



FALKLANDS CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

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Oiled Birds Found After Tanker Fuel Spill

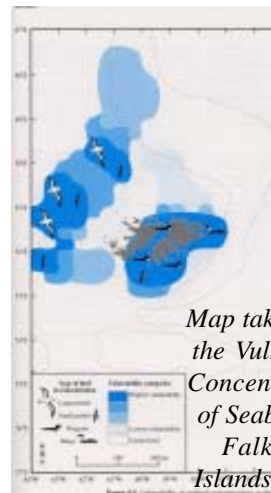
Following the grounding of the reefer vessel *Nova Scotia* on Cochon Island on the 19th April a number of dead and oiled birds were reported from Kidney Island and Cape Pembroke. During a brief visit to Kidney Island on the 22nd April Falklands Conservation recorded over twenty dead sooty shearwaters adjacent to the landing beach that showed obvious signs of oiling and smelled of diesel oil. A further oiled sooty shearwater was found alive but in poor condition and a Magellanic penguin was observed with oil around its head and back. In addition reports were also received that a severely oiled imperial shag and rockhopper penguin had been observed on Cape Pembroke. This highlights the significant risk to seabirds that surface oil pollution presents, even on a relatively minor scale.

Thankfully the incidence of oiled seabirds observed in the Falklands is low but in the long term, the possibility of future oil exploration in the Falklands may form a significant potential source of contamination. The ongoing fishing industry, with associated transshipment and fuel bunkering in coastal waters and as evidenced by the present incident and the grounding of a ship off FIPASS earlier in the year, constitute an ongoing risk.

Falklands Conservation has mapped the vulnerability of seabirds to oil pollution through the year utilising at sea surveys. This has shown high vulnerability of in-shore waters throughout the year due to the resident coastal species. Around the coasts of Berkeley Sound there are an estimated 2,512 gentoo penguins, 5,192 rockhopper penguins, over 50,000 sooty shearwaters,

as well as white-chinned petrels, great shearwaters, grey-backed storm-petrels, rock shags and imperial shags.

The majority of deaths attributable to oil pollution amongst seabirds are due to the physical properties of the oil rather than due to ingestion. Oiling destroys the water repellent properties of the birds' plumage. This allows water to penetrate, decreasing buoyancy, and causing water logging of plumage and drowning. Additionally at reduced levels of contamination thermal insulation is reduced requiring greater use of energy to combat cold leading to reduced fat reserves, muscle weakening and death. Feeding and foraging patterns of different species will also determine the degree of contact with contaminated surfaces.



Map taken from
the Vulnerable
Concentrations
of Seabirds in
Falkland
Islands Waters



Photo's by Dustin
Clark

Many species may be affected by spills far removed from the breeding colonies and it is not necessary for oil to reach shore for an effect to be felt, even though it might be out of sight. Diving seabirds and coastal waterfowl that spend most of their time on the surface of the water are particularly vulnerable and less able to avoid the effects of pollution. Small oil slicks drifting through concentrations of birds resting on the sea may inflict heavy casualties disproportionate to the quantity of oil. This may be the case with rafting seabirds in inshore waters as they return to or leave the breeding colonies, evidenced by the high incidence of oiled sooty shearwaters. Falklands Conservation is content that on this occasion, given the location, prevailing weather conditions and the situation of the vessel that all that could be done was done in a timely fashion and



would like to thank all those that worked together to reduce the severity of the leak and thus

minimise any impact.

The Oil Pollution Contingency Plan appeared to work and the Fisheries Department liaised with all parties to ensure that everyone was informed. However, Falklands Conservation urge a note of caution as there appears to be a tendency, as evidenced in the information supplied in last weeks Penguin News, to understate the inherent risks to the environment. This may have been to prevent public worry but should not stand in the way of a full review of pollution events so that mistakes and successes can be recorded and learnt from and “what if” scenario’s addressed. It is gratifying that this is presently occurring and a mobilisation exercise is being planned. Gaps in the Contingency Plan, available materials and knowledge should be identified so that we are better able to address the next incident that will surely occur.



Fledglings on tour!

Several young Black-browed Albatross took a wrong turn, attracted by the lights these birds crash landed in Stanley.

Falklands Conservation received reports of the birds getting comfortable in people’s gardens after the birds had fledged from Beauchene Island in strong south-westerly winds and were blown off course.

Field Science Officer Nic Huin captured the birds and took them to a quiet spot where they could return to their journey.



Fitzroy Bash a great success!

The Falklands Conservation Camper’s Bash took place on the 16th of April and true to form proved to be a great night out.

Unfortunately due to the strong winds the MPA road was closed and this prevented the band, “Atomic Funky Monkey’s” from attending. After a certain amount of stress (not quite panic!) it was decided that the dance would go on with the entertainment being supplied by Becky Ingham’s IPOD and “10 Years Gone”, a group of young lads who had agreed to play a 40 minute slot.

The boys went on at 9pm and due to their fantastic talent finally managed to get off at 12.30! If there is anyone out there that needs a

great band then look no further. Thank you for such a great show lads!

