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FALKLANDS CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

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Marine Mammal Medics Visit Falklands

Two directors of the British Divers Marine Life Rescue are currently in the Falkland Islands carrying out workshops, training people to become Marine Mammal Medics. Alan Knight and Mark Stevens arrived in the Islands on Monday the 21st of October and have carried out three public workshops and two school visits, as well as visiting several sites around the islands.

The workshops have proved not only to be very informative but a lot of fun as well, even up to your waist in the South Atlantic with sleet blowing in your face. The workshops give the qualification of Marine Mammal Medic and third party insurance to those who successfully complete the day long course. The course includes a morning of theory followed by a practical session in the afternoon, in which you learn to assess the condition of marine mammals, decide on a course of action, and finally how to care for the animal on the beach and, if appropriate, re-float it.



Once you have completed the course you are left with the confidence to face the unfortunate situation of a marine mammal stranding and it is a comfort to know that there are now thirty seven people in Stanley and MPA who are qualified to help if such a situation arose. Whilst this is something that Falklanders have dealt with successfully in the past, having this number of people who are knowledgeable increases the chances of being able to help in an emergency.

The decision to try and get the BDMLR team to the Falklands was taken last year and the Shackleton Fund supported the mission. Some funds have also been provided by the FC Charity Ball. FC would like to thank Alan and Mark for giving their time and expertise free of charge and hope that they have enjoyed their South Atlantic trip.

Over the next few years, with equipment bought at cost price through BDMLR, FC will be running other courses to train people in marine mammal rescue.



Photos by Alan Knight

Return to Keppel

Article and photos by Carol Miller

On the 3rd October I was lucky enough to be part of a group to visit Keppel Island with the task of preparing the settlement for a visit by a small tourist ship during the summer.

It was seven years since I had been back to my home. I arrived with mixed feelings. There was no time to dwell on this, as there was a lot of work to be done in four days. Rob set off to see if the land rover worked and in no time had this going which meant we had transport for heavy loads, next the generator, water turned on and then I could drive everyone insane by insisting on taking over the lighting and feeding of the rayburn.



The old farmhouse at Keppel

While walking around deciding which jobs were to be dealt with first, we found a pair of barn owls roosting in the shearing shed and by the amount of pellets and the contents of them they were doing a very good job of keeping the rat population in check. The disturbing bit was that we also noticed there were no longer any siskins in the settlement but there was no proof that there was a connection. It would be interesting to know if anyone else has ever noticed that barn owls have an effect on a siskin population.



Clearing the larger rubbish was made much easier once Rob had the Land Rover up and running



Looking across the settlement, the areas becoming covered with calafate can be clearly seen. This plant has already proved itself a problem at other East Falkland settlements, where it can take over entire valleys if left unchecked.

We spent the three days clearing out sheds, cutting back overgrown trees, finding paving stones, rebuilding fences and generally giving the place a face lift. There was nothing we could do about the massive spread of gorse. This has spread covering tracks around the banks and self set a large number of bushes. The other plant, which is now becoming invasive, is the calafate. There had always been a few plants but with the removal of stock from the islands this has started to spread and could become a problem.

It was amazing to see how much the trees in the valley, where the garden used to be, had grown. There are various types that have been planted in recent years, of these the lodge pole pine, eucalyptus and Southern beech are the most successful. There is also an increase in the number of currant bushes growing around the settlement.



The settlement at Keppel Island



Sorting out some of the buildings proved a difficult task!

One afternoon while feeling guilty at the fact that everyone was working so hard I set off for the north west part of the island with a particular view to seeing if the sand grass we had planted years ago had taken and spread in the badly eroded area known as Robinson's Point. The ground was very wet due to the wet winter but also because of the increase in the carpet of vegetation. There were large flocks of upland geese but they tended to feed on the greens near fresh water. There were areas that had been short greens that the geese had not touched. It was really pleasing to see that the sand grass had spread and was doing a good job of stopping the erosion at the Point. I didn't have time to look at the albatross and penguin colonies but saw a large variety of shore birds as well as swans, grebe, Johnny rook, snipe, finches, skylarks and various duck. It was good to be walking through one of my favourite places, despite the cold wind.



The hardy band of workers at the end of the day

All too soon it was Monday and time to leave and a last tidy up. Thanks to Debs for asking me to go on the trip and to Sally, Rob, Tony and Jim for being such good company, listening to my reminiscences and putting up with my paranoia about the stove!

ANOTHER NATIVE WILDFLOWER DISCOVERED

Falklands Conservation has discovered another new native wildflower for the Falkland Islands. Only last month Falklands Conservation announced the discovery of Waterwort (*Elatine triandra*), now we have another plant for the list. During survey work around Big Pond, Ceritos, East Falkland last December, a strange looking, sedge was discovered. Material was collected and sent to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, for identification, and after a bit of a wait we now have a name for the plant. It is Bank's Sedge (*Carex banksii*) and it can be found as scattered patches growing around the margins of Big Pond. Whilst new to the Falkland Islands, Bank's Sedge is already known from mainland South America.

