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FALKLANDS CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

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Ratification of ACAP – New hope for Albatross

Recently, conservationists across the world were celebrating the news that South Africa ratified the global Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, thereby guaranteeing its entry into force. ACAP is an essential step in halting continuing declines in the world's 21 Albatross species, all of which now face varying risks of extinction according to the IUCN Red Lists. Here in the Falklands, the Black-browed albatross has declined by over 87,000 breeding pairs in five years and has recently been re-categorised as Endangered.



Ecuador, Australia, New Zealand and Spain have already ratified ACAP. South Africa becoming the fifth country means that this will enter into force on 1st February 2004. Under ACAP, signatory states are required to take measures to reduce seabird bycatch from fishing, shown world-wide to be the prime factor in the relentless population declines in the majority of

albatross species and related seabirds. It also requires signatory states to develop a wide-ranging Action Plan to tackle not just threats from fishing, but also eradication of introduced predators, reduction of disturbance, habitat loss and prevention of marine pollution.

Falklands Conservation, as an Associate member, joins BirdLife International in urging the UK, including the Overseas Territories of the Falklands, Tristan da Cunha and South Georgia, all of which hold globally important populations of some of the most threatened species, to ratify the Agreement without delay, as well as France, Chile and Peru. French-governed Amsterdam Island is home to the most threatened species, the Amsterdam albatross, classified as Critically Endangered and also threatened by disease, now only has a population of some 20 pairs breeding annually and suffering increasing chick mortality. Euan Dunn, Head of Marine Unit for the RSPB, comments 'With many albatrosses sliding towards extinction, ACAP's entry into force comes not a moment too soon. The treaty's strength is that it is legally binding on signatory states, so they will have to take firm measures to protect seabirds'.



In light of these new developments, the 'Save the Albatross' voyage leaves South Africa this week. John Ridgway, who rowed the Atlantic with Chay Blyth in 1966 is one of Britain's most experienced sailors and recently left South Africa on his year-long epic voyage to campaign against illegal fishing. John arrives in the Falklands in January and FC will be hosting a welcome reception for him, prior to his departure for South Georgia. On this trip he will be accompanied by FC's Tim Reid, aiming to highlight the continuing plight of the Black-browed albatross.

Source Birdlife International



Darren says a goodbye as he embarks on another term at university

There aren't many people in the world that would choose to spend their summer holidays in the Falkland Islands winter volunteering for conservation. Those of you who know me won't be surprised by this apparent madness, for the privileged few who haven't met me I should explain...

I arrived in the Falklands in July 2001 and spent just under a year volunteering for Conservation, leaving in May 2002. I have just done the first of three years studying Zoology at University. For some reason Universities give outrageously long summer holidays, probably so that the sensible can earn enough to keep the bailiffs at bay. Whilst all my friends were looking forward to bar and factory work, I was cringing from the idea of stacking shelves in Sainsburys for 4 months. I may be a great believer in the benefits of experience, but I couldn't see how that could possibly help anything, let alone my degree. Off went a hopeful email to Conservation, begging them to save me from the boredom of the UK. Thankfully, they weren't quite as sick of me as I'd thought and started saving jobs for me straight away. Having experienced a winter in the Falklands before, I was resigned to the fact that I wouldn't be having quite as many adventures as I'd had last time. This didn't really matter, as I was going back to the Falklands, which had well and truly wormed it's way into my affections.

I hadn't expected many trips and adventures, but I couldn't have been more wrong. The first day back was the midwinter swim. The following week I was at East Bay for a mass whale stranding (one of the worst things I have ever seen, but necessary none the less). Ten days later I was back at East Bay for a week taking samples from the same whales. A few weeks later I was on Keppel Island clearing gorse. My final trip was 10 days on North East Island on a rat eradication project. All this has been interspersed with spur of the moment mercy missions, weekend walks and trips to some of the most beautiful places in the Falklands. All this and I still found time to help out around the office, planning trips, learning new skills and assisting with setting up the Photo Database which I began last year. With new skills learnt, new species seen, new places visited, new adventures had and most importantly of all, some really worthwhile work that I have helped out with, I can't regret a moment of my time down here. With camp driving, quad driving, more death-defying adventures with leaky dry suits, high speed rib adventures, hiking in the snow and close encounters with sea lions, I've had plenty of excitement to keep me going for a few weeks at least!



Sadly, after a brave attempt to get rid of me by auctioning me off at the charity ball, it's time for me to leave again. Another year at university calls, which I'll start with a host of new stories to bore my mates with, new skills and knowledge to apply to my course and a load of new experiences to remember. Most importantly I have old friends and new to look forward to coming back to next year, all of whom I'm really going to miss. Thanks to all those at FC who made this trip possible, those who trusted me with their houses whilst away, and to those who weren't lucky enough to be away whilst I stayed with them! Thanks also to those not involved with FC who kept me busy in between times. So, until next year's instalment...

