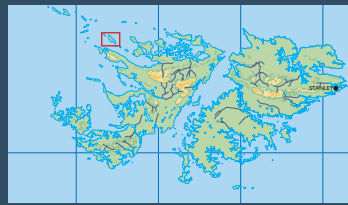


# THE TWINS NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE

## 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

The Twins National Nature Reserve (NNR) consists of two small islands (North & South Twin) and an associated reef lying to the west of Carcass Island in the north-west of the Falkland Islands. The islands are good examples of low lying tussac-grass dominated islands and support breeding southern sea lion and southern elephant seal colonies and a good level of birdlife. The islands are rodent-free and have remained ungrazed. As a consequence they are relatively pristine in nature.

### Ecology

#### Physical

South Twin covers c. 15 ha being around 1 km long and 250m across at its widest point. It is generally low lying, the highest point being only 8m above sea level. There are sand dunes behind a noticeable white sand beach on the north-eastern side and a small sand beach in the eastern landing bay, whilst the remainder of the coastline is rocky with intertidal rocky reefs and kelp.

North Twin covers c. 8 ha and is around 600m long and generally less than 100m in width. The island is low-lying and reaches just 5m at a few small rocky points. There is a wide rocky reef at the south-western point which is exposed at low tide and a narrow reef which extends along the western coast with a boulder beach (Woods 2008). Due to these shallow offshore reefs approach must be made from South Twin by zodiac and requires calm weather conditions.

The geology comprises part of the Port Stanley Formation, dating from the Devonian age and consisting of sandstones and mudstones. No freshwater bodies are recorded.

#### Habitat Value

Tussac grass dominates both North & South Twins. The habitat is considered largely pristine contributing to carbon sequestration and providing shelter for a range of fauna, especially given the rodent-free status that maximises both the diversity and abundance of bird and invertebrate fauna. However several burn holes restricted to behind the area of dune on South Twin hint to possible, or at least limited, burning during the sealing era. Blue grass dune habitat occurs within and behind the beach area on South Twin and is a priority habitat within the Important Plant Area framework.



**The Twins** lie between Carcass Island and the Jason Islands in the north-west of the Falklands archipelago.

**South Twin** (51.246063°S & 60.643010°W) lies 3km west of the north-west point of Carcass Island.

**North Twin** (51.237332°S & 60.650311°W) lies a further 500m north of South Twin.

### Relevant Legislation and Policy

#### Statutory

**The Twins** were originally declared a *Wild Animal and Bird Sanctuary* by the Falkland Islands Government in 1964, and re-designated as a *National Nature Reserve (NNR)* under the *Conservation of Wildlife and Nature Ordinance 1999*.

#### Non-statutory

**The Twins NNR** is part of the West Point Island Group and Carcass Island Priority KBA – FKL-17. Trigger species for this designation on The Twins are Cobb's wren, striated caracara, and tussac-grass. Threats identified for the KBA include invasive species and human disturbance with the recommendation that invasive plants are assessed and control measures undertaken when necessary.

The Twins are part of the West Point Island Group IBA (FK017). The trigger species for this designation present on The Twins are Cobb's wren, ruddy-headed goose, Falkland steamer duck, Magellanic penguin, striated caracara, tussacbird, white-bibled finch and the significant combined aggregations of seabirds.

**IMAGES** The Twins looking north-west from the southern point of South Twin towards North Twin; southern giant petrel (inset, left); (southern sea lion, inset, right). **OVERLEAF** Bluegrass fringes the east facing northern beach of South Twin along which elephant seals breed.



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### Species Diversity

The Twins NNR support a wide range of Falklands flora and fauna especially given their relative small land area.

Thirty bird species have been recorded, with 21 recorded as breeding or probably breeding, and a further 5 as possibly breeding. This includes all 3 Falkland Island endemic species (Cobb's wren, tussacbird, & Falkland's flightless steamer duck) and 7 island sub-species.

South Twin is particularly notable for a high concentration of Falklands flightless steamer duck on the NE beach with over 460 birds recorded on occasion. Southern giant petrels utilise the same NE beach area as a loafing area, with up to 50 birds recorded.

On North Twin, Imperial cormorants breed on the north-east coastline and numerous remains of grey-backed storm petrels and common diving petrel have been found suggesting they may also breed on North Twin (or both islands).

Striated caracara have increased from just 3 pairs in the 1980s to 14 pairs at the last census in 2014, possibly related to the concurrent recovery in pinniped numbers on the island alongside general Falklands recovery following the protection of the species and cessation of persecution.

South Twin is of national significance for its breeding pinnipeds. Both southern elephant seal and southern sea lion breed on the island, with highest densities recorded in the north-east dune area. Numbers have increased significantly in recent years with South Twin within the top 5 sites for elephant seals in the Falklands whilst sea lions doubled in number from 58 to 116 pups between 2003-2014. There is evidence of historic sealing activities in the dune area with sealers middens of butchered seal bones exposed by sand movement and the current increase in numbers represents a slow recovery from this past economic extinction of elephant seals and sea lions. Breeding pinnipeds can strongly influence small island ecosystems in terms of mechanically altering vegetation and soil compaction; and both fertility enrichment and supporting other scavenging species, such as striated caracara, through scat.

Eleven native plant species have been recorded on the islands. Whilst, dense healthy tussac is highly important as a habitat and for productive carbon sequestration it tends to suppress other plants and hence the low number of plant species is typical of closed tussac.

Dune bluegrass provides a more open habitat for a wider range of plant species, although it also hosts non-native stinging nettle and invasive prickly sow-thistle which should be controlled when possible.

### Key Threats and Management

The introduction of rodents would likely extirpate the endemic Cobb's wren, severely depress tussacbird numbers, and significantly impact any petrel populations. Introduction of invasive plant species may further impact the native habitats present. Strict biosecurity

measures are important in reducing the threat, whilst ongoing control can minimise the impact.

Given the combustible nature of tussac-grass and peat soils, fire remains a significant threat. Strict visitor guidelines are available that prohibit smoking or the use of any naked-flame on the islands.

### Notable birds, plants, marine mammals & habitats of The Twins National Nature Reserve

Cobb's wren	Endemic   <i>Least Concern</i>	Common diving petrel	Possible
Tussacbird	Endemic   <i>Near-Threatened</i>	Southern sea lion	Breeding
Falkland flightless steamer duck	Endemic	Southern elephant seal	Breeding
Striated caracara	<i>Near-Threatened</i>	No threatened or protected plants	
Southern giant petrel	<i>Least Concern</i>   ACAP	Tussac habitat	
Grey-backed storm petrel	Possible	Bluegrass dune grassland habitat	Nationally Threatened

**Citation** Falklands Conservation (2022). The Twins National Nature Reserve Island Management Plan 2022.

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