

Newsletter



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Falklands Islands Flora at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew by Andy Stanworth

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBGK) has a long and prestigious history in plant science and conservation, particularly in its collections - the living collections, the herbarium and the Millennium Seed Bank, among others. With over 8.5 million items, Kew houses the largest and most diverse botanical and mycological collections in the world.

FC have a close and positive relationship with this giant of the plant world. This collaboration has led to a range of successful projects hugely increasing the knowledge and awareness of Falkland Island's plants such as the invaluable 'Updated Vascular Plant Checklist and Atlas for the Falkland Islands' (http://www.ukfit.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/FI_Checklist_UpsonLewis2014.pdf), the tefra project on how climate change may affect FI species, and the forthcoming 'Field Guide to the Plants of the Falkland Islands'.

As well as undertaking plant conservation research, FC also curates the Falkland Islands national vascular and lower plant collection in its 'Falkland Islands National Herbarium' (FINH) in Stanley (future article to follow). Kew's support in establishing and maintaining the FINH have been invaluable from mounting and maintaining specimens to providing training for FC's volunteer herbarium curator Helen Marsh.

I was lucky to have the opportunity to visit the UK and The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew this last autumn and catch up with familiar names and faces who have all contributed to the work FC and RBGK have collaborated on. A real bonus was to see how FI flora is playing its part over 8000 miles away.

My first encounters were in the rock gardens and greenhouses at RBGK with a guided tour by Marcela Corcoran UKOTS Programme Officer, Science Directorate. Amongst the rocks was a common heath plant, seen all over the Islands, known locally as 'Diddle Dee'. It is popular for its berries which are used for jam. Next up Mountain Berry, Dusky sedge and Yellow Maiden. Plenty of other Falklands natives to find, but a pleasant surprise was the Falklands endemic and globally threatened Moore's Plantain, found only at a handful of sites in the south of West Falkland. In the non-public greenhouses waiting for a showing were others, including another Falklands' endemic Coastal Nassauvia. There were plenty more. The plants do change, but for those members who might want the chance to see some Falklands species in the UK a trip to RBGK is well worth it!

I was really fortunate to have a look in the herbarium with Tom Heller (Islands Conservation Partnerships Coordinator (Projects), Conservation Science). It has most of the Falklands native species represented, and some real historic gems including a specimen sheet of the endemic Woolly Falkland Daisy with material collected by both Charles Darwin in 1833 and later the great Sir Joseph



Photo 1. Diddle Dee

Photo 2. Mountain berry foreground, centre rear dusky sedge, rear yellow maiden



Photo 3. Moore's Plantain

Photo 4. Coastal Nassauvia

Dalton Hooker - one of the most respected scientists of his day and one of the most important botanists of the 19th century.

Finally on to the Millennium Seed Bank with UK Director David Spivack where we were shown round by former FC colleague Alicky Davey. 125 of 180 native taxa of the Falklands are banked at the MSB in an underground vault. Falkland Seeds stored safely for the future.



Photo 5. Specimen sheet with collections by Darwin and Hooker

Photo 6. Seed storage vault with FI seeds somewhere within

It was a real privilege to see some of the behind the scenes collection work that RBGK do to increase awareness, knowledge and safeguarding of Falkland Islands flora. A huge thanks to Colin Clubbe and all those at RBGK for their time during my visit.

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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Seis and Saoirse by Andy Stanworth, Conservation Manager

I've been told a few times in the last couple of years that 'there's a reason that no-one knows much about sei whales'! And, to be fair, as sei whales don't really go in for surface antics, don't have many characteristic markings and are essentially a 15m long sleek torpedo that can leave the scene at a claimed top speed of 55 km/hr, it is going to be a challenging species to work with! Why then do we see the sei whale (*Balaenoptera borealis*) an important species for the FC marine programme? The species is currently classified as 'endangered' on the IUCN Red List after populations were decimated by commercial whaling operations in the 1900s, so it is a really important marine species that merits conservation action. Furthermore, the Falkland Islands appear to support globally significant inshore assemblages of this species, so we have a national responsibility to aid its recovery where we can. To do this it is vital that decision makers in the Islands can make well informed decisions about management of the marine environment. So, for sei whales in the Falklands, we need to know more!

FC have already undertaken a successful single-season pilot-study through an EU BEST 2.0 Small Grant, focussed on Berkeley Sound in 2016/17. Importantly it identified that the Berkeley Sound 'candidate Key Biodiversity Area' (KBA) should qualify for full, and perhaps 'priority' KBA status due to the presence of sei whales. It also resulted in the development of a guidance document for marine users to reduce impacts on whales and other cetaceans, generated information that will be incorporated into the revision of the Cetacean Species Action Plan, produced public awareness outputs and generated increased interest amongst stakeholders. This fantastic start was made by FC's sei whale project officer Caroline Weir, who will return to the Islands to undertake further work on sei whales in other candidate KBAs in West Falkland this coming February.

