

Hummock Island Group

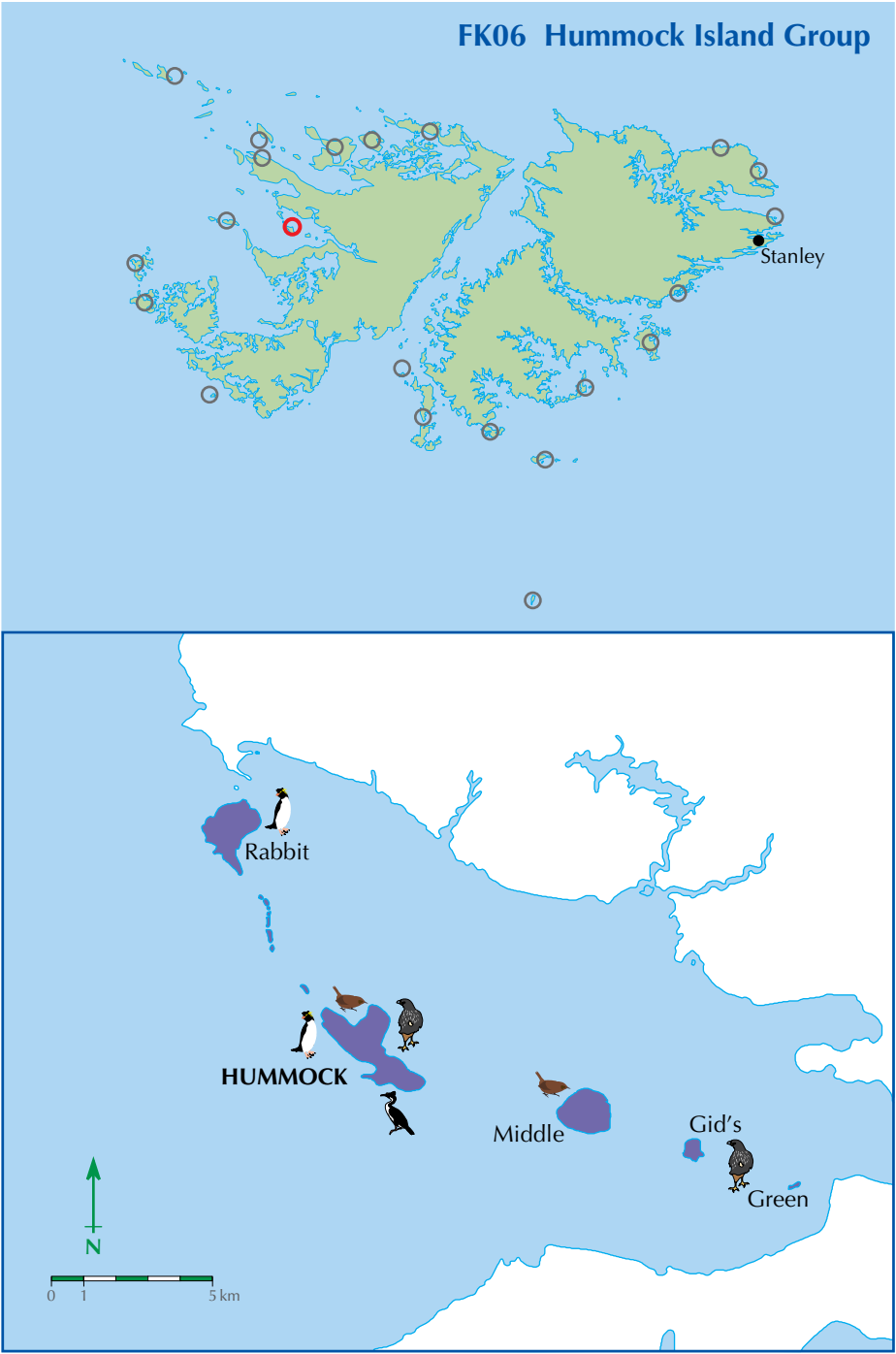
Ref number	FK06
Admin Region	Falkland Islands
Co-ordinates	51°37'S, 60°26'W
Area	Hummock Island (303 ha), Rabbit Island* (178 ha), Middle Island (155 ha), Green Island* (4 ha), Gid's Island (30 ha) [* = rats present]
Altitude	0–191 m
IBA categories	A1, A2, A4i
Status	Hummock: private nature reserve owned by D. Donnelly, Roy Cove. Rabbit: privately owned by S. Bonner, Pickthorne Farm. Middle, Gid's and Green: owned by Falkland Islands Government; Middle Island is a National Nature Reserve (designated 1966).

Site description

Hummock Island is the largest island in the group, stretching to nearly 4 km long and running in a north-west to south-east direction. The highest point is a very distinctive peak of 190 m looming like a gigantic breaking wave towards the north-east. Much of the coastline is cliffs, often reaching over 60 m in height. In the mid-20th century, it was used as an extension of the New Island sheep farm and a high level of grazing has led to much of the coastal Tussac being eaten out and replaced by bare 'black ground'. Considerable Boxwood *Hebe elliptica* grows on the cliffs and there is a varied flora across the central oceanic heathland.

