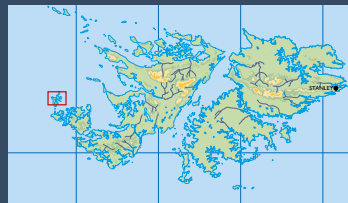


COFFIN ISLAND

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

Coffin Island lies off the east coast of New Island in the south-west of the Falklands archipelago. Coffin Island is of importance due to its rodent-free status; recovering tussac and blue grass habitats; occurrence of restricted range endemics such as Cobb's wren and tussacbird; significant population of slender-billed prion; and a population of the possibly endemic "native Calandrinia" plant species.

Ecology

Physical

Coffin Island is 45 ha in area and approximately 825 x 1052 m in size rising to a height of c. 109m above sea-level in the centre of the island. The island is irregularly conical with steep coastal slopes. The landing onto a rock shelf is in a shallow indented bay on the west coast below the remains of some old stock pens. There is no standing water but a number of water seeps, some seasonal, occur around the coast and within shallow drainage valleys.

The geology of Coffin Island comprises part of the Devonian West Falkland Port Stephen Formation laid down 400 million years ago and characterised by medium to coarse-grained feldspathic sandstones.

Habitat Value

The steep coastal slopes and cliffs are mostly fringed with sparse remnant tussac with a top edge of bluegrass in places. Above the coastal slope break, as the slope lessens and where sheep would have had access in the past, this gives way to modified grassland and dwarf shrub heath with a mix of introduced grasses. On the highest ground in the centre of the Island exposed rock and cushion plants form a feldmark habitat.

The history of sheep grazing and stocking rates on the island are not known. Coastal tussac, bluegrass and feldmark habitats are beginning to recover. However the intermediary slopes of neutral grassland and dwarf shrub heath have been highly influenced by past grazing pressure and the deliberate in-seeding of Yorkshire fog grass. This non-native grass now dominates large areas and suffers from periodic die-back which can expose areas of dry destabilised soils to potential wind erosion.

The island is rodent-free.

IMAGES The montane habitats and cushion heath on the summit of Coffin Island looking south to The Colliers (centre), Beaver Island (right) and Weddell Island Group (left); striated caracara (inset).



Coffin Island (-51.7396 S & -61.2613 W) lies 865m east of New Island at the entrance to South Harbour and is the largest of the offshore islands seen from the settlement and airstrip.

Relevant Legislation and Policy

Statutory

None

Non-statutory

Important Bird Area (IBA): Coffin Island is a component part of the New Island Group IBA (IBA FK11). The occurrence of Cobb's wren, striated caracara, tussacbird, 8 island-races and thin-billed prion on Coffin Island contribute to the designation

Key Biodiversity Area (KBA): Coffin Island is part of the New Island Group Priority KBA (FKL-11). Trigger species follow that of the IBA designation.



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Species Diversity

A total of 26 bird species have been recorded with 21 species recorded as breeding or probably breeding. All 3 Falkland Islands endemic bird species are present; Cobb's wren (*Least Concern*); tussacbird (*Near Threatened*); and Falklands flightless steamer duck (*Least Concern*); with a further 8 endemic island races also present. The *Near Threatened* striated caracara breeds on the island and slender-billed prion burrows are frequently encountered across the island.

A total of 36 plant species have been recorded on Coffin Island, comprising of 27 native plant species and 9 introduced non-natives.

Common violet is widespread across the island and is legally protected due to its role as the primary food source for larvae of the Queen of the Falklands Fritillary butterfly. Two endemic plant species, Lady's slipper & Coastal nassauvia, are present, whilst the intriguing "native *Calandrinia*" is present in the shallow valley above the landing point. This *Calandrinia* species is known from only 8 sites and is thought to be a possible additional endemic species. While it has been tentatively classified as *Calandrinia cf. nitida* and described as *Data Deficient* (FI Red list) the taxonomy of the group is complex and further study will be required. Occasional sea lion and southern elephant seal have been observed hauled-out in small numbers but are not known to breed.

Key Threats and Management

The island is rodent-free. Should rats or mice arrive the impact would be severe leading to the extirpation of the endemic Cobb's wren, severe depletion of tussacbird numbers and reduction in a range of other species. These refuge populations would be important for recolonization back to New Island should a rodent eradication be conducted.

Non-native plant species are already present on Coffin Island with prickly-sow thistle considered as invasive. The non-native grass Yorkshire fog is widespread and presents an erosion risk due to

cyclical die-back.

A system of visit permissions along with visitor guidance is in place. This ensures that all are informed of the biosecurity protocols to ensure there are no further inadvertent introductions.

Whilst island visits are infrequent, visit disturbance may still cause impact and all visitors should follow the Countryside Code and provided specific site guidance.

High fire risk is ongoing on Coffin Island and is only likely to increase with forecast climate change. Visitor guidelines and a fire contingency plan are available.

Notable birds, plants, marine mammals & habitats of Coffin Island

Cobb's wren	Endemic <i>Least Concern</i>	Native <i>Calandrinia cf. nitida</i>	Possible restricted-range Endemic
Tussacbird	Endemic <i>Near Threatened</i>	Southern sea lion	Haul-out
Falkland flightless steamer duck	Endemic	South American fur seal	Haul-out
Striated caracara	Breeding <i>Near Threatened</i>	Tussac habitat	Recovering
Slender-billed prion	Breeding	Bluegrass grassland habitat	Recovering
Lady's slipper	Endemic <i>Least Concern</i>		

Citation Falklands Conservation (2022). Coffin Island (New Island Group) Management Plan 2022.

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IMAGES Bluegrass on Coffin Island; native *calandrinia* (inset).

