

Falklands Conservation



Newsletter

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Growing records for the Cetacean Watch

It has been several months since the circulation of Cetacean Watch calendars to coastal farms and interested persons in the Falklands. The calendars were produced with the intention of increasing our knowledge of the whales and dolphins in the surrounding waters.

Three years of at-sea surveys by the Seabirds At Sea Team gave a good idea that the Falkland Islands are a great place for spotting these amazing animals. However, this was based on patrol boats and fishing vessels and as such gave little idea of the coastal species that are seen by many people from shore and small boats.

The results from the calendars and the sighting forms have provided a superb first glimpse into the world of these aquatic beasts that share our shores. A total of 462 sightings have been made since 2004 including 140 records of the small black and white Commerson's dolphin (locally called the 'puffing pig') and 158 records of the larger greyish Peale's dolphin (locally called the 'porpoise'). There has also been over 40 sightings of sei whales, and an impressive 87 sightings of killer whales – the latter mainly but not exclusively at Sea Lion Island.

Interestingly the sei whale, the third largest whale in the world, is currently listed as *Endangered* on the world conservation union website, which is the same

threat of extinction as the black-browed albatross. There is a chance that this elusive species may be depending heavily on the Falklands for feeding and possibly even breeding grounds. Little is known about the ecology of the great whales and the Falklands may represent a unique, un-reported habitat for them.

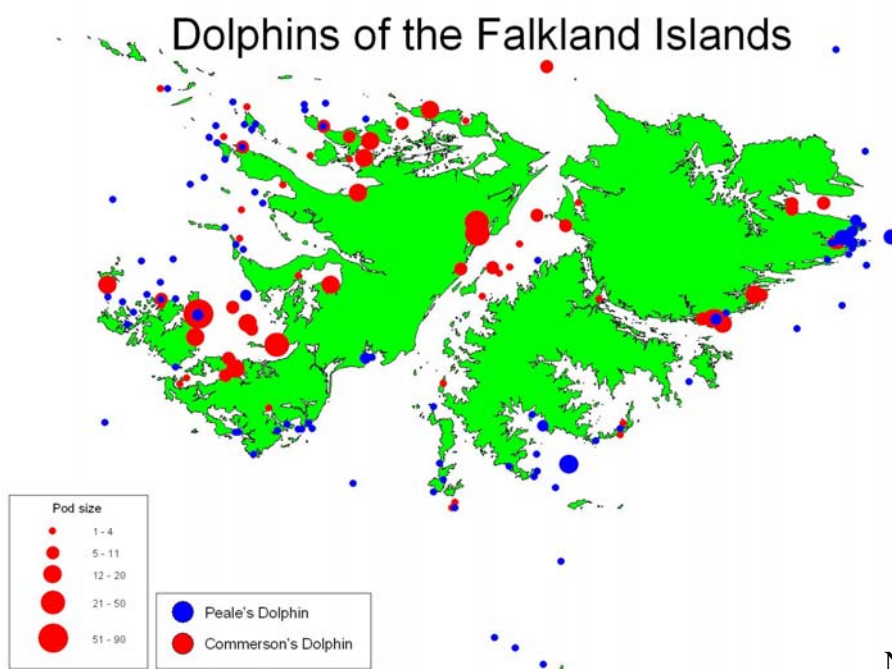
From discussions with many interested people in Stanley and camp it would seem that these animals have been visiting our shores in growing numbers over the past seven years or so. The reason

for this is not clear, but the more data that we can collect the more we will understand about these magnificent creatures. For this reason we would like to urge as many people as possible to continue the collection of where and when these animals are seen.

Many thanks to all of those people who have showed an interest and reported sightings to the office. We are always keen to learn about sightings, strandings and unusual behaviour.

Happy whale watching!!

Oli Yates.



Nic Huin

An illustration to show the current reported sightings of Commerson's and Peale's dolphins.

Albatross and Petrel Workshop

An important workshop was held in the Falklands between the 12th and 15th March to address the conservation of albatross and petrels, not only in the Falklands but also throughout the South Atlantic.

