

Newsletter



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A Successful First Sei Whale Season in Berkeley Sound

By Caroline Weir

In October 2016 I arrived in Stanley to initiate the Falklands Conservation project “Developing a site-based conservation approach for sei whales *Balaenoptera borealis* at Berkeley Sound, Falkland Islands,” which was funded by the European Union BEST 2.0 Programme. This pioneering project was one of the first field studies of endangered sei whales anywhere in the world, and consequently very exciting to be involved with.



At the onset of the fieldwork during January, we really didn't know what to expect in terms of whether sei whales would be sufficiently approachable and amenable to study, how the various proposed field methods would work on this species, or to what extent the weather would dictate our progress. Looking back over the season since completion of the fieldwork in June, it is clear that despite those steep learning curves we have collected a valuable dataset that is beginning to reveal the details of these mysterious whales' lives.

Between February and May we completed six aerial surveys and 26 boat surveys in Berkeley Sound, collecting information on distribution, abundance, behaviour, diet and genetics. We also monitored the movements of individual whales, finding that some animals stayed for only a day while others remained for several weeks. We established that the whales were feeding on lobster krill, providing a direct link between predator and prey that should help with predicting the future occurrence of whales around the Falklands. We have also discovered clues about aspects of their lives outside of Falkland waters. Almost all individuals were covered in small scars from cookie-cutter shark bites, confirming that they had travelled to subtropical waters in previous years. Additionally, at least one whale had diatom films on its body indicative of time spent in Antarctica. Clearly, the Falklands are an important feeding ground for sei whales, but the islands represent only a small part of their total distribution. To understand more about how Falkland sei whales are related to those in other areas, we successfully biopsied 13 sei whales to collect small skin and tissue samples. This genetic work, funded by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, should increase our understanding of population structure which is fundamental to managing the animals over the longer-term and across wider areas.

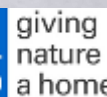
There have been some wonderful encounters along the way for the research team. Perhaps most memorably, we met a characterful individual dubbed "Curious George" on eight different survey dates in April and May who was extremely inquisitive about our small research boat and treated us to repeated close approaches. Having a large sei whale swimming on its side beneath us in a glass calm sea was unforgettable and provided added incentive to ensuring that these magnificent animals are conserved for future generations to experience.

The lengthy process of data analysis and reporting is now underway, and I will be assessing the conservation and



management implications of the data, producing community awareness products (such as information leaflets and posters) and identifying the priorities for future work on sei whales in the Falklands. Many thanks to everyone involved with this project.

Photos all Caroline Weir



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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Small Grants Scheme

Make a difference to your environment.

We can help by funding small grants to get you started.

Grants up to £1,000 are awarded for practical conservation, agri-environmental and educational projects that benefit the wildlife and environment in the Falkland Islands.

Closing date 15th August 2017

Examples of projects:

- Habitat restoration/protection for native plants through planting, management or fencing;
- Restoring eroded or disturbed ground using novel or tested methods;
- Control of invasive animals to reduce impacts on wildlife;
- Control of invasive plants (gorse, thistle etc.) where these are damaging native habitats;
- Wildlife surveys, especially for nature reserves or areas of wildlife importance such as Important Bird and Plant Areas;
- Provision of tourism information including signs, leaflets and guidelines at wildlife sites;
- Enhancement of wild places, nature reserves or places of biological diversity;

Environmental projects for youth and community groups e.g. creation of native plant gardens, trips to wildlife areas, tussac planting trips, awareness events.

Applications will be accepted until 15st August 2017, with grant allocations made by 30th August. Projects should be completed by 30th June the following year. Projects should aim to contribute at least 50% towards the total cost - this can be payment in kind such as labour, fuel, accommodation or materials.

For application forms and further information on eligibility or to discuss your project ideas please phone: 22247 or email: cso@conservation.org.fk

Penguin Pool..tastic

By Sarah Crofts

In February an enthusiastic team from BFSAI, Joint Forces Logistics Unit, spent 2 days at our Oiled Seabird Rehabilitation Facility in Stanley. We were lucky to arrange this through the MoD's community engagement scheme which helps Falkland's charities and organisations. The team were challenged to improve the outdoor area and pools at the facility to make them more comfortable and healthy to speed the recovery of penguins and other seabirds in our care.

Pools are vital for the rehabilitation process of oiled seabirds because they force the birds to replenish and maintain the waterproofing of their feathers. So it's really important that pools are designed in ways which encourage seabirds to use them. It is also vital that the water in the pools is clean - to discourage disease or damage to feathers, - so part of our brief was to improve the ability to do this.

Arriving with lots of energy and the required equipment and heavy machinery the team soon got to work. By the end of the two days the team had sunk one of the smaller pools firmly into the ground and connected drainage pipes to take waste water to our reed bed soak away. The larger pool that was installed in 2012, as part of the initial works at the facility, was also modified to improve access in and out for birds and to improve the filtering and drainage. Large fences were erected on the west end of the outdoor pen to provide much needed shelter on cold and windy days. We were hugely impressed by the teams efforts and enthusiasm on the project, and are very much pleased with the end result of all their hard work. Thank You BFSAI.

Photos all Sarah Crofts





Thank you !

to Ben Parker and all of CRC (Control and Reporting Centre) Griffin for your generous donation after a very successful curry and games night. Ben and his team wanted to give something back to the natural environment after their tour in the Falkland Islands.

