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FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

NEWSLETTER

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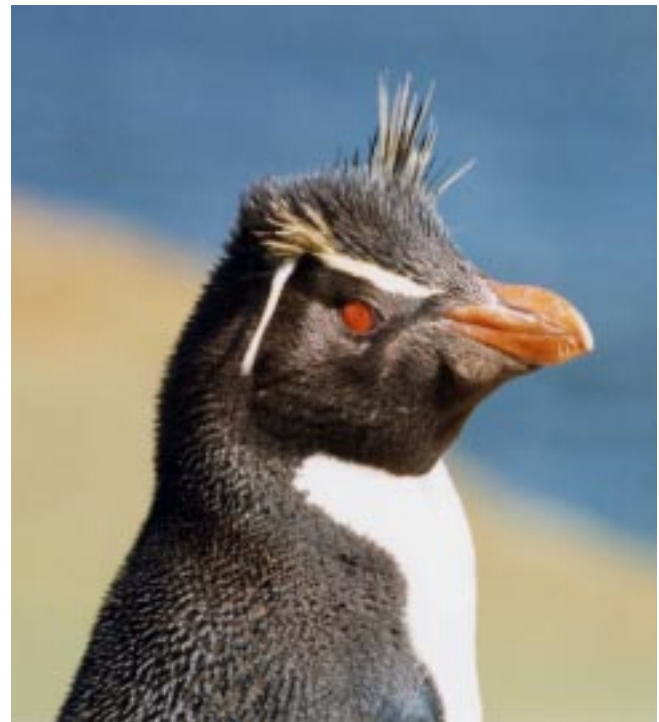
PENGUINS COULD BE FACING PROBLEMS

There have been reports made to Falklands Conservation that many penguins in the Falkland Islands are dying. In March we reported dead Magellanic Penguins sighted at sea, and we are now receiving reports of problems with Rockhopper Penguins.

For some reason Rockhopper Penguins are not leaving their rookeries and are starving to death. Something similar happened in 1986 when there was a massive crash in Rockhopper numbers. In comparison with 1986 the number of dead penguins is low, but we won't know the full impact until penguins return to the Islands next spring.

Falklands Conservation would like to be concerned about this situation and would like to thank farmers around the Islands for checking the rookeries on their land and keeping us up to date about the situation.

So far, we are pleased to report the Gentoo and King Penguins seem to have been generally unaffected by the current problem apart from the occasional casualty and the slightly later moults in some places. This is probably because they exploit different food resources, and have the ability to digest relatively less digestible prey.



In an article written by BAS scientists Professor Paul Rodhouse and Dr Claire Waluda it is suggested that the northern water temperatures off the Patagonian Shelf, may have something to do with the lack of Illex in the fishery. Temperatures have risen where the squid spawn, and it is believed that this has seriously affected their food supply and as a result much of the squid larvae have died. FIG have reported that less than 10,000 tonnes of Illex have been caught this year making this the worst year since the fishery began in 1987. In the Falklands colder than normal water temperatures appear to have prevented the annual migration of Illex into our waters and have altered the relative distribution and abundance of plankton, such that Rockhopper and Magellanic Penguins are experiencing difficulties locating food.

Important Bird Areas in the Falkland Islands

Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are internationally important places for the conservation of birds and their habitats. The IBA programme is a global initiative to identify the world's most important places for birds. These can then be monitored and given appropriate protection. The programme was established in 1981 by Birdlife International, and uses internationally recognised criteria to identify each IBA and an anticipated 20,000 IBAs are likely to be described world-wide.

Falkland Islands birds fall into three of the categories:

- * Globally threatened species, some with declining populations: e.g. Rockhopper Penguin, Southern Giant Petrel, Black-browed Albatross, Striped Caracara and Cobb's Wren.
- * Restricted range species, found only in and near the Falklands: eg Falklands Steamer Duck, Tussac-bird, Kelp Goose.
- * Internationally important gatherings of seabirds or waterfowl: eg Thin-billed Prion, Dolphin Gull, Rock and King Shags.

Cataloguing the Falkland IBAs is being undertaken by RSPB (our BirdLife partner in the UK) and Falklands Conservation. Information from sites on East and West Falkland, and from other islands and island groups, indicate that there are probably thirtyone IBAs in the Falkland Islands.

An inventory of IBAs for the Americas is in preparation and will incorporate Falkland IBAs, as will a separate catalogue of UK Overseas Territory IBAs. These will clearly identify the Falkland Islands as ranking among the most important seabird sites in the world.



Screaming or Shiny Cowbird?

Believed to be a first for the Falkland Islands, a bird thought to be either a Screaming or Shiny Cow Bird, was sighted by George Smith at Johnsons Harbour. It was then seen again by Alan and Trish Henry and Mike and Sue Morrison a week later on the 14th of April and there has since been another sighting on the 21st of April in the same location. These bird species are more commonly seen in mainland South America, where they are native. The bird seen is reasonably small and black in colour with a greeny-blue shine to their plumage. It is thought that the bird sighted at Johnsons Harbour is an immature first winter bird.



The shaded parts of the map below show where the birds are normally found.



Distribution of Screaming Cow bird.