It was a fantastic opportunity for a variety of interested parties to sit down and bring together perspectives from scientific and governmental points of view. Such a combination can be difficult to achieve but in this instance worked well and provided some crucial insights into how science is key to the conservation of these amazing seabirds. Importantly, the method needed for this to fit into a complex governmental structure, such as in the Overseas Territories was discussed in detail.

Attendance for the workshop was as good as we could have hoped, with many of the key delegates enthusiastic from the start. It was a great disappointment that a direct representative from the Department of the Environment, Fisheries and Rural Affairs (Defra) was not present. However, Mark Tasker from the Joint Nature and Conservation Committee, who advise Defra on scientific matters, joined us and was able to provide excellent insights.

The workshop was based around the priorities, set out in a document prepared by BirdLife International, that the OT's need to fulfil to implement the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels (ACAP). This agreement seeks to achieve a better status of these great seabirds by developing an internationally coordinated approach to conservation. This is not an easy undertaking and the workshop concentrated on getting the UK and the OTs to ensure that our input to the agreement would be as smooth as possible.

The first day and a half concentrated on the presentation aspect of the meeting.

Councillor Richard Davies warmly welcomed the group on Sunday morning and provided an excellent description and overview of the issues before handing over to John Barton, who acted as chair for the first session of presentations. There were talks from all the delegates including both local and visiting attendees. These roughly followed the format of ACAP structure and details, OT government perspectives, land-based research and conservation, at-sea research and conservation and finally the role of international conservation organisations. Not only did the presentations bring everyone up to the same level of understanding of the variety of issues. It also brought to the foreground some of the most important points for discussion, such as the heavy seabird mortality associated with non-regulated fisheries adjacent to some of the OTs.

Professor John Croxall then expertly managed the discussion sessions that followed, which dealt with the issues and targeted the best methods for implementing the work needed to progress and develop the current situation. Each discussion group included a chair to guide the session and two rapporteurs to record the comments. The notes were then written up as a summary of the talks and agreed upon in plenary. These efforts will then go on to make up the body of a workshop report.

The final discussions were focussed on detailing the reporting methods for ACAP species through the UK and scrutinising a database designed for this purpose. It was a huge amount to expect to cover in just four days but somehow the group managed to get through the workload, mainly thanks to the huge effort all the rapporteurs and chairs made. What this meeting provided was a clear document to direct the albatross and petrel conservation and research aims for the OTs - not an easy task. It was a wonderful exercise and has been a key factor in the progression of this work in the South Atlantic.

Some fantastic feed back from the

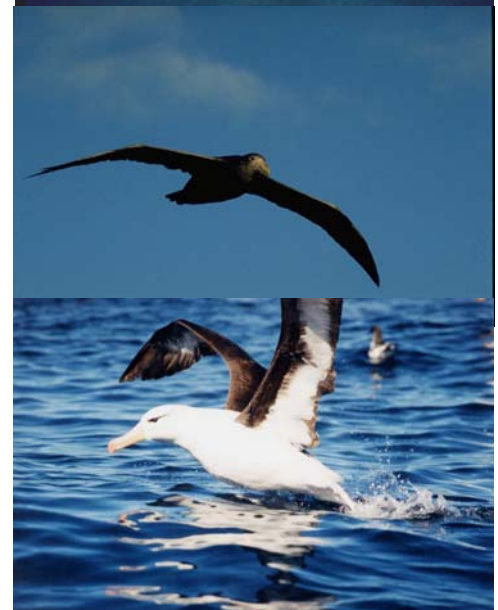
attendees indicated that the workshop was a great success and that the main points of discussion were both timely and constructive.

Thanks to staff at Falklands Conservation and huge support from SeAled PR in arranging all the events and logistics, the delegates arrived safely and were excellently cared for during their stay.

The Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) and the Falkland Islands Government (FIG) funded the albatross and petrel workshop. Consolidated Fisheries Ltd and Cable and Wireless also provided sponsorship for the workshop and Falklands Conservation is very grateful for all the support.



The delegates gathering for a group photo at the end of the workshop.