Falklands Conservation: Dolphin Delight

By Matt Hay

I won't beat around the bush; I had reservations about being posted to the Falkland Islands during the austral autumn. Working for the Met Office, I have been a military weather forecaster for over two-years and in that time have heard plenty of grumbles from MoD colleagues about the hardships of life on the 'Mount Pleasant Complex'.

Admittedly, some of the people I'd spoken to had also hinted at the natural delights that the Falklands had to offer. But it wasn't until I arrived in March of this year that I realised just how much the archipelago had been undersold.

Being only twenty minutes from Bertha's beach has allowed me to escape the confines of base life at least once a week, and immerse myself in this country's rich marine ecosystem. I've had memorable encounters with penguins, sheathbills, giant petrels and steamer ducks. I've had a juvenile dolphin gull land on my hand and even spent several hours hanging out with an elephant seal weaner that hauled out near Fox Point on one occasion.

The absolute highlight though, was watching pods of Commersons dolphins surfing on a rare windless day last month. Seeing their pint-sized bodies so clearly framed in the transparent cylinders of the breaking waves was magical, and witnessing their enjoyment of the activity was wholly special.

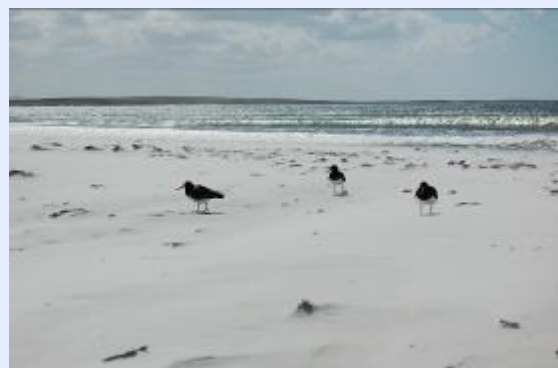
It is very rare to see wild animals doing anything just for 'fun'. We often think of the natural world as nothing more than a relentless struggle for all those creatures that exist within its intricate webs, but these little dolphins seemed not to have a care in the world; they were only too happy to expend their energy on exploiting and harnessing the power of natural forces far greater than themselves. It was immensely rewarding to witness.

Despite these memorable experiences, however, one does not have to look far to also see the ecological plundering that has befallen the Falklands in the past. Penguins turned into oil, tussac grass destruction, peat burning and now over-fishing and oil exploitation all loom large over the islands' most vulnerable assets. There has never been a more important time for the well-organised protection, study and stewardship of this archipelago's nature.

Consequently, it has been incredibly heartening for me to see the determined and wide-ranging scope of work that Falklands Conservation do. I was particularly delighted to discover the tussac grass restoration initiatives, a form of native 'rewilding', that are ongoing on East Falkland and, I'm sure, elsewhere.

To me the islands' natural assets are by far its most valuable, and not just economically (though I'm confident that nature tourism will become the most profitable and sustainable of the Falklands' economic mainstays eventually). Morally and even spiritually, the archipelago's wildlife gives its visitors and inhabitants alike an identity, and the chance to enjoy experiences that are so breathtaking they free us from our everyday concerns and allow us, if only for a short while, to just *be*.

Thank you so much for all that you do.



Falkland Islands Museum and National Trust Identification Day

Saturday 1st July was a great opportunity for children of all ages to examine all sorts of interesting pieces, including Ambergris and Baleen. The children were encouraged to bring along any shells, fossils, and bones they had found, to be identified. Thanks to all FC staff for helping out, and the FIMNT for inviting us.



FC at the BirdFair

We will once again be attending the British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland Water, from the 18th - 20th August, in marquee 1 on stand 4.

Stalwart FC volunteer, Margaret Carr, will be speaking in lecture marquee 3 at midday on Saturday 19th on the passerines of the Falklands and the importance of tussac grass.

Over 24,000 visitors attend the Fair annually, and over 450 exhibitors display and promote their organisations & products, with BirdLife International and its partners receiving the profits for conservation projects. Since the first project in 1989 close to 3 million pounds has been raised to help save birds and their habitats in Europe, Africa, Asia and South America.

We would of course not be able to attend each year without the support of our wonderful team of volunteers. Thank you to all of you on behalf of all of us at FC and to all of our members & supporters that make our work possible - we look forward to hopefully seeing you at this years BirdFair.

Farmers Week

This year's Falkland Islands Rural Business Association's Farmers Week was again a very busy week for us all at FC. The week started off with the Expo on Sunday 2nd July, a great opportunity to talk to all members of the community about our work, including the Watch Group, Habitat Restoration, the Sei Whale Project, and the Small Grants Scheme. We encouraged visitors to our stall by holding a 'Guess the Skulls' competition, won by Konner and Toyah, and a 'How Many Gentoo Nests' competition, won by Leigh Robertson.

Frin held a talk on the Monday, 'Falklands Plants for Habitat Restoration', which had a great turn out, as did the field trip to the habitat restoration plots at Cape Pembroke on Wednesday afternoon.

Helen, our volunteer Herbarium Curator, held an open afternoon, and hosted children and teachers from Camp Education, who were very interested in the Herbarium and our native plants garden.

This was all followed by the annual 'Conservation's Curry Night', which was a success as always. Thanks go to Kevin and Glynis at the Stanley Arms for hosting. Thanks also go to all staff for giving up their time to make it a successful week.



Magellanic
Student £15

Rockhopper
Individual £30

Gentoo
Household £50

King
Gold £100

Albatross
Life £1000



Become a FC Member

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Administrative Officer: Pamela Quilodran Jelbes
Sei Whale Project Officer: Caroline Weir



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nature and people

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