

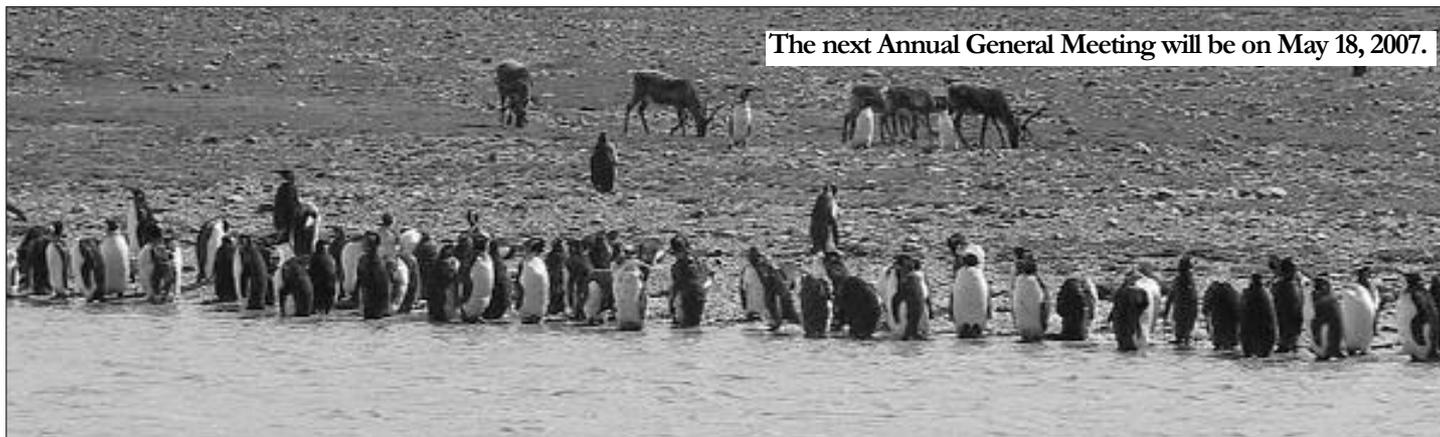
South Georgia Association

Newsletter

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The Fifth Annual General Meeting, 19 May 2006

Held at the Royal Over-Seas League, St James, London

Fifty two members including the members of the Committee attended. Another 36, including the President, Stephen Venables, sent their apologies.

The Chairman, David Tatham, welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Sally Poncet from the Falkland Islands and Mike Richardson and Kate Batty-Smith from the FCO. He reported the sad news of the deaths of John Heap and Angus Erskine. John Heap had been a member of the committee, and both were involved with SGA since its inception. He then summarised the Association's activities over the past year. There was a the visit to the Hydrographic Office in Taunton, followed by lectures given by Andy Willet and Dave Fletcher (Newsletter 9). The SGA has become a member of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum with Ron Lewis-Smith attending meetings on our behalf. The SGA Initiative Fund has been set up (Newsletter 9). The committee and officers were thanked for their help over the year, and also thanks were given to GSGSSI for its support and interaction with SGA.

In Elizabeth Hawker's absence, Fran Prince reported on membership. Membership numbers have risen by 37 in 2006 to 377. These include 81 overseas members - Argentina (1), Australia (5), Barbados (1), Belgium (2) Canada (3), France (3), Germany (2), Ireland (4), New Zealand (2), Norway (7), South Georgia and Falkland Islands (15), Spain (1), Sweden (2), Switzerland (2), Uruguay (1), USA (29) and Zimbabwe (1). There are currently four corporate members: Polar Star Expeditions, Fathom Expeditions, Peregrine Shipping and Zegrahm Expeditions. We have four reciprocal institutions who receive newsletters (UKOTCF, UK Antarctic Heritage Trust, Salvesen Ex-Whalers Clubs of Tønsberg and Edinburgh, and Øyas Venner). There are also nine institutions who receive our newsletters (British Antarctic Survey, Scott Polar Research Institute, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Vestfold Fykesmuseum, Kdr Chr. Christensens

Hvalfangstmuseum, Commissioner GSGSSI, UKOTCF Coordinator, BAS base Bird Island, BAS base King Edward Point).

