

Newsletter



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RSPB Sabbatical assisting with FISMP

By Janet Fairclough

After a lot of planning and the long flight from the UK, I finally arrived in the Falkland Islands in late October 2016, excited to be spending four weeks assisting with Falkland Conservation's annual Seabird Monitoring Programme.

This incredible opportunity was made possible thanks to RSPB sabbaticals and Falklands Conservation's willingness for me to visit and lend a hand. RSPB sabbaticals are a benefit which allows long-established employees to take four weeks out of their day-to-day job to work on projects that support the work of the RSPB and key BirdLife partners, such as Falklands Conservation.

The first half of my visit was spent on Steeple Jason. An hour-long flight from Stanley to Carcass Island was followed by a five-hour boat trip on the Condor. We (Sarah Crofts, Ross James and I) finally arrived at the spectacular, remote, uninhabited island that was to be our home for 12 days.

We had plenty to do whilst on Steeple Jason. We made several visits to the black-browed albatross study site, a defined area within the colony where c.460 nests are marked annually. As this was the first visit of the breeding season, our job was to mark all the nests where a bird was incubating an egg, and then identify the adult birds (the albatrosses within the study area are all ringed with unique numbers which enable individuals and pairs to be identified each year).



Secondly, we counted the albatross, gentoo penguin, southern rockhopper penguin and southern giant petrel colonies, using a combination of direct counts, taking photos with a go-pro on a long pole, and photos using a drone.

We also found time to enjoy all the other wildlife on the island, walk up to the top of the impressive ridge, and eat a lot of cheese! Steeple Jason is a truly incredible and unique place, I feel incredibly honoured to have lived there for nearly two weeks.



The second half of my sabbatical saw us travel the length and breadth of East Falkland, bumping along tracks and across camp to get to the penguin colonies that needed counting. We visited Bull Point, Low Bay, Motley Point, New Haven, Race Point, Volunteer Point, Lagoon Sands and Cow Bay.

In the UK, I work as a Farm Conservation Adviser, mostly in the more remote upland areas of Northern England. As such, I was very interested in finding out a bit about farming and habitats in the Falkland Islands as we travelled around East Falkland.

Sheep, cattle, acid grassland, dwarf-shrub heath, bogs, gorse scrub and sandy beaches – parts of the Islands seemed like such a familiar landscape, and I sometimes found myself comparing the landscape with Northumberland, where I live. However, the farming systems and scale are quite different.

All too soon my trip was over, and I reluctantly left the Falkland Islands to return home. I had a thoroughly amazing trip that fulfilled my passion for remote islands, had some spectacular wildlife experiences and met many wonderful and enthusiastic people. Thank you Falklands Conservation!

(Top to bottom) Albatross, On the ridge, Black-browed Albatross colony at Steeple Jason.



Falklands Conservation is a charity that takes action for nature in the Falkland Islands. We work in conjunction with local and international partners to preserve and protect the unique wildlife, plants and natural features of the Islands. It is only through your support that our work is possible. Thank you.

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Blown Across the Falklands By Colin Souness

Understanding in advance what challenges life might throw at you and actually meeting those challenges in reality are two very different things. I think we all understand that principle in our own personal ways, but it's probably not a bad thing to be practically reminded from time to time. My recent walk across the Falkland Islands, from Hill Cove to Stanley, was for me just such an experience. Namely, I was made to truly appreciate the difference between imagining wind and living with wind.

In advance of my trans-island trek I'd decided upon the summary title 'A South Atlantic Stroll' to represent the trip. However, in retrospect I think that 'Blown Across the Falklands' might have been more appropriate, for I have never experienced a constant barrage of moving air like that which helped propel me from west to east across the two primary landmasses of the island group. I completed the trek solo (a distance of just over one hundred and twenty miles, inclusive of the summits of Mt. Adam and Mt. Osborne) in thirteen days and it was an amazing experience for me; one of open vistas, unbroken horizons and seemingly perpetual wildness punctuated only by the occasional gorse bush, the odd dusty road and the occasional typhoon or chinook fly-by. The sky was vast and all encompassing, strewn with flitting clouds; nebulous reminders of my insignificance in this landscape. But, I never felt truly alone. The wind was with me almost every step of the way. At almost no point did I experience true silence as the ever-moving sky whipped audibly around my head, lashing my ears and, at night, pulling my tent every which way. Whether on West Falkland, Lafonia, somewhere on the MPA road or on the stone run strewn sides of Mt. Osborne, in the Falklands weather reigns supreme. Be it windy, wet, or, on some occasions, alarmingly sunny the Falklands landscape leaves walkers nowhere to hide. But, in the same vein, the views are equally unobstructed. This will surely be one of the more enduring memories of my time in the South Atlantic; the sheer immensity of the horizon. To stand on a mountain top - so clearly sculpted by the icy hands of glacial posterity - and look out unimpeded to the relentless blue immensity of the open ocean in almost every direction... To do that whilst still surrounded by life; grasses, tiny flowers and cordial news birds... That is truly special, and there are few places in the world where the hiker can enjoy such a rare privilege. The Falkland Islands are such a place and I'm grateful to have had opportunity to experience them.