Field Assistant 2003 - Jim Scott



My name is Jim Scott and I work for the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) in the UK. I am in the Falklands for seven weeks, till mid December, assisting FC with their annual seabird monitoring program. This is a combination of a months sabbatical plus some holiday. I have worked for the RSPB since 1991 on a number of different nature reserves. For my first four years I worked in my native Scotland, and then moved south to England. I have been at my current reserve at Snettisham in west Norfolk for the last eight years. Snettisham is a lovely place to work. The reserve is situated on the east side of the Wash, and consists of 1,830ha of intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh, brackish lagoons, and vegetated shingle. The Wash is the most important estuary in the UK for wild-fowl and wading birds with over 300,000 present at peak times during the winter. Snettisham is the single most important part of the Wash holding up to a third of the Wash total. The vast flocks of wading birds feed out on the mudflats outside of the high tide period. One of the reasons why Snettisham is so attractive to waders is the availability of disturbance free high tide roosting sites. Part of my job is to ensure the availability of roosting sites for waders. These occur within a series of lagoons that run parallel to the beach, and consist of a series of islands and shingle spits. To maintain them in optimum condition requires manipulating lagoon water levels, removing vegetation on an annual basis, and replacing washed out shingle on an occasional basis.

A whole range of wading species can be found on the reserve, either spending the winter or passing through in

spring or autumn to and from their breeding and wintering grounds. Most of the waders breed up in the Arctic. Some are circumpolar breeders such as sanderling, others come from specific areas, such as bar-tailed godwits from western Siberia, and knot from Greenland and eastern Canada.

From late October through to early February the reserve is also home to one of the largest roosts of pink-footed geese in the UK. In recent years numbers have peaked at around 35,000 to 40,000, which is around one sixth of the world population. They breed in Iceland and eastern Greenland and mainly winter in the UK.

My job as warden entails running the reserve on a day to day basis; managing other staff and volunteers; maintaining a car park, footpaths, birdwatching hides etc; carrying out habitat management; conducting a whole series of survey work; producing an annual report, plus numerous other admin work. I am also involved in wider conservation work within the Wash and north Norfolk.

During my stay in the Falklands I will be assisting with counts of penguin and albatross colonies, as well as carrying out some diet sampling to find out what the birds have been eating. So far I have been out to Sealion Island for a couple of days, and surveyed colonies around Bull Point and Motley Point. Areas yet to cover include around Volunteer and Cow Bay, Port San Carlos, and hopefully a trip out to Steeple Jason to monitor albatrosses.

So far I have really enjoyed myself. The wildlife is amazingly tame, and the people are very friendly. I am sure the rest of my stay will be just as good.

Jim Scott November 2003

Fossilised Albatross Colony Discovered

Source:- THE GARDIAN

The first fossilised colony of breeding albatross ever discovered has been unearthed by researchers in Bermuda. The colony was entombed under several metres of sand in a single storm, burying adults, eggs and chicks.

The birds were driven out 400,000 years ago due to a massive jump in sea level, to more than 20 metres above its current height. Storrs Olson of the National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC says that "the albatross would probably still be there if we hadn't had the rise."

The Bermuda birds were short-tailed albatross, (*Phoebastria albatrus*.) and are only found on a few islands off Japan, having been all but wiped out by feather-collectors a century ago. This species is critically endangered and elsewhere around the world albatross are being accidentally killed by long-line fishing.

Moody Brook Clean Up!

The annual Falklands Conservation Beach Clean is taking place on **Sunday 7th December 2003** at Moody Brook.

Rubbish and industrial waste pose a real threat to our environment. We need to keep our beaches free of rubbish for the people and wildlife who use it.

We have chosen Moody Brook this year as we feel that there is a lot we can do make the place much safer, especially for the horses now grazing there.

The clean will be starting at 10.30am and we hope to finish at around 2.30pm. There will be a free barbecue, teas, coffees and the odd beer afterwards!



New Faces at Falklands Conservation

Amanda Morris is the new Executive Office and will be holding fort until Sarah Clement returns from the UK. Amanda will be doing all the usual jobs as well as working with the Watch Group, and focussing on the 25th Anniversary Celebrations.

Christina Laskaridis has come from Athens, Greece as a volunteer for Falklands Conservation before she goes off to University in the UK and already she is thoroughly enjoying life here.

Alex Cripps as you may remember did her work experience here last year. She has just finished her IGCSE's and will now also be volunteering for Falklands Conservation before she goes to college in the UK.

FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

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A full list of Trustees is available from our offices

The Newsletter is edited by Becky Ingham

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Spiderman to visit Falklands!

In January, the Falklands are all set to receive a visit from Alastair Lavery, the RSPB's very own Shackleton Spiderman!

Alastair will be arriving on the 21st January, to collect baseline data on the distribution and abundance of Falkland spiders, from a variety of sites around the islands. He will do this by pitfall trapping, using trays dug into the ground to literally catch the spiders as they walk along the ground, and also by direct searching. Although his visit is brief, just a month from mid January to mid February, Alastair intends to cover many different areas and habitats in his search for the islands 8-legged residents.

Funded by the Shackleton Scholarship and supported by Falklands Conservation, the trip will cover Lafonia, the Wickham Heights and areas of West Falkland. This is the second trip Alastair has made to the islands, the first being in 1997 when he visited to help FC develop their environmental education programme.

Falklands spiders are a relatively unknown part of the fauna. There are 19 types of spider and 2 types of harvestmen, with many of these being endemic to the islands. First described in 1913, with updates in 1977, literature on this group of animals is rare and little has been published. Ultimately, Alastair aims to work with Falklands Conservation and interested locals, to produce an illustrated guide to the spiders.



Photo: Green spider, Dave Tyler 2002

Adopt A Penguin

A Gift That Lasts All Year

This Adopt-a-Penguin Pack is available from the UK and Stanley Office. They make great presents and give you the opportunity to help support the Falkland Islands Wildlife.



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