

# Ongoing efforts to bring an island back from the brink

By Joost Pompert

MIDDLE Island is a 150ha (375 acres) island situated at the entrance of Choiseul Sound, more or less halfway between Lively Island and Mare Harbour. It has been owned by Falklands Conservation since 1994. Up until 1994 it had been owned by various farms and used to stock sheep and cattle. Most importantly, like nearby Lively Island, it was and is rodent free, meaning lots of endemic Tussac Birds and Cobb's wrens present.

In 2019, Company directors of Georgia Seafoods Ltd, a Falkland fishing company that operates in the Southern Oceans targeting toothfish, tasked Joost Pompert, the General Manager, to see if the company's carbon footprint could be offset, providing a pathway to enable the company to market their toothfish product as carbon neutral.

There are other fishing companies that have put schemes in place to do exactly that, and there are various ways of doing this, such as investment into solar energy systems, tree plantation schemes, the creation and/or restoration of coastal mangrove forests, all obviously with an equivalent amount of gain to offset the CO2 footprint.

The company's annual CO2 (equivalent) footprint was established and verified, and now the

decision had to be made how best to offset this. Although the above mentioned schemes would be a sensible route, it was preferred to try doing something locally. It was then that discussions with Falkland Conservation (FC) were initiated to see whether there were areas in need of restoration, in particular using tussac. It is well known that tussac grows into tall dense stands, lives for many years, is peat forming, stores significant amounts of carbon, besides harbouring significant wildlife.

And so the Middle Island restoration project was conceived. Middle Island was estimated to have at least 20ha of exposed peat, as well as areas where the peat had eroded away to the clay underneath. It had initially been hoped that the island would restore itself by simply being left alone, but this never really happened, and more and more vegetation was being lost, some of it smothered by blown-away peat dust.

We had a good idea of how we might go about it. In 2019 FC had landed with a group of BFAI Conservation volunteers to start replanting efforts. And so in 2020, after a recce and drone survey, an initial trip harvesting tussac tillers on nearby Green Island was undertaken, followed up with a 4-day session,

shuttling volunteers each day by launch from Mare Harbour, a mere 30 minutes away. At the end of this first period, 2.5ha of bare ground was planted. In the next 3 years, this system was repeated annually. The aim was always to have 12 volunteers (thereby optimising the launch capacity) on each day, harvest for a few hours on Green Island, and then shuttle to Middle for the afternoon's planting.

This year a slightly different approach was taken. Instead of shuttling tillers from a nearby island, we aimed to harvest in the vicinity of the areas to be planted. This worked well by and large, and we were all surprised that areas that had been planted last year could be harvested from this year for replanting.

Now that we are into the 5th year of this project we have covered a significant section of the exposed areas: 12.4ha. Steps are being taken to calculate what the net benefit of this effort is in terms of carbon capture, but this is not straightforward and ongoing. However, the Falklands Conservation Watch Group, who come out most years for a day trip, undertook some measurements this year to: a) look at survival rate, b) health, & c) bog size. We can clearly see the benefit of the restoration, but the company of course would like to see actual figures too

of how much is being saved by halting the erosion and also the restoration and rebuilding of tussac peat.

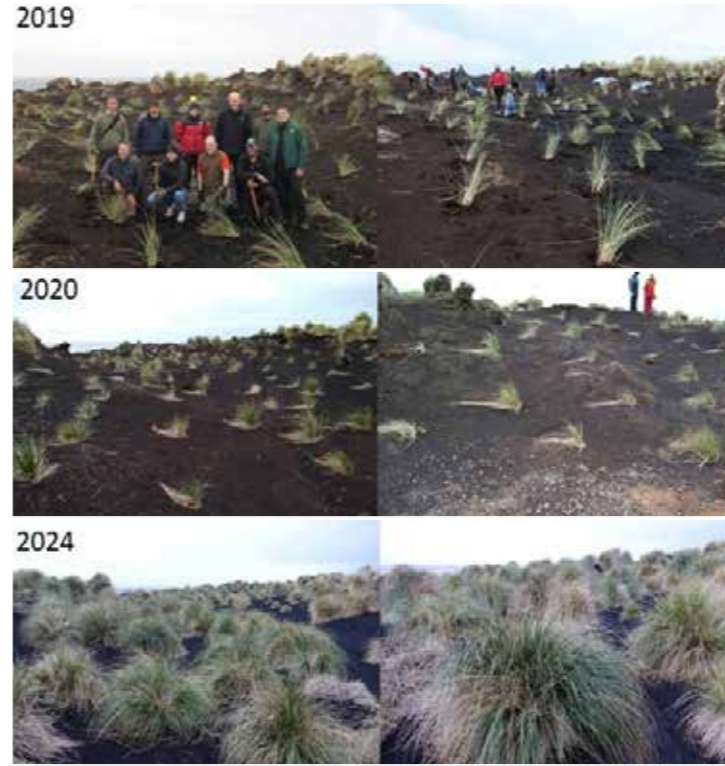
And then there are the clay patches. Nothing much will grow on these exposed areas. Except for the local boxwood. Local boxwood enthusiast Sacha Cleminson started planting small seedlings along the coast quite a few years ago, and these all seem to survive and thrive.