The Falkland Islands are home to 3 of the 28 ACAP species; white-chinned petrel, southern giant petrel and black-browed albatross.

A busy March for the WATCH Group

4th March

Sponsored Walk

On Saturday 4th March 33 people, including 9 WATCH Group members, their family and supporters of the WATCH Group, came to the Stanley Leisure Centre Football Pitch to support the Falklands Conservation Watch Group by participating in a sponsored walk. The participants were to walk around the football pitch in a bid to complete 103 miles, the approximate distance from the enormous albatross colony on Beauchene Island to Stanley. The walk was not only to raise money for the WATCH Group so that they can continue to enjoy a variety of exciting activities but also to raise awareness for the albatross and petrels that are experiencing a dramatic decline all around the world.

The walkers actually completed an amazing 116 miles in total, which far exceeded our target, in just 2½ hours. Everyone put in a fantastic effort but we had a few that just kept on going, Sorrel Pompert-Robertson managed an incredible 6 miles, running nearly all the way. Kate Stenning, Ariane, Amber and Emma Goss all walked 5 miles each and Hannah Collier walked 4 miles while encouraging Ella Clement, our youngest walker at 2 years old, who walked 2 miles. We are hoping to have raised about £300.00 for the WATCH Group once all the sponsor forms are collected.



Sponsored Walk

18th March

Invertebrate Collecting

The WATCH Group met at the top of Wireless Ridge by the Murrell Road in the afternoon on Saturday 18th to spend a couple of hours collecting invertebrates with Dr Alex Jones, our invertebrate specialist visiting from the UK. So armed with sample jars, water nets

and observation trays they searched, in the grass, under rocks and in the ponds, in an attempt to find some invertebrates.

The children were extremely lucky and found a wide variety of different animals, which included camel crickets, Darwins black beetle, spiders, water beetles, wasps and weevils to name just a few.

The children were fascinated with the animals that they found in the pond such as the fly and beetle larvae and the water beetles. The camel crickets, that they found, surprised some of the children for they were much larger than they had imagined. After they had become seasoned bug hunters, Dr Alex Jones set the children a challenge, they were to see how many different species of insect they could collect in half an hour. Not wanting to disappoint they started collecting with a passion. At the end of the half hour some of the children had collected as many as 9 different species with many of them collecting 5 or 6. Some of the children however went for quality of insect rather than quantity of insects and caught some large camel crickets and one very large spider. At the end of the afternoon, once everything was collected and packed away, the WATCH Group thanked Alex for taking the time to meet with them and make them more aware of the smaller animals of the Falklands.



Getting up close for a really good look!!

19th March

Standard Chartered Bank

Marathon

The second Standard Chartered Bank Marathon started at 10am at the Bank on Ross Road. It was supported by members of the WATCH Group who manned the water stations at various points along the 26 mile long course. The day was cold and windy, and the WATCH Group worked hard handing out water and moral support to the runners as they passed the water stations. WATCH Group participation may encourage a new generation marathon runners in the future.

25th - 26th March

Bleaker Island

Ali Liddle

To bring to a close what has been a very busy month for the Watch Group 12 children, supervised by Ali Liddle and Karen Steen, headed out to Bleaker Island for the weekend. to clean the coast line around the settlement.

On arriving at Bleaker on the Saturday morning the WATCH Group headed along the coast to see some of the wildlife that Bleaker has to offer such as rockhopper penguins and Imperial shags.

After lunch we headed down to the beach to begin the clean up. We managed to fill over 20 black bags with metal and plastic as well as dragging huge bundles of old fencing up onto the green to be taken away in due course. The children worked like trojans and did a fantastic job to make this little bit of the island safer and more pleasant.

After a well earned break and afternoon tea we went out again to explore the tussac.

We got back to the house in time for a fantastic supper very kindly prepared and delivered by Elaine followed by a huge cream cake provided by Karen Steen.

The following morning after breakfast we headed over to the sand beach for a walk before it was time to head home. It had been a very enjoyable and memorable weekend for everyone involved. As usual there are lots of people to thank for making the weekend so successful.