Thank you, both to the landscape and to the people who live upon and in the midst of it. In particular, thank you to Peter in Hill Cove, everyone in Port Howard, Keith in Goose Green, the proprietors of Darwin Lodge for the use of their barn, Luke, Sarah and Leah Clarke for their hospitality in Stanley and, of course, everyone at Falklands Conservation for their continual work in protecting the unique identity of the Falklands' ecology. I hope I'm able to return and enjoy it again soon.

Habitat Restoration grows on! By Frin Ross

Following the success of the Darwin Initiative project we are very pleased to have been awarded a grant by the John Ellerman Foundation which will enable us to continue this work. Thanks to this support, and interim funding from the Falkland Islands Government, we have pressed on with exciting restoration initiatives across the islands. Here's a little taster:

At Sea Lion Island we have pinned sausages of green hay (grass leaves and stems with the seed heads intact) on to heavily eroded ground and secured patches of hay under pallets. If it works this approach might be used in other conservation areas where the use of manure is not appropriate.

We have supported the planting of tussac plug plants and a new Native Seed Hub at Cape Dolphin Farm. Cape Dolphin and Elephant Beach Farms are at the

forefront of tussac restoration and the addition of a seed hub should enable them

to use a whole range of native plants in future restoration projects, and to launch cool spin-off projects elsewhere.

In conjunction with the Public Works Department we have trialled the use of sheep poop, native seeds and discarded wooden pallets to improve the plant diversity at a spoil site which was otherwise sparsely vegetated with non-native species. We hope that once established the plants will seed and spread outside of the trial area.

With the Department of Agriculture we have tested the nutritional value of some native species and their plantability by direct drilling (where a machine makes a small slit in the soil and sows seeds straight into that - removing the need to disturb soil by turning it over). If successful these types of methods could be used to

revegetate large areas - currently only possible with non-native species.

In another trial to investigate ways of restoring larger eroded patches in agricultural areas we have popped whole native seed heads into an enclosure containing sheep, - to see if the direct hoof action and fertilizing powers of livestock can reproduce the raking and manure that proved successful in Darwin trials.

Control and eradication of invasive species is a high priority for the Falkland Islands Government: we are supporting practical control measures with volunteer hoeing trips (it's the "green gym" you know!) to Sea Lion and Saunders Islands.

A big thank you to everyone that has supported this work, we look forward to bringing you results as these projects progress. Please get in touch if you would like to find out more about using native plants for habitat restoration or have information you would like to share.



A Zookeeper's Visit to the Falkland Islands

By Charlie Ramsey

Falklands Conservation receive kind support for their work from Detroit Zoological Society and have just begun an annual program which will enable their expert staff to visit the Falklands. This is an account of the first joint visit to 5 FC owned Islands around West Falkland, which was a brilliant success, and kicks off our initiative to actively manage and monitor FC owned Islands. Here Charlie outlines his experiences.



Growing up in a small suburb of Detroit, never did I imagine that I would one day embark on a wildlife adventure of a lifetime in the Falkland Islands. This past December I was fortunate enough to be chosen by the Detroit Zoological Society (DZS), where I've been working as a penguin keeper for the last seven years, to travel down to the Falklands with our Director of Conservation, Paul Buzzard. The purpose of this trip was to play a supportive role to Falklands Conservation (FC) in the gathering of various types of ecological data on a grouping of islands owned by FC. Shortly after we arrived in the Falklands we travelled to Gypsy Cove for a brief look around. This is where I saw my first wild penguin, the Magellanic. At DZS I spend my days caring for macaroni, gentoo, king, and southern rockhopper penguins. Despite the fact that I have never worked with Magellanic penguins before, I was overjoyed with the experience of seeing these charismatic birds as they climbed the surrounding hillside toward their nest burrows. Little did I know as I watched in awe and wonder, was the sheer diversity and abundance of wildlife I would encounter in the days that followed.

Our expedition began the following day when we met up with David Spivack, Andy Stanworth, and Frin Ross of FC, and flew from Stanley to Weddell Island, where we were kindly met by Martin and Jane Beaton, and then boarded the yacht, Le Sourire, owned and operated by the lovely Delignières family. Immediately after boarding we charted course towards New Island and its smaller surrounding islands.

Fortunately we were blessed with, what we were frequently informed of as very unusual, calm seas and sunny skies for this 4-5 hour voyage. Upon our arrival at North Island, just north of New Island, we boarded a Zodiac and made landing. Here we were greeted by some cantankerous resident sea lions as we interrupted their sun-bathing and made our ascent up the side of the island. After what seemed to be hours of pushing through a forest of 2+ meter tall tussac we arrived at a mixed-species breeding colony of seabirds. Nesting black-browed albatross, king shags, and southern rockhopper penguins stretched intermingled along the east side of North Island numbering in the thousands. It was at this moment, as the sun passed overhead and the powerful smell of ammonia drifted along the gentle breeze that the magic of this entire experience really sank in.