Out of the blue, FC were contacted in October by Keri Pashuk and Greg Landreth of Patagonia Projects (<http://www.patagoniaprojects.org/>) who run the yacht Saoirse (pronounced *SEER-shuh*). Keri and Greg have been involved in sei whale projects in southern Chile, including the largest recorded stranding of this species, in 2015 (<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/11/151120-worlds-largest-whale-stranding-sei-chile-animals/>). As luck would have it, Saoirse was going to be visiting the Falklands to pick up equipment and planned to sail around the north and west of the Islands. They generously offered to get FC volunteers and staff aboard and undertake some bonus sei whale survey work, an offer we were of course pleased to take up.

Five volunteers and I braved the Falklands weather and waters to rack up some impressive stats for the short trip, including some underwater sound recording using Saoirse's new hydrophone - approximately: 580 km travelled (figure 1), 40h 36mins on-effort sighting whales and trying to get Photo ID images (Figure 2) to add to FC's existing catalogue, 92 separate cetacean sightings (figure 3), an estimated minimum of 267 cetaceans observed including 110 whales (38 confirmed as sei), 20 Peale's dolphin, 137 Commerson's

dolphin, and 53hr 47 mins recording time on hydrophone. Though data and photo images still have to be analysed, it's already great to have seen sei whales in the West ahead of FC's upcoming work. All of this data will help to further understand more about this enigmatic species, feed in future survey planning and importantly conservation decision making. Huge thanks to Keri, Greg and Pichi the dog for time on Saoirse, and to volunteers Thomas Farrugia, Benjamin Keningale, Nathan Murphy, and Tara Boag. Thanks to all at Saunders Island, Beaver Island, West Point and Hill Cove for logistic support, and warm welcomes.



Figure 1. Survey tracks around West Falkland (different days in different colours) and approximate locations of sightings of individuals or groups (rorqual whales in square icons – green squares identified as sei whales; Commerson's dolphin in orange circles and Peale's dolphin in pink circles)



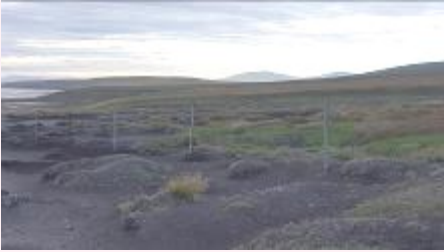
Figure 2. Whale sighting and images for photo ID on the bow of Saoirse



Figure 3. Close encounter with a sei whale showing 'nicks' in its dorsal fin that could be used to individually identify this animal

Small Grants Scheme Success at West Lagoons

Sian and Karl Nightingale received funds from Conservation's 2017 Small Grants Scheme to fence off an eroded area at their farm West Lagoons, on West Falkland. The area has begun to revegetate now that livestock can be kept off the area. Some tussac has been planted, with further planting planned for 2018. Sian said 'The tussac we planted seems to be doing well, and we are really chuffed with how the grass has grown on the eroded area with no help, just from not



having sheep eat anything trying to get through'.

The Small Grants Scheme provides small grants of up to £1,000 per project for promoting practical conservation and research and/or environmental education projects within the Falkland Islands for individuals or small groups. The Small



Grants Scheme receives applications from 1st July to 15th August each year. The SGS Committee is responsible for the decision process and decisions are typically completed by the 1st September.

The Detroit Zoological Society's Return to the Falklands

Paul Buzzard, PhD Field Conservation Officer, Detroit Zoological Society

For several years the Detroit Zoological Society (DZS) has provided financial support to Falklands Conservation (FC) because they work to conserve several species of penguins that are also at the Detroit Zoo such as Rockhopper, Gentoo and King penguins. With the opening of the Detroit Zoo's Polk Penguin Conservation Center in Spring of 2016, I was especially excited for the opportunity to help FC with direct conservation action, and that December, I went on an expedition with a DZS penguin keeper and FC staff to several FC islands around New Island. Using a drone, we documented the habitat and conducted baseline population surveys for Rockhopper penguins, black-browed albatross and other wildlife as part of the ongoing management of FC sites.

In 2017, the DZS and FC signed a three-year MoU for future collaboration, and I was thrilled to return to the Falklands in December for more surveys and field work. This time, the focus was to conduct bird and habitat surveys at some other rarely visited FC islands of East Falkland so in early December 2017 FC colleagues and I again boarded the ship we chartered in 2016, *Le Sourire* and benefitted once again from the sailing skills of Marie-Paul and Hugues Deligniers, for an expedition to Centre Island as well as Sal Island, Pyramid Island, Pyramid Island Islet, Motley Island and Little Motley / The Mot. On most islands, we again used the drone to document the habitat and landed to document plants and birds. The bird surveys identified Falkland endemics (those species only found in the Falklands) such as Cobb's wren, tussac birds and steamer ducks at all islands including several first records for Cobb's wren. This was significant because these ground nesting birds are important indicators of islands that are free of rats and mice. On one of the islands, The

Mot, only one of our crew (Andy Stanworth, FC Conservation Officer) was able to make a short and tricky landing, so we relied on the drone to document the habitat. In the late afternoon near The Mot we noticed sooty shearwaters gathering together, and as the sun went down we were thrilled to see thousands of shearwaters returning to their burrows there, fewer shearwaters than can be seen at Kidney Island near Stanley, but still one of the expedition highlights. Shearwaters are threatened and an important indicator of well-managed fisheries so documenting the location of a new colony was very significant.

