

A Native Seed Hub is Born *by Frin Ross*

Last year we described how a mixture of sheep dung and native plant seeds could be used to revegetate eroded areas (*FC Magazine October 2016: Get growing! Sheep poop and native plant seeds prove a successful recipe for habitat restoration*). A challenge to using this method is finding convenient and reliable sources of native seed...

Then! Cape Dolphin Native Seed Hub was born. Hooray! This Hub is based on trials at Stanley Nurseries; it will provide seed for restoration projects at Cape Dolphin Farm and small spin-off projects elsewhere. It will also be a great place to try out different methods of collecting and processing seeds and to showcase this work for other Falklands farmers who might like to try similar seedy projects. The Hub was created and is run by Sonia and Andy Felton of Cape Dolphin Farm, with help from farm manager Ben Bernsten. Sonia's green fingers are legendary and she's a great fan of Falklands' native plants, - so it's no surprise that the Hub is flourishing.

Sonia and Andy dug the area by hand, removing the top sod and turning over peaty soil. It was then covered in a generous layer of old sheep dung and gently rolled using a quad bike. Importantly the Hub was tightly fenced with chicken wire to keep livestock and hungry hares out. Grazing upland geese are trickier to exclude and Sonia is often found shooing them away!

The super Seed Hub currently homes 7 native species. I am particularly excited about the Fuegian Couch Grass "jungle", - you may remember this species is my favourite and surely destined to be a Falklands Restoration Superhero because it can grow on the most eroded clay soils. Fescues and bluegrass are also popping up in neat, albeit patchy, lines. Seed collection will start this year but it may take another growing season before all of the plants are producing good amounts of viable seeds. Already plans are afoot (!) to add more cool species including native boxwood and fachine - these shrubs are super habitat for small birds. You can find out more information about native planting by following the links on the Habitat Restoration page of the Falklands Conservation website. Grow for it! 🐦

After less than one growing season plants are flourishing.



First cut - a Seed Hub is born (left to right Andy, Sonia and Ben).



A neat row of Fuegian couch grass emerges after just two months.



If you are at Cape Dolphin do stop in for a look at the Hub and an inspirational chat to Sonia about native plants around the Cape. If you are planning a visit it's worth calling Sonia first to check she is around (phone: 41017).