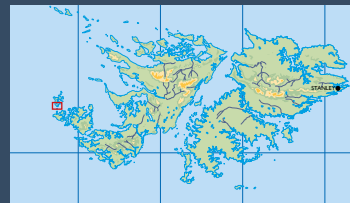


# SEAL ROCKS, NEW ISLAND

## 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

Seal Rocks are a narrow chain of exposed steep-to rocks situated midway between New Island and Beaver Island in the south-west of the Falkland Islands. Seal Rocks are of importance due to their rodent-free status; pristine tussac, occurrence of restricted range endemics such as Cobb's Wren and tussacbird; significant population of slender-billed prion; striated caracara; and South American fur seal population.

## Ecology

### Physical

Seal Rocks have seldom been landed on. They are fully exposed to the South West Atlantic, subject to the tidal race passing through Grey Channel and are steep to and rocky on all sides, making them difficult to land on but also a remote, if wave lashed, haven for wildlife. They have a combined area of circa 8 ha. and stretch 1,200 m in a south-east to north-west orientation with a maximum elevation of 45 – 50 m. The lower northern islet is the most exposed being almost devoid of vegetation. The larger southern islet is ringed with cliffs on all sides with a gently domed top of dense tussac.

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 northern rocky islet has not been landed on in recent times. It is largely exposed maritime rock surrounded by a dense ribbon of kelp. However sparse short tussac does survive on the very top and within more sheltered crevices. On the southern islet a monoculture of dense tussac extends across the upper domed top of the island. The tussac has an unusual growth form of closely-spaced interwoven bogs that forms a "mattress" that can be walked across the top of above the basal level.

Whilst early sealers will have undoubtedly visited the islands, there is no evidence of any past stocking, introductions, fire or rodents and the limited habitats can be considered as pristine and rodent-free.



**Seal Rocks** (-51.7837° S & -61.289° W) form a chain of two larger rocky islands and four smaller rocks located in the middle of Grey Channel exactly equidistant between New Island (1.5 km to the north) and Beaver Island (1.5 km to the south).

## Relevant Legislation and Policy

### Statutory

None

### Non-statutory

**Important Bird Area (IBA):** Seal Rocks are a component part of the Beaver Island Group IBA (IBA FK02), though due to common ownership and management would better sit within the New Island designation. Given the rat-free status Seal Rocks are important for endemic restricted range species.

**Key Biodiversity Area (KBA):** Coffin Island is part of the Beaver Island Group Priority KBA (FKL-2). Trigger species follow that of the IBA designation.



**IMAGES** Seal Rocks from the south looking towards New Island; slender-billed prions (inset, left); southern fur seal (inset, below).



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### Species Diversity

Survey of the islands are incomplete and limited to inshore zodiac transit and 10 minutes ashore, it is likely that additional species are still to be recorded.

In total 16 bird species are recorded, though definitive confirmation of breeding is difficult during a short survey. Tussacbird, rock shag, slender-billed prion, & striated caracara were all recorded as breeding. Tussacbird is particularly abundant on both the rocky coast and upper tussac. Slender-billed prion burrows extend throughout the tussac and breeding striated caracara are associated with the prions and fur seals. Two wren were observed but it was not possible to identify them with 100% certainty, though

they were assumed to be Cobb's wren. This would signify that 2 endemic bird species and 3 island-races occur on Seal Rocks.

Only tussac grass and lesser sea-spurrey have been recorded on the southern islet. Plant diversity is likely low within the dense tussac but other salt tolerant species such as stone-crop may be present on exposed rock areas.

South American fur seals are present along the chain of rocks with high numbers on the northern islet. It is highly likely that fur seal breed on the northern islet. Although pup numbers have not been counted within the island-wide census, a cursory incomplete count gave +100 animals with bulls and females present. The likely number is far higher.

### Key Threats and Management

Seal Rocks are rodent-free. Should rats or mice arrive the impact would be severe leading to the extirpation of the endemic Cobb's wren (assumed present), severe depletion of tussacbird numbers and reduction in a range of other species including burrow nesting seabirds. Non-native plant species also pose a risk to native habitats. Due to the extreme difficulty of landing and short time

windows due to tidal conditions, landing except for essential scientific study is not envisaged. A system of visit permissions along with visitor guidance is in place. This includes strict biosecurity protocols to ensure there are no inadvertent introductions. High fire risk is ongoing on the south islet of Seal Rocks due to dry tussac and peat soils below. Visitor guidelines and a fire contingency plan are available.

### Notable birds, plants, marine mammals & habitats of Seal Rocks

Cobb's Wren (assumed)	Endemic   <i>Least Concern</i>	South American fur seal	Breeding
Tussacbird	Endemic   <i>Near Threatened</i>	Southern sea lion	Breeding
Striated caracara	Breeding   <i>Near Threatened</i>	Tussac habitat	Good
Slender-billed prion	Breeding		

**Citation** Falklands Conservation (2022). Seal Rocks (New Island Group) Management Plan 2022.

### Contact

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**IMAGES** The exposed spine of Seal Rocks looking from the summit of the largest southern-most rock in a north-west direction along the chain; striated caracara (inset)

