

Bird Island

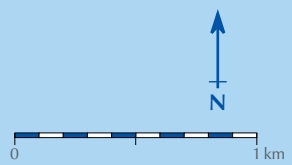
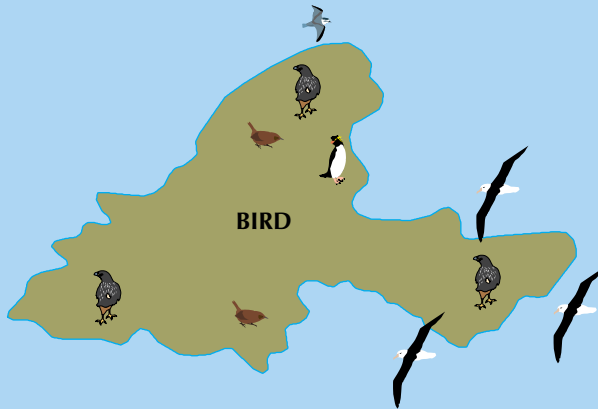
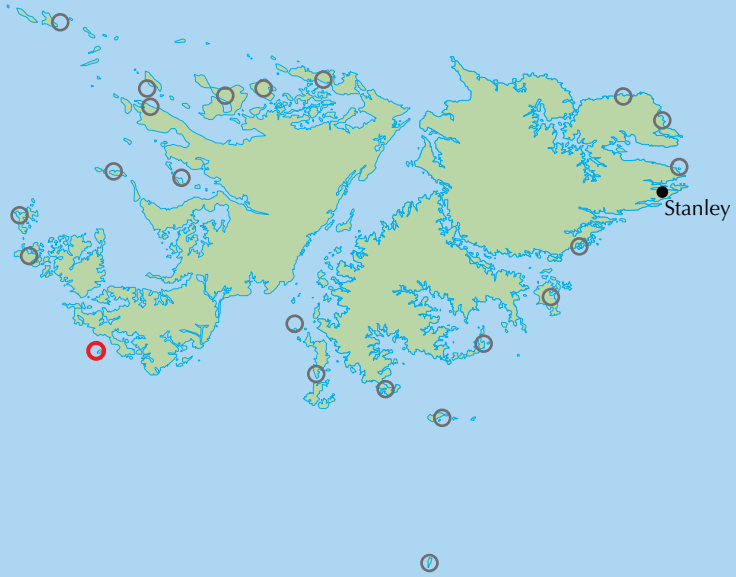
Ref number	FK03
Admin Region	Falkland Islands
Co-ordinates	52°10'S, 60°55'W
Area	120 ha
Altitude	0–107 m
IBA categories	A1, A2, A4ii, A4iii
Status	National Nature Reserve (designated 1969) Owned by Falkland Islands Government.

Site description

Bird Island is located 4.5 km off the south-western coast of West Falkland and is roughly triangular in shape. The western half of the southern coast has sheer cliffs reaching at least 70m and the plateau above slopes gently to the north and west. In the centre of the island there is a large seasonal pool, to the west of a small inlet. The eastern promontory has two domed peaks reaching to at least 110m with sheer southern cliffs of 30m and very steep slopes in the north. Access by boat is difficult, except at the small north-east-facing inlet between the northern and eastern promontories, and the terrain is difficult to cross, with dense growth of Tussac above thick, soft peat and Tussac overhanging deep gulches.



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FK03	Bird Island	Breeding (pairs)	Notes
Criteria	Key species		
A1, A4ii	Black-browed Albatross <i>Thalassarche melanophrys</i>	10,200 (approx)	2000/01
A1	Rockhopper Penguin <i>Eudyptes chrysocome</i>	7,900 (approx)	2000/01, decrease from 10,600 (approx) in 1995/96
A1	Sooty Shearwater <i>Puffinus griseus</i>		Heard at night in 1998 and 2000
A1, A2	Cobb's Wren <i>Troglodytes cobbi</i>	Numerous no counts	
A1, A2	Striated Caracara <i>Phalacrocorax australis</i>	50 (approx)	Spread across dense tussac, territories generally small, 1998
A2	Tussacbird/Blackish Cinclodes <i>Cinclodes antarcticus</i>		Population unknown but numerous throughout island
A4ii	Thin-billed Prion <i>Pachyptila belcheri</i>	Thousands	Very numerous, no counts
A4iii	Combined seabirds	>20,000	

Birds

See table above for details of key species.

The total number of species recorded on Bird Island in November 1998 was 27, of which 25 bred or were probably breeding. Macaroni Penguin, Ruddy-headed Goose, Canary-winged/Black-throated Finch and Falkland Steamer Duck are present but their status is uncertain or populations are too small to qualify. The congregation of seabirds on this island exceeds 10,000 breeding pairs, making the site classifiable under the A4iii criterion. Bird Island is one of the most important breeding sites for the Striated Caracara and it is considered that the population here is at least as dense as on any offshore island around the Falklands, possibly due to the very large population of Thin-billed Prions, an important prey species. Deep Tussac cover over most of Bird Island makes it comparable to Beauchêne Island for the density of burrowing petrels. Other species that should be investigated include Sooty Shearwater, Grey-backed Storm-petrel, which is thought to be numerous, Rock Shag, Imperial Shag and Dolphin Gull. Endemic races present include Dark-faced Ground-tyrant, Falkland Thrush, Long-tailed Meadowlark and Common Diving Petrel.

Other species of interest

There are two colonies of South American Fur Seal present on Bird Island, one of about 100 individuals on the northern coast, the second on the south western coast, comprising approximately 10,000 individuals: the largest South American Fur Seal colony within the Falklands archipelago. The island also provides a haul-out for Southern Sea Lion, although they are not known to breed there. No endemic or introduced species were recorded in 1998; only 12 native flowering plants were found with Tussac predominant.

Conservation issues

Bird Island is free of introduced mammalian predators, which is fortuitous because penguins were being killed there in the mid-19th century, seals were taken at the end of that century, and penguin and albatross eggs were collected for consumption. All visitors by boat should be informed about the dangers of accidentally introducing alien species to Bird Island. Another local issue arises from the annual dispersal of juvenile Striated Caracaras, perceived as a problem at a few farms on neighbouring West Falkland. There have been requests to kill some birds, but few licences to remove 'rogue' birds have been issued under the Conservation of Wildlife and Nature Ordinance (1999). A detailed study of the ecology of the Striated Caracara and the interaction of the species with agriculture within the Falklands is necessary and should be seen as a priority.

One of the main priorities for Bird Island is to assess the populations of burrowing petrels and passerines. The Tussac has not been grazed and there are no signs that the vegetation has been burnt in the past. It is very important that the Falkland Islands Countryside Code (see Appendix 1) is followed, particularly to guard against the risk of fire to this important National Nature Reserve.

References

Strange, Parry, Parry and Woods (1988), Woods and Smith (1999).



Sooty Shearwater – breeds in considerable numbers at several Falkland sites and probably at Bird Island
ALAN HENRY