

NEWSLETTER

July 2019



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Falkland Islands Seabird Monitoring Programme Update

The results of the Falkland Islands Seabird Monitoring Programme (FISMP) from summer 2018-19 may seem late to be published at this time of the year, but this reflects the enormous undertaking of the work and the length of time it takes to prepare the data and reports. Last summer we visited 17 sites across the Falklands to monitor 8 species of seabirds. This equated to 18 people involved with counting 242,091 birds. Some of the birds were counted directly in the field at the colony, whilst others were counted from imagery on a computer; obtained with drones (see photo bottom right).

Why do we count all these birds?

Seabirds thrive on a healthy and stable marine environment, but when this is thrown out of balance the seabird populations will respond accordingly, and during unfavourable conditions this can impact their breeding performance. FISMP records the annual breeding performance of seabirds by counting breeding pair numbers in November and numbers of chicks in January. The data allows us to detect imbalances in the populations and relate this back to the marine environment, particularly the phenomenon called the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO). ENSO can influence climate and oceanographic changes with profound impacts on seabirds, including the food available to them to survive and raise chicks.



What are the results telling us?

In 2018-19 the breeding success of the seabirds was generally improved from the previous two seasons indicating healthier marine conditions (more food



available) to successfully raise chicks. The seabirds were still recovering from a severe El Niño event that occurred in 2016. This event likely reduced their food supplies and less pairs were recorded breeding. We had hoped that this season the numbers of breeding pairs would return to the levels before the El Niño event, this however didn't happen for the gentoo and southern rockhopper penguins, and it now seems likely that around 25% and 29%, respectively, of the adult population was lost to mortality (likely starvation) in 2016. Good news though, for the Black-browed albatross the 2018 breeding pair estimate was the highest recorded since 2004. The seabirds ideally need a lengthy period of stable and favourable marine conditions to help them recover, particularly the rockhopper penguin. However with scientists predicting more frequent and stronger El Niño events, the resilience and health of the seabird populations remain a concern.

FISMP is coordinated by Falklands Conservation, funded by the Falkland Islands Government and works with numerous landowners. The full report can be provided upon request.



Citizen Science

July 2019 saw the launch of a new project for Falklands Conservation: **Citizen Science Cetaceans Shore Watch**. The project is co-funded by FC, the FIG Environmental Studies Budget and the Darwin Initiative, and aims to use a network of shore-based volunteers to monitor the occurrence of whales, dolphins and porpoises (collectively known as “cetaceans”) around the coast of the Falklands.

A key part of this project is that it can collect presence and absence data over a set time period, which can be used to calculate sighting rates that enable direct comparisons between different locations or times of year - an important tool for conservation and management. The project’s findings will compliment the long-term monitoring being completed by other FC projects.

For more information or to get involved, please contact Michael Ford on outreach@conservation.org.fk or call +500 22247

falklandsconservation.com/citizen-science-whales



Shore Watch volunteers received training at Cape Pembroke, and posed for a photo with a newly installed whales information board.



Top: a boxwood planter made from recycled materials including milk cartons.

Below: (left) Volunteer grower Thomas with Falklands lavender, and (right) Samantha’s boxwood plants.



Volunteers get growing for new nature area

The Neil Clark Nature Area was set up by Port Howard Farm Ltd. in 2018. and it is a brilliant place to relax and enjoy exceptional views towards Falklands Sound or Mount Maria and the Hornby Mountains. Historically the landscape has been shaped by livestock grazing and accidental burning, but the farm now hopes to restore healthy stands of Falklands native plants which will help insects, birds and even zebra trout.

As you can see on page 4, native plants have been grown and planted by children from Port Howard School. Volunteers in Stanley have also been growing Falkland lavender and native boxwood for planting out in the spring. With luck these young plants will grow to excite and inspire visitors to give nature a boost on their farms or in their gardens. If you are keen to try this at home visit www.falklandsconservation.com/downloads to find your leaflet on

[Growing Native Boxwood](http://www.falklandsconservation.com/downloads).



Go on – give it a grow!

