the subject of invasive species was raised and a healthy debate followed. In a quote from Grant he feels "Members meetings are an invaluable forum for members to actively input their opinions into the decision making process. Falklands Conservation is a membership organisation and ultimately the trustees and staff are answerable to the membership. I was pleased to see how many had turned up, at this my first meeting, with 3 people having come in from camp especially. I would encourage as many members to attend future meetings as possible and to take an active part in the organisation".

## FC produce Fishers Leaflet

As part of the on-going albatross and petrel programme there is a real need to maintain continuous information flowing to and from the fishery. This is to ensure that the members of the albatross and petrel team are up to date with the occurrences in the fishery and that the fishers are aware with what conservation issues are involved with their day to day activities. This is not quite as simple as it might seem. . . Obviously the fishing vessels are continuously working on the high seas and are directly at the forefront of the fishery issue. We at Falklands Conservation, although kept in contact through the fishery observers and our own specifically tasked seabird observers are frequently left staring at documents on computer screens (writing scripts like this one!). How do we keep the information flowing between us so that the fishermen are aware of the importance of the conservation of seabirds and we are kept in touch with the inherent complexities of fishing?

One attempt at maintaining the connection has been to design and produce a 'fishers leaflet' to help share the importance of Falkland Island seabird populations with the captains and crews of the many fishing vessels in the Falkland Islands. This will form a key part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Overseas Territories Environmental Programme funded project.

Historically longline vessels have been under the spot light for the interactions between baited hooks and seabirds. The problem is now well known – seabirds forage the baited hooks when they are deployed from fishing vessels, the weighted hooks sink to the seabed and seabirds sink with them, trapped by baited hooks intended for fish. The fishermen lose a potential fish and we lose another seabird. Falklands Conservation has targeted this problem for several years now and the situation has improved drastically, however the other vessels in the zone have come under scrutiny and we have recently found that trawl fisheries cause a large amount of seabird mortality too. This is a slightly different situation as the cables that are towing the net through the water are what cause the problem – colliding with seabirds feeding on discarded fish heads and guts not required for the consumer market. The collisions cause broken wings and drowning of hundreds of birds per year and have become a focus of new mitigation over the past two years.

So, where does the leaflet come into play? Obviously there has been huge effort by many people to bring this situation into light, the leaflet provides an excellent medium for informing the fishermen exactly what the problem is, how severe the situation is and what they can do to help out. The idea after all is never to work against fishermen but to encourage them to help relieve the stress of human impact upon seabird populations.

*Front cover of the Fishery Leaflet*



At the end of the day fishermen are doing their job, same as everyone. If we can help them understand how to do this in a more sustainable manner so much the better! Longline vessel fishermen, specifically captains and officers will be the first to comment on their knowledge of the seabird issue – largely thanks to previous work between Consolidated Fisheries Ltd, the Fisheries Department and Falklands Conservation, but how aware are the crews onboard the trawl vessels?

The first step was to find the best people for the job. I was very aware that my creative ability is rather low down on the arts ladder and so I turned to Sarah Clements for help! I can safely say that from that point I have been repeatedly reassured that this was the best possible option as the results have been improving hand over fist. This is clearly no easy task but through some long hours and baffling button twiddling on the Apple Mac Sarah came up with some incredibly impressive designs to form the basis of a superb informative leaflet. The text was threaded together by Tim Reid and myself, the addition of some fantastic photography from Tim, Nic Huin and Andy Black and we all of a sudden had a professional looking leaflet! It cannot be stressed the work that has gone into this and some very useful skills have been acquired in the process – mainly by Sarah (much to be exploited in the very near future!).

The leaflet is now in the printing office and will soon be on its way to help maintain the link between fishermen, Falklands Conservation and the Islands seabird populations. All in a days work. . . well a few weeks at least.

*written by Oli Yates, head of the Albatross and Petrel Team*

## Observer post comes to an end

I was employed for a year as a Lavinia Marine Observer for Falklands Conservation, working as part of the Albatross and Petrel team. This job involves spending periods of up to 6 weeks at sea on mainly Spanish Finfish Factory Trawlers in the fishing zones around the Falkland Islands.

I observed the effectiveness of tori-lines, which are ropes with coloured streamers hanging off them. These mitigation devices are designed to reduce incidental mortality of seabirds. The tori-lines have been shown to scare the birds away from the stern of the ship - especially important when there is high offal (fish heads, tails, guts and skins) discharge.

## Education Officer appointed

Alison Liddle has recently been appointed Education Officer with Falklands Conservation. Ali has been a teacher here in the Islands for the last 10 years and has worked in the Islands as, first a travelling teacher then a primary school teacher with the Infant Junior School.

The purpose of the role is to focus on the production of local environmental and wildlife resource materials for Falkland Island and Ascension Island schools and youth groups.

The use of these devices in Falkland waters is now obligatory and the Falkland Islands Government is leading the world on this kind of environmental protection. The current design is working well, and has reduced warp fatalities by about 90%. My work involved collaborating with the captains, working out the best method to deploy and retrieve the lines and advise on how to fish in a bird-friendly manner.

I also assisted in breeding censuses of penguins and giant petrels at their colonies. I have also helped catch and diet sample penguins. The varied nature of my work made it very enjoyable and the spectacle of over 1500 noisy, squabbling birds feeding at the back of the ship during a period of high offal discharge is one not to be forgotten. The

The primary purpose of the job will be to determine the most appropriate presentation and content of education packs, where topics might fit best into the curriculum, research existing resources and determine how these might be adapted/ utilised to better include new research and current local environmental affairs. Materials to be produced will include School Packs (including practical projects), guidance for teachers, a resource bank, simple identification guides, and information sheets on key sustainability issues (such as marine pollution, hydrocarbon development, waste disposal and recycling, invasive



two Great Albatrosses (Wandering and Royal) also occur, dwarfing the other birds. South American fur seals are often attracted by a free meal too. I was usually transferred on and off the ships by Fisheries Patrol Vessels via small RIBs, which was exciting. The crews tend to be friendly and my Spanish improved.

Many thanks to Lavinia Corporation for proving the funding for this post.

*written by Matthew Edwards*

species, global warming). As much as possible will be in a format suitable for use by peripatetic 'Camp' teachers (visiting children taught at home in remote settlements in the Falklands), short term teachers in Ascension Island, leaders of youth groups, and adaptable for other Overseas Territories in the South Atlantic region. A 3-month period to assist with the introduction and their use including training and workshops is included. It is expected that the bulk of the work will be undertaken on the Falklands, where the post will be based for 12-15 months. However, 3-6 months will be based on Ascension Island, ensuring adaptation to local schools and groups of resources.



Ali pictured left during fundraising efforts with the Watch Group.

*The opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of Falklands Conservation.*

### FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

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**CABLE & WIRELESS**  
FALKLAND ISLANDS