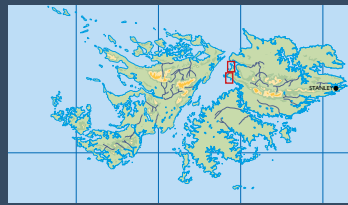


# CAT & ROOKERY ISLANDS

## Information sheet



Falklands Conservation own and manage a number of offshore islands and mainland sites across the Falkland Islands. FC strive to manage these national assets to conserve and enhance them for future generation of Islanders.

### Island Summary

Cat & Rookery Islands are the only remaining rat free islands along the coastline of Wreck Point in northern Falkland Sound. They are therefore highly important for their refuge populations of Cobb's wren and tussacbird.

### Ecology

#### Physical

Cat Island is 3 ha in area, 115 x 410m in size and reaches an elevation of 10m. It is a low-lying tussac island with a rocky coastline.

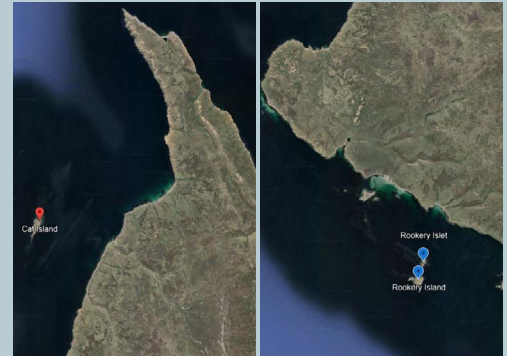
Rookery Island is 2.5 ha in area, approximately 135 x 150m in size and also reaches a height of 10m. It is a low dome-shaped tussac island with a rocky foreshore extended towards the south-west. Rookery Islet, now named Syke's Island in commemoration of Cpl. Steven John Godfrey Sykes of the Royal Signals & 22nd Special Air Service Regiment as an enduring legacy of the ultimate sacrifice in 1982, is just 1 ha in area and forms a low exposed ridge of rock forming an un-vegetated reef along the majority of its length with only the two higher points at either end capped by tussac.

The underlying geology of both is part of the Carboniferous Fitzroy Tillite Formation of tillites and mudstones.

#### Habitat Value

Tussac is the dominant vegetation on both islands. Tussac bogs are mature and it is likely that the islands have never been grazed; Rookery Islands due to their small size and lack of water, and Cat Island due to its inaccessible and exposed position.

Both Cat & Rookery are rodent-free and constitute the only rodent-free islands in the northern half of Falkland Sound, the nearest other rodent-free island being c. 35-km distant. The rodent-free status means that the islands are a good example of an un-impacted functioning tussac island ecosystem with full complement of invertebrates and other species. It also means that they are important refuge populations which could never be replaced if rodents were to arrive.



**Cat Island** (51.537° S & 59.1546° W) is located 1,400m to the west of Wreck Point in northern Falkland Sound, whilst **Rookery Island** (51.62° S & 59.133° W) and Islet (51.6166° S & 59.1311° W) lie 900m off the south coast of Wreck Point in Grantham Sound.

### Relevant Legislation and Policy

#### Statutory

None

#### Non-statutory

None

*"Cat Island. What a beautiful pristine spot that is - rat free with tussacbirds and Cobb's wren, Grey-backed storm-petrel feathers, and a few hundred probable sooty shearwater burrows at the south end. Big tall tussac bogs where you have to crawl through at ground level to get past. One of those places that was a real privilege to visit and made you realise what the Falklands was like before people. A true Jewel in the Crown of North Falkland Sound and one of the most isolated rat free islands in the Falklands, it's closest rat free neighbour being High Cliff Island, some 40km to the SW." (Sally Poncet, 2020)*

IMAGES Rookery Island looking west, towards North-West Islands and West Falkland; southern sea lion (inset).



# CAT & ROOKERY ISLANDS

## Information sheet

### Species Diversity

Island visits have been limited to zodiac-cruise or short opportunistic visits and full survey has not been undertaken.

Both islands support all three Falkland Island endemic bird species; Cobb's wren, tussacbird and Falkland's flightless steamer duck. Along with Magellanic penguin and a typical range of passerine, shore and waterbirds. In addition Cat Island supports a population

of grey-backed storm-petrel and possibly a few hundred sooty shearwater. Rookery Island formerly supported a large Imperial cormorant colony.

Mature tussac stands, whilst highly productive for carbon sequestration and providing valuable habitat and shelter for a range of wildlife, generally exhibit low plant species diversity. Southern sea lions haul-out in small numbers but are not recorded as breeding.

### Key Threats and Management

The exact history of past land use is unknown but the high quality of tussac habitat suggests the islands have never been grazed or burnt.

The introduction or dispersal of rodents to the island would be catastrophic for many species and lead to the extirpation of Cobb's wren. Invasive plants can modify and replace habitats. Calafate

is present on the adjacent coastlines and easily transferred by passerine birds. It is highly invasive and if discovered should be immediately eradicated with herbicide applications.

Strict biosecurity prior to any visit is essential to prevent such introductions. Visitor guidelines and biosecurity protocols are provided to all visitors.

Fire is an ongoing risk, visitor guidelines are available and a fire contingency plan is in place.

### Notable birds, plants, marine mammals & habitats of Cat & Rookery Islands

Cobb's wren	Endemic   <i>Least Concern</i>	Grey-backed storm petrel	<i>Least Concern</i>   (Cat Island)
Tussacbird	Endemic   <i>Near Threatened</i>	Sooty shearwater	<i>Near Threatened</i>   (Cat Island)
Falkland steamer duck	Endemic	Southern sea lion	Haul-out
Magellanic penguin	<i>Least Concern</i>	Tussac habitat	Native

**Citation** none.

### Contact

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IMAGES Sykes Islet (foreground right) and Rookery Island (background left) from the north-east; Falkland steamer duck and blackish oystercatchers (inset).