We began our data collection here on North Island with the gathering of albatross fecal samples, the fresher the better, for diet analysis. This is where my training as a zookeeper really came in handy. Spending countless hours hosing, scrubbing and collecting the guano of seabirds throughout my career, one could say I am an expert in the field

of seabird scat. Additionally, we collected feather samples from the rockhopper penguins nesting on the island for isotope analysis. This will provide invaluable information regarding the foraging locations of these birds. Finally, we used a small remote-controlled drone to fly, at a safe altitude, high over the colony, photographing the nest sites from above so that an accurate census of each of the three species nesting throughout the colony can be taken. After a very productive and equally strenuous day of field research we made our way back to Le Sourire where we enjoyed a marvelous farm-fresh meal of masterfully-prepared mutton and a refreshing glass of wine. Never before have I had such fare after a day spent conducting field research, and probably never again will I be so fortunate.

During the days that followed we landed on Saddle Island, Ship Island, and Coffin Island, where we conducted similar data collection, and then finally we made our way back to Stanley to prepare for our long journey back to Detroit. I left the Falklands feeling simultaneously humbled and awestruck, having encountered animals I work with on a daily basis in their native habitat. I was overwhelmed by the kindness and hospitality that I encountered along every step of this journey, and I will truly never forget my experience in these beautiful islands in the South Atlantic.

(From top anticlockwise) Author on Le Sourire, North Island Seabird Colony, North Island Seabird Colony From Drone, Gentoo with Chicks





Stuart runs for the Watch Group

Standard Chartered Bank CEO for the Falkland Islands, Stuart Horsewood recently completed a marathon on the blue ice of Antarctica, close to the South Pole.

The temperature was minus 25 degrees C with the winds blowing at 50 miles an hour.

After travelling down from Punta Arenas in Chile on a gigantic Russian cargo jet, the marathon was run almost in the middle of Antarctica, right next to the South Pole itself. This meant that there were no animals or vegetation of any kind for Stuart to study, with the snow forever blowing such that you could never see where your feet were landing.

He was one of only 50 braving the climate and the 24 hours a day sunlight and aims to raise money for several Falkland Islands charities, including the Watch Group whose members Stuart admires for their invaluable help during the Standard Chartered Stanley Marathon every March.

The highlight for Stuart was not so much finishing the marathon and therefore completing the distance on every one of the seven continents, but actually planting the Falkland Islands flag on Antarctica and leaving it there for future travellers to see.

Sei whale project underway! By Caroline Weir

The sei whale is one of the least-known whale species worldwide. It is currently classified as Endangered by the IUCN following decades of commercial exploitation in the 1900s, and collecting data on its biology and ecology is important for filling in data gaps to inform conservation effort. The FC project “Developing a site-based conservation approach for sei whales *Balaenoptera borealis* at Berkeley Sound, Falkland Islands” is financed by the BEST 2.0 Programme funded by the European Union. It aims to investigate the spatial distribution and abundance of sei whales in Berkeley Sound and the potential for interaction with human users of the Sound. I arrived in Stanley in October to commence work as the Sei Whale Project Officer. My time prior to Christmas has predominantly been spent preparing the shore, boat and aerial methodologies that we will use to collect information on sei whales during the 2017 field season. Over the last month, sightings of sei whales in wider Falkland waters have begun to trickle in, but we are still waiting for the whales to arrive in Berkeley Sound. I am expecting most of the fieldwork to be carried out between February and early May, after which the whales will move out of Falkland waters again to other, currently unknown, areas. While they are here, I will investigate their distribution and abundance, and we will also collect information on population structure and diet via faecal and genetic sampling. The project will also trial a research technique called photo-identification which uses nicks and scars on the dorsal fin to identify individual whales, providing information on population size, movements and social structure. If you are interested in finding out more about the sei whale project or volunteering for survey work, please contact me via email (SWPO@conservation.org.fk) or via Falklands Conservation on +500 22247.



Sei whale (c) Yick Beaver

Falklands Conservation's UK Members Evening Wednesday 8th March 2017

We are pleased to announce that Falklands Conservation's UK Members Evening will take place on Wednesday 8th March 2017 at the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, London SE1 8UJ.

Doors will open at 6pm for a 6.30pm start, a contribution of £8 towards the cost of refreshments is requested, payable at the door, and the evening will end at around 9pm.

This years speakers will be Jonathan Hall, RSPB Head of UK Overseas Territories who will be talking about the Society's work in the South Atlantic UK Overseas Territories, and Maggie Balaskas, BirdLife International's Penguin Co-Ordinator who will letting us know all about BirdLife's new Penguin Campaign.

RSVP to: Falklands Conservation, UK Office, The Gatehouse, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, telephone 01767 693710, or email: ukdirector@conservation.org.fk

We look forward to seeing you on the 8th March and thank you for all of your support for Falklands Conservation.

Magellanic	Rockhopper	Gentoo	King	Albatross
Student £15	Individual £30	Household £50	Gold £100	Life £1000

Become a FC Member

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