Thanks to Mike and Phyll for allowing us to stay and enjoy their island, to Elaine and Robert for their wonderful hospitality, to Karen Steen for giving up her weekend to come out and help, to Anna Shepherd for the food shopping, to FIGAS for the flights and as always to Standard Chartered Bank for their continued support and sponsorship of the Watch Group. Without their financial support weekends like this just wouldn't happen. The final thank you, however has to go to the youngsters - they all did a fantastic job, were great company and I thoroughly enjoyed my weekend!

Education packs for Falklands and Ascension

It seems like it has been a while since I updated people on my progress with the Education Programme so I thought I'd take the opportunity during a rare quiet moment to fill you in on what has been happening with my project.

Since I got back from my 5 week visit to Ascension Island in October/November I have been busy putting together teaching packs for use in both the Primary School here and on Ascension Island. I'm pleased to report that all the units of work identified for the Primary Schools in this project have been completed and here, at least, are being successfully integrated into the curriculum. The other packs will be delivered to Two Boats School when I go back up to Ascension in April and hopefully the process of integration will be just as successful there. In the term leading up to Christmas Year 2 and Year 6 were the first year groups to sample my work and the feedback from the staff involved was very positive. 4 more units of work have been taught this term. The projects obviously all have a local environmental theme. In Year 2 last term the children had to focus on Plants and Animals in the Local Environment. They had two visits out of school, the first to Victory Green where we saw a surprising number of bird and plant species, the second being to the heath land area around the Lady Liz. Again we saw an amazing number of species including a very inquisitive Tussac Bird and a very tiny, very scared mouse! It really is amazing what you see even with 20 young children in tow!

During the second term Year 6 embarked

on a Geography project entitled Investigating Coasts, which included a study of the area around Gypsy Cove and preparing walking guides for tourists focusing on the coastal features of the area. They even discussed the environmental impact assessment of building a luxury 25 bed hotel on the site - heaven forbid this would ever happen!! Year 5 were looking at Water and investigated Moody Brook as the source of our water and focused on some of the stream's inhabitants. I also helped to prepare resources for two Science projects. Year 2 were looking at Variation in species, particularly in plants, while Year 4 investigated Habitats and the variety of species living in the different habitat areas in the Falkland Islands. They had a successful trip to Hookers Point and the corner of Surf Bay finding marine invertebrates in the rock pools, producing a bird list of species seen on the day and looking in the tussac bogs for insects and spiders. Indoor activities included building Food Chains using facts sheets I have made for animals, birds, insects and plants in the Falkland Islands. Another successful day involved the Reception Class (age 4 and 5) pond dipping on Cape Pembroke and spending time on Surf Bay where they watched Peale's Dolphins and saw a Fur Seal lazing on the sand.

As well as working on resources for the Primary School here I have completed all the teaching packs for use in the Primary sector of Two Boats School on Ascension Island. The units of work being taught are the same as

both schools follow the National Curriculum but the plant and animal species involved are rather different! Bananas, Bamboo and Boobies! It certainly makes for a very stark contrast!

The current work plan is to begin work on producing resources for the secondary school curriculum. I have met with the Head of Science at FICS to see which areas can be supported by my work and have already begun developing resources and activities for this. I will be visiting Ascension Island again in April to deliver all the Primary School teaching packs and I'll be working closely with the secondary staff to see how I can support the curriculum there.

Following on from the ACAP conference here in the Falkland Islands in March I have been approached by a couple of delegates with a view to posting some relevant educational materials on their website for teachers to download and use in school. This will be a great advert for my project and the work of Falklands Conservation with regard to Albatross and Petrels

So all in all it has been a busy but very satisfying few months and it looks like it will be continuing that way for the foreseeable future.

Many thanks must go to Alan Henry who provided most of the bird and plant photographs that have been used in the teaching packs, to Alex Jones for his expertise on insects and to the staff at the Infant and Junior for having a go with the teaching packs. It's great to see my work being used so successfully in school.



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



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Company Number 3661322

Charity Number 1073859