Distribution of Shiny Cow Bird.



Information and maps were taken from *The Birds of South America* written by Robert S. Ridgely and Guy Tudor

A Farewell from Darren

Darren Christie our Volunteer Field Assistant sums up his time with Falklands Conservation

I could never have believed what could be crammed into a ten-month period, or just how quickly that time could go. I did not plan to stay longer than my intended six weeks, as I had a place to study Zoology at University last year. My University place was safe, my parents happy, and FC willing to keep me busy, so on I stayed. And what a year I've had! I couldn't imagine a situation where I could have experienced more of what the Falklands has to offer, from the wildlife to eventually feeling part of the Stanley community, every experience has been a positive one. I originally started with FC in the office, where I had several projects to work on. I learnt my bird identification from working on the dreaded photo database and from helping produce the education packs used in the junior school. I learned about FC and the local area from designing posters and leaflets about their research and projects. Then came the fieldwork.

My fieldwork season actually started in the winter, helping with the very successful Rat Eradication Project. With wind and hail swept islands and death defying Sealion encounters my adventures were off to a flying start. I fear I'll always be known as Rat Boy, and only remembered as being stupid enough to spend the whole open day in the water, but to me it was one of the highlights of my stay. I also had my first trip to the West, staying at Saunders and Shallow Harbour. I managed to progress from rats to penguins when I moved on to the Seabird Monitoring project. I never thought that I would have to learn to count again, but penguin counting is definitely a skill that has to be practised! In terms of travel and wildlife, I probably got more out of this project than I did from any other. With Mags, Macs, Rockies, Kings and Gentoos I can safely say that I've seen some penguins. I also had a dream come true as I saw a Leopard Seal on one of the trips, something I'll never forget.



The project took me from Bull Point to Seal Bay, Port San Carlos to Volunteer Point, safely covering a large part of the East. I also made several return trips to Volunteer Point as temporary warden. More counting, penguin marking and the privilege of being able to spend time observing the wildlife provide yet more memories. Trips to Sea Lion and Saunders Islands were an added bonus. Unfortunately, I think that the smell of penguins and diet sampling will haunt me forever! The Seabird Monitoring Project introduced me to my first Albatross as well. Several days of counting and diet sampling allowed me to spend hours watching these incredible birds, and dodging under the occasional low-flyer on the cliff tops as well. This trip later proved to be only a brief encounter with albatross, in comparison to the Steeple Jason experience. Ten days on one of the most incredible islands in the world – I couldn't imagine a better trip to finish on. Two days on the Penelope, a stop at Carcass Island, sleepless windswept nights, the infamous Steeple 5 and 16,327 volcanic orange albatross will not be things I'll ever forget! A great experience, and another highlight of my stay.

No Conservation experience would be complete without some plants, so it was to the Wickham Heights I turned. A large part of a week was spent doing a plant survey for the National Park programme, and allowed me to learn some basic plant identification and also to play a role in the rediscovery of a plant not seen in the Islands since 1923. Another highlight was playing a part in cleaning the oiled Gentoos chicks, and having to feed them afterwards! It was a real pleasure to have got them to the stage where they could be released back into the wild, and to have been involved in that in some way.

I feel very privileged to have been a part of FC and to have played a small part in protecting such a special place. I've been lucky enough to live and work in a lot of places, and there is nowhere I love more than the Falklands. I'm sure that I'll find a lot of excuses to come back, I just hope that the Falklands will have me! Thank you to all at FC for letting me stay, and for keeping me busy, there never seemed to be a shortage of things to do!

Replica Endeavour visits Falklands



Photo by Jackie Summers

The HM Bark Endeavour sailed through the Narrows of Stanley Harbour on the 18th of April and set sail on the following Saturday evening. Whilst at dock the ship played host to more than six hundred visitors. The Endeavour, of which the HM Bark is a replica, originally sailed to the Falkland Islands in 1772 and was to visit twice more between 1772 and 76. It was built in Stanley's twin town of Whitby, England. The original ship was Captained by James Cook. The crew of the replica enjoyed their visit to the Falkland Islands and wished they could have stayed for longer. The ship's next port of call was Rio de Janeiro where they were due to arrive on the 5th or 6th of May.

Sponsored Swim to raise money for Watch Group

The Falklands Conservation Watch Group are about to undertake a sponsored swim. It is hoped that enough funds will be raised so that the Group can purchase T-shirts with their own logo on them (which they are all busy designing). The group, and other volunteers, hope to cover twenty miles which works out to be 1,280 lengths of the swimming pool. The swim will take place on Saturday the 8th of June. If you would like to pop in and offer your support or swim some lengths and help make up the distance, the Watch Group would be grateful for your support.



The HM Bark Endeavour leaving Stanley and beginning its onward journey to Rio de Janeiro.

Photo by Jackie Summers

Falklands Conservation will have on sale from September 2002 New Stock

Only available from the Stanley Office



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A full list of Trustees is available from our offices

The Newsletter is edited by Sarah Clement

Company Number 3661322 Charity Number 1073859

All items sold by Falklands Conservation have the Logo embroidered on them.

The price list available from the Stanley Office



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