Falklands Conservation would also like to thank Alan, Isabel and all at Fitzroy Farm for hosting the event, supplying the meat and potatoes which Sally Blake, Hay Miller and Amanda Morris turned into a really great feast. A huge thank you to all who helped out, Wayne Clement and Chris Gilbert for running the bar, Paul and Amanda for delivering the bars contents and Sam Miller for doing the door. A final thank you must go to Falkland Tours and Travel for the laying on of the coach.



What is out there.....

A new paper for Falklands Conservation "What is out there: diversity in feeding of gentoo penguins (*Pygoscelis papua*) around the Falkland Islands (Southwest Atlantic)" by A.P. Clausen, A.I. Arkhipkin, V.V. Lapitokhovsky and N. Huin, a joint project with the Fisheries Department. This paper has recently been published in Polar Biology and can be viewed by logging onto www.springerlink.com

During austral spring 2000, the diet of Gentoo penguins, *Pygoscelis papua*, was studied and compared to prey availability, assessed by trawl and plankton surveys, in waters adjacent to a number of colonies along the coast of West Falkland. There was good agreement in size and abundance of key prey species in the penguin diet and from the plankton and trawl

surveys. The diet of birds breeding adjacent to shallow sheltered waters was dominated by demersal species, in particular crustaceans, *Munida* spp. Whilst birds breeding adjacent to deeper exposed waters generally preyed upon pelagic species of fish, Falklands herring *Sprattus fuegensis*, and squid, *Moroteuthis ingens*. Gentoo penguins generally foraged at depths of up to 30 m, relatively close to the coast, and illustrated a certain degree of selection of prey species where possible, thus providing evidence that they are not fully opportunistic feeders.



Open Day well attended

The Open Day marked the end of the 25th year of Falklands Conservation and saw over 60 people through the door. Inside the office there were a number of displays on show and outside people could view the warp scarer, tori lines and FC's Rib. There were also boat trips laid on by Sullivan Shipping, who kindly took groups out to look at Top and Bottom Island in Port William. Rats have been eradicated from these Islands and the boat trips allowed people to see the improvement in the tussac and the increase in small birds. The trips also gave people the chance to see some of the wildlife that is right on our door step. The day proved to be a fitting way to end Conservation's 25th year celebrations.



Members Meeting

To be held on Wednesday the 22 of June at 7pm at the Chamber of Commerce. Come along and meet the new Falklands Conservation Director, he will recap on the last 6 months in conservation, update you on current projects, staff changes and introduce the two new OTEP projects. There will also be the opportunity to discuss invasive plant species in the Falklands. Thistles, califat and the control of gorse will be up for discussion. There will also be a small presentation of Cetaceans from the new Albatross and Petrel Programme leader, Oli Yates.

Refreshments will be provided

Past meetings have proved very successful, this is your opportunity to put your views and suggestions forward, Falklands Conservation looks forward to seeing all our Falkland based members there.

Andy Black bids farewell

Once again, the time has come for me to leave the Falklands. This time I managed to stay for over three years having come down in March 2002 for a six-month contract with the government fisheries department. As luck would have it, a job with Falklands Conservation, to survey seabird and marine mammal distributions around South Georgia, came up just as my contract with fisheries was drawing to an end, how lucky was that? So I spent two marvellous years steaming around South Georgia on fishery patrol vessels counting whatever birds and marine mammals passed by. You might think that having already spent three years doing much the same around the Falklands the prospect of spending more time at sea would be unappealing.

However, South Georgia is a place that I've always wanted to work and so I jumped at the chance. Although the Falklands and South Georgia are relatively close, the species encountered around these Islands are quite distinct and so the job offered plenty to maintain my interest. In addition there seemed to always be something different going on whether it was assisting in the rescue of shipwrecked mariners or pursuing toothfish poachers. An unexpected highlight of my time in the job was the opportunity to participate in a census of the black-browed and grey-headed albatross populations breeding on South Georgia. The survey was conducted from a yacht and entailed a complete circumnavigation of the Island at close range,

something that is rarely possible on patrol vessels. So I was able to see all those places I'd viewed from afar over the years. Following two years of at-sea surveys, I've spent most of the summer writing up the work in the Stanley office, getting involved with other aspects of Conservation's work whenever possible has kept me sane.

I'm sure I'll miss the Falklands and would like to thank all those people who have made it so memorable, you know who you are. Hopefully I'll be able to return sometime in the not too distant future.



Andy Black showing off the warp scarer

Sei whales get up close and personal

Sei whales are taking a close look at the visiting launches in Berkeley sound. Alan Henry, FIC Shipping Agent sent in these fantastic photographs from a recent trip to Berkeley Sound. The Sei whales have now been present in the

sound for some months but have, up until now, kept their distance from the working launches. It would now seem that their curiosity has gotten the better of them and they have started approaching the boats for a closer look., in some cases an extremely close look with one whale actually swimming under the launch.



FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

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