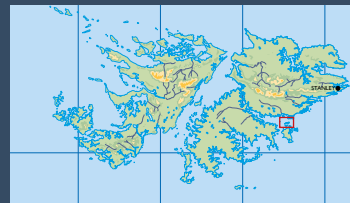


MIDDLE ISLAND

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

Middle Island and its three associated islets are located in the outer entrance of Choiseul Sound within the Lively Island group

Middle Island is most notable for the extensive bluegrass dune habitat across the eastern half. The transition area between the bluegrass and coastal heath supports the endemic endangered Falkland rock-creep, along with nationally vulnerable Fuegian foxtail and small-dusky-sedge adjacent to dried-up former pond area.

Ecology

Physical

Middle Island and its Islets are generally low lying with the highest point on the north coast being no more than 15m above sea level.

The eastern section of the island comprises mostly sandy beaches and associated bluegrass stabilised dunes. The remainder is covered in peat soil of coastal heath and former tussac. Bare clay patches extend along the northern coastline representing past over-grazing and fire with wind erosion.

There are no large standing bodies of water but 3 areas with small shallow freshwater pools occur seasonally.

The geology of Middle Island forms part of the Brenton Loch Formation comprised of siltstones, mudstones and fillites, dating back to the Permian period 250 – 300 million years ago.

Habitat Value

Three main habitat zones occur on Middle Island.

Bluegrass dune, a national priority habitat, occurs across the eastern portion of the island providing important habitat for passerines and Magellanic penguins. The bluegrass has recovered from past grazing and only the occurrence of some non-natives such as nettles and groundsel would suggest that it may have been more degraded in the past.

In contrast the former tussac grass fringe has been severely impacted by past grazing and fire and has not recovered since grazing was removed in 1994. Only the central eastern point has a small area of remaining tussac in a healthy state. On the western point and along the northern coastline any remnant tussac is of low density with drying and erosion between bogs, whilst large areas of bare peat extend along the majority of the northern coastline with erosion down to clay having occurred in some areas. A major programme of restoration was commenced in 2020 with tussac planting utilizing tillers collected from neighbouring Green Island.

Coastal dwarf shrub heath occurs within the center of the island. The transition zone between heath and bluegrass dune is important for a range of rarer plants. However along the northern coast, in areas behind the coastal tussac erosion, aeolian deposition of eroded peat dust has buried diddle-dee and caused die-back. This suppression of ground-cover may lead to further soil destabilisation if not remedied.

Tussac dominates on the 3 small offshore Islets, these being too small to have ever been grazed.

The Lively Island Group, including Middle Island, is the largest rat-free group of islands in the Falklands representing one of the few groups where restricted range species such as Cobb's wren and tussacbird can disperse naturally between islands across an extended range.



Middle Island (51°57'20" S, 58°28'00" W) is located on the eastern seaboard of East Falkland approximately 1.4 km due north of Lively Island and 2.8 km due south of Fox Point (Mare Harbour) in the entrance to Choiseul Sound.

Middle Island is approximately 2.9 km long from east to west, 1 km at the widest point and covers an area of 150 ha. Sunderland Islet lies around 660m to the west, whilst Griffin and Hope Eastern Islets lie around 305m and 1.1 km to the east respectively.

Relevant Legislation and Policy

Statutory

None

Non-statutory

Important Bird Area (IBA):

Middle Island is part of the Lively Island Group IBA (FK010). The trigger species for this designation on Middle are the Cobb's wren, tussacbird, Falklands flightless steamer duck, Magellanic penguin, ruddy-headed goose, & white-bridled finch.

Important Plant Area (IPA)

Middle Island is an IPA (IPA11). Triggers for this designation are Falkland rock-creep and bluegrass dune grassland. Of additional importance is Fuegian foxtail. Soil erosion is identified as of 'medium' threat to the IPA

Key Biodiversity Area (KBA):

Middle Island is part of the Lively Group Priority KBA (FLK10). Trigger species for this designation follow those of the IBA & IPA but also extend to tussac grass and the endemic vanilla daisy, woolly ragwort and smooth ragwort. Threats identified for the KBA includes rodent arrival.



IMAGES The long east facing sand beach of Middle Island; small dusky sedge (inset, right).

Species Diversity

Middle Island supports a diverse fauna and flora.

39 bird species have been recorded on Middle Island with 31 recorded as probably breeding. This includes all 3 Falkland Island endemic species (Cobb's wren, tussacbird and Falklands steamer duck) along with 11 classed as Falkland Island-races. Magellanic penguins breed across the island with the highest concentrations in the thick cover provided by the bluegrass grassland in the east of the island and may number up to 500-600 pairs.

The floral diversity of Middle Island is considered good for a small-sized island. In total 84 plant species have been recorded

on Middle Island; including 4 endemic plant species and a further 61 native plant species. Three plant species are of particular note. The globally Endangered (IUCN) and endemic Falkland rock-cress, along with the nationally Vulnerable (FI Red List) Fuegian foxtail occur in an area of transitional habitat between heath and bluegrass in the central east of the island. Small dusky sedge also occurs. A total of 19 non-native introduced plants have been recorded, the most significant invasive may have been several patches of marram grass which have now been controlled as part of the restoration programme.

Sea lions haul out on Middle Island, but no breeding has so far been recorded.

Key Threats and Management

Key threats to these islands have been investigated and identified, and ongoing management takes these factors into account.

Biosecurity is vital to prevent the introduction of rodents or other predators which could extirpate the endemic Cobb's wren and tussacbird, and significantly impact many other passerine, shorebird and small petrel populations. Likewise the introduction of invasive plant species has the potential to degrade habitats and compete with native plants and the biodiversity which relies upon them.

Biosecurity measures are important to prevent this and all clothing and equipment should be carefully cleaned and checked before landing.

Whilst deliberate burning has ceased fire remains a threat to the fauna and flora, especially given the island's predominant peat soils and ongoing drying of the Falklands climate. Preventative visit guidance is available for all visitors.

Significant erosion has occurred in the past and has been ongoing. The cycle of wind erosion and Aeolian deposition in inland and downwind deposition zones can degrade and destabilise further additional land and lead to advancing erosion fronts. An island restoration programme of tussac planting has been commenced to provide ground-cover and stabilise soils with the longterm hope that the bare peat will once again become a functioning tussac habitat with significant carbon sequestration gain.

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

Cobb's wren	Endemic <i>Least Concern</i>	Small dusky sedge	Nationally vulnerable (FI Red List)
Tussacbird	Endemic <i>Near Threatened</i>	Falklands smooth ragwort	Endemic
Falklands steamer duck	Endemic	Vanilla daisy	Endemic
Striated caracara	Near Threatened	Southern sea lion	Breeding
Magellanic penguin	Least Concern	Tussac grass habitat	
Falklands rock-cress	Endemic <i>Vulnerable</i>	Bluegrass dune habitat	Nationally restricted priority habitat
Fuegian foxtail	Nationally vulnerable (FI Red List)		

Citation none.

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IMAGES Bluegrass dominates on the eastern half of the island (left); Middle Island looking south-west from eastern point (right).

