

From colony to fallout: Artificial lights pose a risk to our seabirds

By Amanda Kuepfer

EVERY September, about 400,000 sooty shearwaters (sooties) return to the tussac islands near Stanley to breed after completing an epic 30,000+km round trip migration to east Canada.

The sooty shearwater is a medium-sized seabird which nests in burrows dug into rich peat. There is still a large global population, but due to sharp declines, it is now considered 'near-threatened' on the IUCN Red List.

In the Falkland Islands, there are several known colonies, and others could yet be found. Most of the known population breed on Kidney Island (>80%), with nearby Cochon, Top and Bottom Islands also providing crucial nesting grounds. These islands are free from non-native predators like cats and rodents, and the rich tussac over healthy peat provides important shelter and substrate suitable for burrowing.

Having these colonies so close to Stanley offers a unique summer spectacle when thousands of sooties return to their nests in the evening. However, Stanley and its associated marine activities such as anchoring fishing vessels, cruise ships and tankers aggregating in the harbour, can also pose a threat.

Artificial lights may attract and disorientate birds. Whether through exhaustion, confusion or collision with structures, they can become grounded in lit areas, a phenomenon known as "fallout".

While birds of all ages can be affected, young, inexperienced fledglings that leave their nests for the first time appear to be particularly vulnerable, which is why we tend to see so many during the present time of the year. The number of grounded birds can vary annually – poor visibility through fog or rain, strong winds, and low moon light can increase the likelihood.

All artificial lights, regardless of proximity to seabird colonies may pose the threat of seabird fallouts and can result in mass-mortality. Birds can become injured or die during impact with structures or the ground, or once grounded, they are vulnerable to predation from cats and dogs, traffic collisions, and even hypothermia and starvation. Depending on location and weather, birds may not be able to take off again by themselves.

This year, we've recorded dozens of dead sooties, including over 40 in a single event. How-



Above: the sooties coming into roost on Kidney Island. Below: a sooty shearwater. Pics Amanda Kuepfer.

ever, this is likely just the tip of the iceberg - many birds will go undetected, and the long-term effects of impacts upon grounding in surviving birds are unknown.

The sooty shearwater is the most reported species experiencing fallouts around Stanley. Burrow-nesting petrels and shearwaters like the sooty shearwater appear particularly vulnerable to artificial lights-driven fallouts, perhaps because they are naturally attracted to them, and because they tend to fly close to the water.

Other species can fallout too, and grounded black-browed albatross fledglings are also regularly sighted around the Falklands during this time of the year, grounded through inexperience or adverse weather. These large birds cannot easily take off by themselves, as they typically require a slope, a gust of wind or a long runway to become airborne.

How you can help:

(1) Reducing light use during this critical period is the single most important preventative action we can take. Screening lights, switching off superfluous light-

ing, and minimising unnecessary night-time activity can contribute to reduced light pollution.

(2) Look out for grounded birds at risk of immediate harm (e.g. from road collisions). When you see a bird that needs help, contact Falklands Conservation on 22247 or message us on Facebook).

If the bird is uninjured, we will collect it in a box and safely release it in an area of elevated coastline that is facing the present wind direction (e.g. Hookers Point or Cape Pembroke). Releasing them onto an area of land facing the wind helps the birds to take off more easily.

If a bird is injured, then we will take them to the vets for assessment. There has already been a huge community effort in reporting of grounded birds, and we thank everyone for their care and patience.

(3) Provide information. Data on fallouts in the Falkland Islands is lacking. Help us better understand the scale and impact of fallouts - Contact Falklands Conservation to inform us of your observations!



THE CHURCH COLUMN

DURING the month of May, the Catholic Church recalls in a special way the role of Mary in God's plan. Scripture clearly teaches that there is one Mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2.5). His glorious mediation is already infinite and inexhaustible. It needs no supplement. So why is Mary important?

I would answer that, precisely because Christ's heavenly mediation is limitless, he allows by grace we human beings may participate in his high-priestly intercession at the Father's right hand. In fact, we do so every time we pray for one another on earth; and the same holds true for the saints in heaven. They pray even more effectively than we do because they are perfectly united to Christ and behold God face-to-face. The intercession of Mary is especially fruitful because, when Jesus was conceived in her womb, she became the link that connects Christ's humanity with ours. This pattern continues in heaven. Jesus Christ is both God and Man: the Eternal Son of the Father and also the Son of Mary, conceived and born in time.

To put it simply: Mary WAS the vessel of grace, and SHE STILL IS and remains so forever.

The great Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen put it this way:

"Mary is not our salvation—let us not be absurd on that. The mother is not the doctor, and neither is Mary the Saviour. But Mary brings us to the Saviour!... Devotion to the Mother of our Lord in no way detracts from the adoration of her Divine Son. The brightness of the moon does not detract from the brilliance of the sun, but rather bespeaks its brilliance... It may well be that, as the world returns to love of Mary, it will also return to a belief in the divinity of Christ."