We were encouraged to see few invasive plants on the islands and heartened that much of the habitat at another island, Motley, has recovered tremendously from historic grazing. On Motley, the plant life was very diverse with especially rare flowers such as yellow orchids and hairy daisies as well as large patches of bluegrass. Motley also had a very diverse bird community with an important Magellanic penguin colony, as well as many elephant seals. On the return to Mare Harbour, we were also fortunate to visit Middle Island with its stunning beaches full of Magellanic penguins. Unfortunately, our visit was too short to confirm the presence of Cobb's wren, but we saw many tussac birds which was encouraging. We also enjoyed identifying many rare plants on Middle Island such as Fuegian foxtail and rock cress.

At the end of my trip and back in Stanley, I was thrilled to meet with several FC trustees. We discussed the increasing role of zoos in conservation and the unique and exciting potential for FC and DZS to positively impact the conservation of penguins and other wildlife.

UK Members Evening Thursday 1st March 2018

We are delighted to announce that this year's UK Members Evening will take place on Thursday 1st March 2018 at the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street, London, SE1 8UJ (just 5 mins walk from Waterloo Station). Doors will open at 6pm for a 6:30pm start, and the evening will end at around 9pm. During the interval refreshments will be served, and a contribution of £10 towards the cost of refreshments is requested, payable at the door.

This year we will hear from Margaret Carr on how habitat restoration and rat eradication are helping the passerines of the Falklands.

After the interval we will hear about penguins from Professor John Croxall with a talk entitled "Penguins: Paradigms & Paradoxes".

If you would like to attend this year's UK Members Evening please email our UK Director, David Spivack at ukdirector@conservation.org.fk, by phone 01767 693710, or write to him at Falklands Conservation, The Gatehouse, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds, SG19 2DL before the 21st February 2018. Thank you for all of your support and we look forward to seeing you on the 1st March.

Farewell from Pamela

Working at Falklands Conservation has been one of the best experiences in my life. There's nothing more rewarding than working in a place with great culture, where we are all working with passion for the same reason.

I deeply enjoyed working on Habitat Restoration at Sea Lion Island with Frin, being part of the Sei whale project ("chasing whales" - like a dream come true) with Caroline. Camping whilst helping at the Seabird Monitoring Program with Sarah (training for the zombie apocalypse). Being part of the Charity Ball organisation team with Farrah and Liz and taking care of lovely Snowdrop and Romeo, our two King penguins that stayed with us as guests at the Penguin Rehab Centre. And all of the quests around the island with Andy and Esther...and ice creams with David!

The Falkland Islands is a very generous place, not only for the extraordinary wildlife and stunning geography, it is also for the people who live here. I feel I met high quality people at Falklands Conservation, and I'm happy to call them my friends. Now I will continue my support as a member, and as an active volunteer and I look forward to be part of many more projects in the future.

Playing for Conservation at the Gull and Penguin

Falklands Conservation received a welcome boost to their funds when Ghurkas Private Newton Rai and Gunner Puran Rai turned up in their office on Monday with £650. This money was the takings from a live rock concert held at MPA on Friday night at the Gull and Penguin. The event was organised by the two members of the 16 Regiment Royal Artillery 32 (Minden BTY). Being both musicians, who play under the name, Pigeon's Parade they topped the bill together with another MPA group, The Anemidiots, for whom Pte Newron Rai also plays drums. Other special guests were Dan and Lisa and DJ Moogyagi. All of this guaranteed a rocking good night for an audience of around two hundred.

Farrah Peck of Falklands Conservation said that they were very happy to receive such a generous sum and very touched that Newton and Puran had chosen Falklands Conservation when there were so many military charities they could have supported. Gunner Puran is a shortly to leave the Falklands which he says is "a very special place for wildlife."

Private Newton still has some months to do here and is already thinking about staging another similar event.

Farrah and Pame receive the money from Pte Newton Rai, (centre) and Gunner Puran Rai (right)



Magellanic
Student £15

Rockhopper
Individual £30

Gentoo
Household £50

King
Gold £100

Albatross
Life £1000



Become a FC Member

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Not all opinions expressed in this newsletter are necessarily those of Falklands Conservation



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