



# Visiting Falklands Conservation's Island Nature Reserves

Why have we written guidance?

Offshore islands are the most important sites for wildlife in the Falkland Islands. Their isolation often preserves them from damage by humans and their livestock, however islands are vulnerable. Of the 724 recorded animal extinctions in the last 400 years, about half were island species!

Falklands Conservation owns and manages a number of island reserves in the Falkland Islands. Many of these sites are nationally important for the plants and animals found there, some are parts of a network of sites which are globally important. Our vision for these sites is that they are managed to conserve their wildlife and ecological functions, so that they remain robust to threats, and intact for future generations to appreciate. They will also contribute to maintaining the well-being of the wider Falklands environment.

We need to try and protect our sites from important threats to their wildlife and habitats. For this reason we ask people to **please seek permission before accessing Falklands Conservation's island sites**. This is so that we can inform them of how to avoid damage to them, and also sometimes help us gather information to aid management of them.

We generally have no objection to access requests from responsible visitors and hope you will be inspired by the wonderful wildlife and share your experiences with others. There is no landing charge, but if you wish to support our management of the sites please get in touch!

Below are brief descriptions of threats to Falklands Conservation's islands and the approaches you should follow to protect them.



Figure 1: Double Island, an FC-owned site

## Non-native species

The introduction of any non-native species has the potential to damage habitats, species and ecological function. For example, a number of bird species including the Cobb's wren and tussacbird (these species are only found in the Falklands) would be heavily impacted by the introduction of rodents, and in the case of Cobb's wren certainly wiped out from the island. Many habitats and plants are susceptible to grazing and non-native plants can compete with native species and could be very difficult to eradicate if established. The introduction of diseases can have catastrophic impacts on wildlife which has not previously been exposed.

- Check and thoroughly clean boots, outdoor clothing and used outdoor equipment for soil, animal faeces, seeds and insects. Look in all the nooks and crannies, risk organisms are found in unlikely places; seeds lodged in Velcro fastenings or the treads of boots, soil stuck in tent pegs or tripod legs, earwigs in backpacks and mice in tent bags are not unheard of! Please check any storage containers for rodents before taking them ashore too.
- There are several naturally occurring diseases which affect our wildlife, and while it is natural for outbreaks of such diseases to occur, the speed and distance these diseases can spread can be made worse by people inadvertently spreading the disease. Therefore it is particularly important to clean footwear when moving from one wildlife area to another. If foot dips are provided for this purpose please use them, if not give boot soles a scrub with a weak bleach solution and let them dry before moving on to your next destination. If you see signs of diseased wildlife please notify Falklands Conservation.
- Our marine and freshwater environments are relatively pristine, with only three known marine invasive species present in the Falklands. If you have a fouled hull, suspect you may have marine hitch hikers, or have come from another region that harbour marine invasive species please think carefully about accessing our sites. If you are in doubt check biosecurity guidance on the FIG website. Waste should be disposed of according to MARPOL regulations.
- Certain foodstuffs are of concern since they may carry avian diseases. We ask that only essential processed foods are taken ashore and no food remains are left on the island.



Figure 2: Cleaning equipment is vital to limiting the spread of invasive species



Figure 3: Rodent detector dogs can be used to search for mice and rats, but the process of removing them is much more costly than making sure they are not present to start with



Figure 4: Seeds and insects can spread on boots and other clothing

## Fire

Fire is highly destructive for offshore islands, particularly those which may have extensive tussac habitat. Tussac peat will burn for long-periods underground destroying soil structure and creating sink holes. The loss of vegetation makes wind erosion worse, less mobile animals (chick on nests for example) or burrow nesting seabirds can be burned, whilst seals are known to fall into and get trapped in sink holes.

- No smoking whilst ashore
- No camp fires whilst ashore
- Camping stoves may be only permitted on specific request

## Disturbance

Disturbance is sometimes difficult to detect and may be subtle to the visitor but significant to the wildlife such as distracting birds by your presence so that predators can take eggs or chicks more easily, causing unnecessary movement at resting sites where penguins may be moulting and unable to feed to replenish vital reserves, scaring animals into areas where they may be preyed or injured or affecting their behaviour by your presence such as small seabird being attracted to vessel lights and crashing into them.

- Always give animals the right of way. Remember not to block the routes of seabirds or mammals coming ashore to their colonies.
- Stay on the outside of seal and seabird colonies. Remain at least 6m (20ft) away.
- Move slowly and quietly.
- Do not startle or chase wildlife from resting or breeding areas.
- Where possible dim lighting to avoid seabirds being attracted to, and colliding with, your vessel. This can be a significant problem at islands with large burrowing seabird populations under certain weather conditions. If you cannot dim lighting for health and safety reasons, please be away from the islands by night fall.
- Drones should not be used without explicit permission from Falklands Conservation. Any permission will likely be subject to presenting an appropriate research licence and/or written commitment to adhere to national policy on drone flying.



Figure 5: Although the largest animal you're likely to find on an FC island, elephant seals can hide in tussac and be difficult to spot

## Physical Damage

Although discarded rubbish can directly damage wildlife through entanglement or ingestion, and picking rare plants can have direct impact on their population, unintentional damage to habitats can occur just through trampling or siting tents or equipment.

- Please do not damage the site by picking plants. Some are protected by law and you could be fined.
- Whalebones skulls, eggs, and many other natural artefacts cannot be exported from the Islands – leave them as you find them.
- Remove your waste.
- Think about the impacts of your activities – apart from your footprints there should be no signs of your visit.

## Health and safety

Visiting islands comes with risks to the visitor as well as those posed by the visitor to the island. Islands are remote places with challenging terrain and sometimes unpredictable wildlife that may attack if threatened or if you threaten their young. Falklands Conservation can take no responsibility for site visitors, who should undertake their own risks assessment before visiting such remote sites.