Falklands Conservation loves Ecological Restoration!

The right whale to study!

Falklands Conservation have expanded our whale research efforts this year to include a second species of baleen whale, the southern right whale, in addition to our longer-term work on sei whales in the Falklands. During the whaling era, the right whales were considered the “right whale” to capture because they were large (and yielded a lot of oil), slow and buoyant. These same features help to make them the “right whale” to study, especially compared with the fast, sleek and unpredictable sei whales!

Southern right whales appear to use Falklands’ waters both as a summer feeding area and as a migratory corridor during the late autumn and early winter when they are heading north towards their breeding grounds. We have been encountering them on our Darwin Initiative funded boat surveys since mid-June, and have been able to collect photo-identification pictures and genetic samples that will help us to understand the links between the Falklands and their calving grounds.



Photo: Caroline Weir



Photo: Pamela O. Jelbes

Celebrating—and conserving—Oceans!

World Oceans Day was celebrated on 8th June and in Stanley Falklands Conservation teamed up with other local organisations to host a public event to celebrate the world's seas. The young people of FC's Watch Group and the local guides and brownies had the morning to enjoy all that was on offer, before the doors were opened to the public. There was a fabulous turn out for the event, and everyone could feel a real sense of the community's positive ambition for the local marine environment. Over 200 people signed the Clean Up Pledge that was developed by the children of the Watch Group; addressing the issue of poorly managed waste, including plastics, which can end up in the marine environment and threaten wildlife.

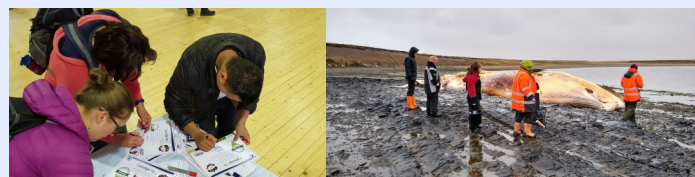
World Oceans Day may have been celebrated for just 24 hours, but FC are focusing a large part of our efforts on the marine environment year-round.

This year sees the third successive season of dedicated cetaceans research. Our current Darwin Initiative funded project continues FC's exciting research on sei whales and southern right whales, expanding the survey sites to include Falkland Sound. In Feb this year monitoring of sei whale movements and foraging behaviour was trialed for the first time, using tags and recording units with cameras attached via suction-cups. Acoustic monitoring devices to record cetacean vocalisations have now been running for over 6 months in Berkeley Sound to trial this as a potential method for longer-term monitoring. Established studies of whale genetics and diet in the Falklands continues, and FC's ever-expanding cetacean photo ID database has shown that individual whales revisit the islands and utilize well-separated locations in the Islands; one individual was first photographed in Berkeley Sound in April 2017, and sighted again in March 2018 off Weddel Island.

FC also attend cetacean strandings. Although it is always sad to see, they can be useful and fascinating sources of information. Samples (taken under licence) can be investigated in great detail; a complete southern right whale dolphin from the Falklands is currently being studied at the Natural History Museum in London, samples were taken from sei and long finned pilot whales over the 2018-19 summer, and a stranded Burmeister's porpoise at Cape Pembroke was the first record of this species in the Falkland Islands.

On the opposite page, there is a little more detail on our new cetaceans Citizen Science project. With our cetaceans research now well-established, involving members of the community in this work is a brilliant opportunity to connect the public with the science being done on their doorstep, and to add to the data being collected on other surveys and understand more

about these amazing animals and the threats they may face. All of this cetacean work is contributing data to inform evidence-based decisions on candidate Key Biodiversity Areas (cKBAs), off-shore industry development, and marine management in the Islands.



#CleanUp pledges being signed at Oceans Day 2019, and FC staff attending a whale stranding.

Keeping on the theme of community engagement, the Watch Group have also been learning about the oceans with workshops on spotting and identifying whales, and whale and dolphin physiology. Importantly, they have also been considering their own actions in relation to the wellbeing of the oceans and the wider environment, and have been working to develop their own Islands Plan; six key topics which they see as being vital to the conservation of the Falklands' environment. The group took this Islands Plan to Members of the Falklands Legislative Assembly, and a video of this project can be viewed at falklandsconservation.com/watch-group.