Over the years this has been added to each year, with this year bushes in flower being seen for the first time. It is hoped that even though tussac cannot be used to regenerate those specific sections, a fringe of boxwood can keep the clay from washing away, rebuild soils and provide buffer against further erosion, as well as providing habitats for native wildlife. Anything should be better than nothing, and hebe can grow to enormous bushes, and capturing carbon too.

But it is not all and only hard work. We all get to see fantastic wildlife: sealions in abundance, penguins, shags, tussac birds, wrens, finches, owls, Johnny Rooks, dolphins and whales. We all share the enthusiasm of trying to bring this island back from the brink, and in the process take in a lot of the encouraging scenery as well as taking funny pictures of each other.



Above left: Members of the Watch Group get stuck in pulling tillers to replant. Above: boxwood plants are also being planted to help cover eroded ground. Left: Some of the volunteers L-R back row: Doug Clark, Thomas Prebble, Anupam Sunuwar, Joost Pompert, Mhari Ashworth and Ali Mudford. Front row: Mike Jervois, Grant Munro, Martin Murphy and Simon Browning. Below: Pame working hard. All pics FC



This year showed some notable firsts on Middle Island;

- First harvesting of tillers from planted tussac bogs
- First flowering and seed-set of planted boxwood seedlings
- More self-seeded tussac plants (seedlings were first recorded last year)
- Striated Caracara recorded as breeding. The first record of a pair was last year, 2023, but the breeding status was still uncertain, however this year there was both two mature birds in adult plumage and at least 1 juvenile suggesting that breeding has occurred.

(Taken from a report by Grant Munro)

THE collage, left, shows the original plantings in October 2019, one year later in July/August 2020, and five years later in 2024.

The planting was into shallow dense black peat that would have formed the bottom basal layers of the peat profile before the upper horizons were eroded away to expose it. As such the soil has very poor fertility, poor water retention (indeed following drying it is now likely hydrophobic), likely high acidity and is hostile to plant growth.

Not surprisingly the planted tussac tillers struggled in the first couple of years, however those that survived are now growing well and are of a size where the tussac skirts are now starting to intermesh between the closer bogs.

This means that the skirts of dead leaf litter are now beginning to be retained on site rather than being

blown away by the wind, as happens between wider spaced bogs.

With some of the skirts meshing together to form a mat of leaf litter on the ground, this represents the beginning of a humus layer, the accumulation of which will eventually form new peat deposits and re-start the process of carbon accumulation.

Whilst the bogs provide shelter and catch windblown sediment, the leaf litter also protects the soil surface, retains water and provides a substrate to catch seeds.

As such we saw the very first self-seeded tussac plant last year, with more this year, showing that now shelter is being provided and bogs are at a minimum spacing the island has hopefully been bump started to start healing itself.

(Taken from a report by Grant Munro)



Photographer Sophie Pompert Robertson taking a break

**FOR SALE**

CasaVerde, San Carlos

We are pleased to offer, for sale, this substantial three bedroom, two storey, double fronted, stick build home overlooking San Carlos Water. The property comprises of a front porch leading to the entrance hall with storage, the main bathroom, a well proportioned double bedroom with ensuite and dressing room, a further bedroom with built in storage, a generously sized modern fitted kitchen with Rangemaster cooker and a breakfast bar, a large dining room with double glazed patio doors leading to the garden. The stairs leading to the first floor take you to the very generously sized lounge with picture double glazed windows to the north and south to take advantage of the beautiful views of San Carlos. Leading from the lounge is a sunroom with views of San Carlos, Blue Beach and the surrounding hills. Also leading from the lounge is a further very large bedroom with picture windows to again take advantage of the breath taking views.

The property has new carpets throughout, with recent upgrades to the inverter, a new battery bank, independent solar power and two Lister Diesel back up generators that were professionally refurbished in 2023. There has been additional electrical works undertaken. The property benefits from central heating fuelled by a diesel system. The exterior of the property was fully repainted and weatherproofed in 2023. The generators are housed in a separate utility room.

The property benefits from two large gardens, a poly tunnel and a detached large workshop/garage.

Please note that the property is sold on an exclusive basis and all viewings should be arranged through the agent. Viewing of the property is recommended as the description does not do it justice.

For a confidential discussion or more information, please contact Laura on 55864 or email [pandnrealestate@gmail.com](mailto:pandnrealestate@gmail.com)

All offers of interest are to be sent to PO Box 950 or via email by 4pm on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2024.

The seller does not bind himself to accept the highest or any offer.

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