The Falkland Islands have thirteen native sedge species. Most, like Bank's Sedge, are poorly known, rare, and in some cases under threat. Falkland sedges are a difficult group of plants to identify but they are an important part of our native biodiversity and would repay greater study.

Big Pond seems to be an important location for rare plant species and interestingly it is one of the two locations where Waterwort was discovered. With this new discovery the Falkland Islands are now known to have 173 native plant species. A specimen of Bank's Sedge can be seen in the National Herbarium.

Falklands Conservation would like to thank Dr David Simpson of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, for his help in identifying the new plant.



Bank' Sedge - Carex banksii

Standard Chartered Bank to Sponsor Watch Group

Following an approach earlier this year, the Standard Chartered Bank in Stanley have offered to assist Falklands Conservation by sponsoring the junior Watch Group.

The financial support has been offered for one year and will allow members of the Watch Group to have one flight per year. This will enable FC to take the children on a wider range of trips and activities and hopefully encourage more activities on offshore islands and the West. Also being covered are the costs of producing the Rocky's News, the junior newsletter, as well as producing each member their very own designed Watch Group t-shirt.

The Watch Group was started three years ago and has recently expanded in both terms of numbers and the level of meetings and activities. FC would like to take the opportunity to thank the SCB for their support

Marine Mammal Medics visit Volunteer Point

Alan Knight and Mark Stevens, the visiting marine mammal medics, ventured out on a trip to Volunteer Point on the 28th October. The trip was to capture King Penguin chicks on film for a program for Falklands Conservation on the Do's and Don'ts of how to behave near wildlife. The cameramen who accompanied Alan and Mark on their trip, Martin Gaunt and Russ Williams, have been brought down by the military because they are filming a documentary for them, whilst also filming the marine mammal medics. Their trip also involves filming for the Discovery Channel.



The great Falkland Islands bug hunt

Islands in the southern oceans are of considerable conservation importance. They provide some of the few examples of terrestrial ecosystems to be found in mid to high southern latitudes, contain the nesting grounds of a significant proportion of the world's seabirds, and house a variety of unique species. Mention the wildlife of the Falkland Islands and you probably think of penguins, albatross or perhaps elephant seals. While these beautiful and endearing species are certainly of considerable conservation significance there is another group of animals, seldom thought of as beautiful, where the number of native species far exceeds that of birds and mammals combined; the invertebrates.



Alex setting up a bughunting trap

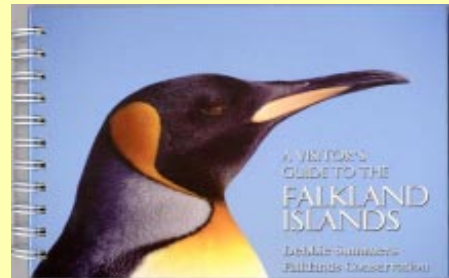
Invertebrates are animals that lack backbones, and include such bugs as insects (e.g. beetles, flies and moths), crustaceans (e.g. woodlice), annelids (e.g. earthworms), mollusks (e.g. snails and slugs) and arachnids (e.g. spiders and mites). At present little is known of the true extent and diversity of Falkland Island invertebrates and the conservation threats which they may be under, the absence of such data representing a major gap in our knowledge of Falkland Islands biodiversity. In order to find out more about our local bugs so that they can be best conserved, October saw Falklands Conservation begin work on a survey which has already identified several species likely to be new to science. The survey (becoming known as the 'bughunt') is being coordinated by Dr Alex Jones, from the University of Wales, Bangor, who will be on the Islands until December the 8th. Over the next month a variety of collecting methods will be employed over a range of terrestrial and fresh-water habitats in an attempt to ascertain the diversity of Falkland

invertebrates. All the samples collected will then be returned to the UK for taxonomic identification, the majority being examined by experts at the Natural History Museum (London).

This bug hunt is a pilot for a planned project that it is hoped will run for a further three years, during which time a field guide to local insects will be written and a reference collection of invertebrates produced for the islands. An important aspect of this, and all future, invertebrate research in the Falkland Islands will be to raise local awareness and knowledge of our unique invertebrate life. If any readers are interested in finding out more, or even joining in with survey work, please contact Alex at Falklands Conservation, where collection kits and instructions can also be obtained. If enough interest is shown, weekend field trips can be arranged. This is an excellent opportunity to go down in history by discovering a new species (and we expect many), so why not join the hunt and look under a stone tomorrow?

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