The local economy is heavily reliant on the health of our oceans and new or developing industries will likely add to the current pressures – Falklands Conservation are driving for leading practice for development, but also wider enhanced marine management through the addition of a Marine Conservation Officer to the team in Stanley, a post taken up by Peter Wessels. Peter will be engaging stakeholders on marine conservation issues and working with Caroline, our Cetacean Project Officer, on identifying cetacean Key Biodiversity Areas.

Seabirds remain a core part of FC's work, with the Falkland Islands Seabird Monitoring Programme now into its 30th year. The most recent results are described on page 1, and FISMP is providing an incredible and valuable long-term view of the population trends of many species of seabird. In the 2018-19 summer, FC collaborated with DZS to investigate the health of penguins in the Islands, and our Seabird Rehabilitation Facility is ready to accommodate any oiled or injured penguins and seabirds – thankfully no oiled seabirds were reported this season.

Of course, this is all interlinked with terrestrial work. The decisions we make on land influence the ocean, and vice versa. Good habitats along coastlines help seabirds, seals, and land-based species alike – including humans! World Oceans Day is celebrated every year on the 8th June, but rest assured, they are a priority for FC every day.



Photo: Caroline Weir

Conservation Ball 2019

Progress is well underway for the Conservation Ball 2019. The annual Ball, consisting of a formal dinner, licenced bar, art auction, live music, and a large raffle, is FC's largest fundraising event of the year; last year we raised over £30,000! It isn't too late to support this event: we need items for raffle or auction, or financial support for the costs of the event. Nearer the time we will also need Falkland-based volunteers to help with many aspects of setting up and running the evening. If you are interested in more information or supporting this event, please contact Michelle on marketing@conservation.org.fk. The money raised helps to ensure that we can continue our work to conserve the Falklands' natural environment, and the Ball is always one of the highlights of the social calendar in Stanley!

Welcoming a new face to the team.



FC welcomes a new administration officer into the UK-team. Alicia has worked in the charitable sector for the last 10 years, and describes her biggest achievement as being able to provide real and positive outcomes for families with children with additional needs, and raising awareness of the issues they face.

A member of Butterfly Conservation, Alicia enjoys walking, travel, photography and engaging with nature.

"I share Falklands Conservation's strong commitment to community engagement, collaboration and encouraging the next generation particularly through their work with the Watch group, I look forward to working with them."

Planting for Port Howard! by Mallory Barnes

Over the last 2 years, my class and I have been privileged to be involved in a community project to create the Neil Clark Nature Area; a community led nature area on West Falkland. Our first experience visiting the site was with Falklands Conservation's Dr. Frin Ross, on a cold but beautiful winter day. Crisp but bright, snow on the mountains, sun in the sky—a perfect day for a school fieldtrip. We explored the area near to Port Howard settlement and spoke about the dangers endemic plants and animals were facing. Following this, Dr Ross led a practical planting lesson in the schoolroom. We learnt all about native plants and how best to care for them. We had a go at growing some plants over winter and were even successful in some cases!

We have now had multiple visits to the NCNA with Dr Ross, and have learnt a lot about our natural environment. We were delighted to be able to plant some boxwood at the site, and the children are looking forward to the day, in years to come, when they can picnic under those same hedges.

We now have a better understanding of how to care for the plants and animals found locally and we feel very lucky to be part of this amazing project. Port Howard School would like to thank Dr Ross and Falklands Conservation for their time and enthusiasm—please let us know when you next need some willing volunteers to go out planting and picnicking!



Adopt A Penguin



In addition to being a member of Falklands Conservation, you can also adopt a king penguin at Volunteer Point, and make a valuable contribution to our practical conservation activities. Visit www.falklandsconservation.com/adoptions to find out more

Dr Esther Bertram, Chief Executive Officer; Dr Andy Stanworth, Conservation Manager

Patron: HRH The Duke of York KG KCVO ADC

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