Rabbit Island is 4.5 km north-west of Hummock Island and about 5.5 km west of Roy Cove. It is roughly rectangular, about 2 km square with a long promontory extending south-eastwards. The island slopes gently to the east and has very steep slopes up to 61 m facing north and west, with highest points of about 91 m. It has been heavily grazed by sheep in the past, though probably not since about 1986. An old shanty in a valley is in bad condition. The presence of rats was confirmed in 2000/01.

Middle Island is a small, conical island reaching to around 120 m in height, with dense, thick coastal Tussac. There is no beach as such, but flat stone slabs and low cliffs form the shoreline. It is believed to have been grazed for a short period prior to 1930, however since then the island has been ungrazed. It is also free of







The Hummock Island Group of islands in King George Bay NIC HUIN

FK06	Hummock Island Group	Breeding (pairs)	Notes
Criteria	Key species		
A1	Rockhopper Penguin <i>Eudyptes chrysocome</i>	1,664	Hummock 871, Rabbit 793 2000/01
A1, A2	Cobb's Wren <i>Troglodytes cobbi</i>		Breeding Hummock, numbers unknown
A1, A2	Striated Caracara <i>Phalacroboenus australis</i>	8–10	On Hummock, Green and Gid's
A4i	Imperial Shag <i>Phalacrocorax atriceps</i>	5,000	Hummock, 2000/01

introduced predators. The Tussac thins out and is replaced by short spongy grasses further inland. The island was struck by lightning and badly burnt in the late 1960s and again in the 1980s. It was declared a wild animal and bird sanctuary by the Falkland Islands Government, with the consent of the owner, in July 1966 and was retained by the Government when the estate was sold in the 1980s.

Green Island is the smallest of the group, only 1 km offshore and extending to just 4 ha. The vegetation is apparently limited to dense Tussac. Little information exists about the birds present, although 10 species were recorded during a short offshore observation period in November 1997, including Tussacbirds.

Gid's Island is almost round and reaches approximately 60m towards the north-western coast. Tall and healthy Tussac grass extends from the coastal fringe almost to the top of the slopes, although there are patches of black and eroded ground present. The island is thought to be free of introduced predators and has only been grazed intermittently in the past. No livestock are currently present.

Imperial Shag ALAN HENRY



Birds

See table opposite for details of key species.

These islands were visited during the Striated Caracara Survey in 1997; Hummock was revisited in 2001. Canary-winged/Black-throated Finch, Falkland Steamer Duck and Tussacbird are present, but numbers are not known and therefore do not qualify the site. On Hummock Island, 28 bird species were found, including all native passerines except Falkland Pipits, but the visit was short and a thorough examination of the island was not possible. Fourteen species were recorded on Middle Island, of which probably 12 were breeding. On Rabbit Island, there was a 32% increase in Rockhopper Penguin nests from 1995 to 2000. A total of 20 species was recorded in November 1997; 18 were breeding or probably breeding; only two individual Tussacbird were seen and no Cobb's Wren, Canary-winged/Black-throated Finch nor Ruddy-headed Goose. Magellanic Penguins were breeding but counts are required. Gid's Island held 17 species and 15 were probably breeding. At Green Island, in a very brief landing and circumnavigation, only 10 species were seen, of which nine were probably breeding. Thin-billed Prion and Common Diving Petrel may be present on some of these islands, but no surveys have been possible.

Other species of interest

More than 50 Southern Sea Lion pups were born on Gid's Island in an earlier season and 29 were found in the 2003 census. The other islands are used as haul-out sites for a few non-breeding seals. In two visits, 53 flowering plant species were recorded on Hummock Island, including the largest known population of an unidentified purslane (*Calandrinia*), possibly a new endemic plant. These plants were growing on the north-west-facing slopes below the peak at a height of about 46m. Five endemic species were found: Lady's Slipper *Calceolaria fothergillii*, Woolly Ragwort *Senecio littoralis*, Coastal Nassauvia *Nassauvia gaudichaudii*, Falkland Rock Cress *Phlebotobium maclovianum* and Vanilla Daisy *Leucheria suaveolens*. One interesting and rare introduced species, Jersey Cudweed *Gnaphalium luteoalbum*, was found in very small numbers. On Rabbit Island, 45 plant species were identified, of which four were endemic and six introduced.

Conservation issues

The entire group is worthy of further study and there are many populations that require close examination as a matter of priority. The present owner of Hummock Island has declared his intention not to put sheep on the island, but to allow the vegetation to recover and view it as a private reserve. Hummock, Green and Gid's Islands could therefore be considered for National Nature Reserve status. Hummock, Middle and Gid's Islands are free of rats and mice. All visitors should be informed about the dangers of accidentally introducing alien species to these islands. Rats are present on Rabbit Island and Green Island. It is important that the Falkland Islands Countryside Code (see Appendix 1) is followed, particularly to guard against the risk of fire.

References

Huin (2001), Thompson (2003), Woods (1998, 2002a), Woods and Smith (1999).