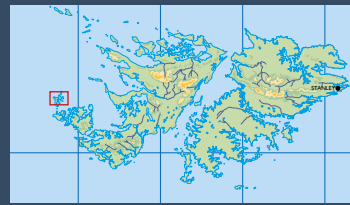


SHIP ISLAND

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

Ship Island lies within New Island's Ship Harbour in the extreme south-west of the Falklands archipelago. Ship Island has in the past been highly impacted by fire, grazing and invasive species and will benefit from a programme of island restoration to improve conservation status. Despite the degraded status and need for restoration the island still supports a range of seabirds including breeding southern giant petrel, brown skua and slender-billed prion, along with the near-threatened striated caracara. Although there is no current evidence of rodents the absence of Cobb's wren would suggest that the island may have suffered periodic rat invasion, along with loss of tussac habitat which would have also depleted wren numbers.

Ecology

Physical

Ship Island covers 9 ha and is roughly pear-shaped in outline. In relief it forms a low shallow dome rising to a height of only 10m above sea-level. It is fringed by a rocky or cobble coastline with low rock scarps.

The underlying geology of Ship Island is part of the Devonian West Falkland Port Stephen Formation (pp 400 million years). Within this formation the rocks of the South Harbour Member are characterised by medium and coarse-grained feldspathic sandstones.

Soils are generally very thin and dry and an orange layer of burnt clay and clinker is visible in the soil at various locations around the Island suggesting high temperature fires at some point.

Habitat Value

The terrain is dominated by dry coastal heathland of scattered diddledee with large areas of non-native Sheep's sorrel extending across the island. This is interspersed with patches of bare ground, clay patches, small areas of eroded bogs of dispersed remnant tussac and vestigial bluegrass. Habitats have been degraded by past land management including overgrazing and likely burning by early sealers resulting in significant soil erosion and presence of non-native plants.

Whilst the island currently appears to be rodent-free the lack of Cobb's wren would suggest that there has either been periodic invasion in non-sustaining numbers or the habitat has been degraded to a level that will not support occurrence.



Ship Island (-51.7098°S & -61.2794°W) lies within the semi-enclosed Ship Harbour on the east coast of New Island. Ship Island is just 410 m from the nearest point on New Island.

Relevant Legislation and Policy

Statutory

New Island South is a statutory designated National Nature Reserve however the boundary does not extend to Ship Island.

Non-statutory

Important Bird Area (IBA): Ship Island is a component part of the New Island Group IBA (IBA FK11). Ship Island is of specific importance for the breeding colony of southern giant petrel. Other trigger species include tussacbird, Falkland Island steamer duck, Magellanic penguin, ruddy-headed goose, and white-bridled finch.

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

IMAGES Ship Island from above; coastal naussavia (inset).



Species Diversity

Whilst recognising that habitats have been degraded and a programme of island restoration is required the island nevertheless retains a number of endemic and important species.

A total of 17 bird species have been recorded on Ship Island. Of those 15 are thought to breed, including 2 endemic bird species (tussacbird & Falklands steamer duck) and 3 island races. The most notable feature of the avifauna is the small colony of southern giant petrel (an ACAP species). This species is very sensitive to disturbance during the breeding season and the south-west area of the island should be avoided.

Brown skua, striated caracara (Near-Threatened) and slender-billed prions are known to breed, whilst a significant colony of kelp gulls previously occurred.

Plant assemblages are highly influenced by non-native plant species. A total of 34 plant species have been recorded comprising; 18 native plant species and 16 introduced plant species. Coastal nassauvia is the only endemic plant to occur. European gorse & Marram grass are present and considered to be invasive. The gorse has been controlled and will be subject to ongoing checks to prevent regrowth. Marram grass is widespread on New Island and therefore control is not deemed to be feasible.

Ship Island is a small but well used haul out site for southern sea lion but breeding has so far not been confirmed.

Key Threats and Management

Seal Rocks are rodent-free. Although Cobb's wren is already absent, should rats or mice arrive the impact would still be significant. Past land management including fire and overgrazing has had a profound effect on the conservation status of Ship Island with habitat modification and erosion both evident.

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

Invasive species have already been identified as affecting the

flora and fauna; rodents impact birds whilst introduced plants have the potential to outcompete native habitats and species. The exact status of rodents is uncertain. There is currently no evidence of rodent signs or scat, however the absence of Cobb's wren suggests that a temporary arrival or incursion may have occurred periodically. Strict biosecurity guidelines are available for visitors and a gorse eradication has begun.

Human disturbances also remains an important threat to the southern giant petrel populations and all visitors should avoid the area and sight-lines during the breeding season.

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

Tussacbird	Endemic <i>Near Threatened</i>	Slender-billed prion	Breeding <i>Near Threatened</i>
Falklands steamer duck	Endemic	Brown skua	
Striated caracara	Breeding <i>Near Threatened</i>	Coastal nassauvia	Endemic
Southern giant petrel	ACAP Listed Specis <i>Least Concern</i>	Southern sea lion	Haul-out

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

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IMAGES Southern giant petrel colony; brown skua (inset).