Keith Holmes tabled accounts, which had been independently examined and signed by Mr John Bawden who was thanked for carrying out this procedure. Total assets within the current and deposit account amount to £19,000. This year, £3,700 was received from subscriptions, which is equal to this year's expenditure. Keith explained some of the costs this year. These included £1,000 to run the AGM, £500 on new application forms and £300 for cruise preparation. The conference fund had provided £5,500 input. Keith thanked the members for their support.

Bob Burton reported the routine production of two newsletters and thanked Jackie Burton for her help with proof-reading and stuffing newsletters into envelopes. As usual, he requested material from the membership. Members reported that they were happy with the content and thanked Bob for producing the excellent newsletter.

Keith Holmes explained that the Initiative Fund is now up and running, with £250 per three months made available. Applications are sent to Dr Mike Pienkowski who is the independent appraiser. So far two applications have been received: one concerning bio-remediation of oil-waste at the whaling stations, the second to collate a photograph collection dated back to 1909. A question was asked about the degree of public access that will be available for this collection. A suggestion has also been made to provide help with restoring the whaling station cemeteries. Keith Holmes encouraged members to suggest ideas.

Charles Swithinbank kindly agreed to chair the meeting for the election of the Executive Committee. He thanked the outgoing committee particularly David Tatham who was retiring as Chairman. Richard Ralph, a former Commissioner, had been nominated as Chairman, proposed by David Tatham and seconded by Fran Prince. Charles suggested that the Executive Committee be elected en bloc. This was proposed by Dave Fletcher and seconded by Ute Bowen. Both votes were passed unanimously.



David Tatham hangs his print of a painting of albatrosses by David Gale, which was presented on his retirement as Chairman. David thanks the SGA and adds that 'it makes a fine souvenir of good times with the SGA from its establishment in 2002'.

The Committee comprises:

President: Stephen Venables

Chairman: Richard Ralph

Secretary: Fran Prince

Treasurer: Keith Holmes

Membership Secretary: Elizabeth Hawker

Newsletter editor: Bob Burton

Members: Bob Headland, David Rootes, Alexandra Shackleton, Stephanie Martin, Ron Lewis-Smith, David Tatham.

Corresponding Members remain as: Jan Cheek (Stanley), Sarah Lurcock (SG), Trevor Potts, Dan Weinstein (USA). (Since the AGM, Jane Tanton has been co-opted onto the committee as Events Organiser. Jane was formerly a scientist at Bird Island.)

Programme for 2006 - 2007 (See also page 8)

Alexandra Shackleton gave details of the forthcoming joint event with the James Caird Society at the National Maritime Museum, Falmouth on 9 September 2006. There will be a dinner and time to enjoy the museum which will be hosting the Endurance and Survival exhibition.

A visit to the Foreign Office is planned with a tour of the building and a meeting with the Overseas Territories department.

Bob Burton talked about the Letters Patent Exhibition in 2008. SGA is hoping to produce an exhibition showing two examples of legislation: the unsuccessful attempt to control the whaling industry compared with the modern situation of successful fishing control. The exhibition will initially be at the Scott Polar Research Institute and then travel elsewhere.

Any Other Business

Michael Gilkes informed the meeting there is an article on *Curlew* in the June issue of 'Old Glory'.

John Hatchman asked whether the proposed South Georgia cruise was totally abandoned. Keith Holmes replied that SGA may try to run it again but not for a few years.

David Nicholls reported that the South Georgia Heritage Trust is now up and running, with the protection of the Environment and Heritage as main objectives.

Lyle Craigie-Halkett, who had been involved with the 1991 operation to remove waste oil from whaling stations,

commented that three out of seven ships at Stromness, Husvik and Leith Harbour were leaking oil in 1991 and he predicted that more oil could be lost in the future.

Resolution - Proposed boardwalk at Prion Island

A resolution from Sally Poncet had been tabled and details were circulated to the meeting.

"This meeting is concerned that the proposed construction of a boardwalk on Prion Island may not meet the commitments made by the South Georgia Government in the 2001 Environment Charter (SGSSI Commitment 2), nor those in Annex 2 of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels.

"The Association recommends that the South Georgia Government prepare a site-specific management plan to replace the existing Prion Island Code of Conduct before any decisions are made about the installation of boardwalks.

"The Association further suggests that this site-specific management plan include measures to address the increasing number of visitors to Prion Island and to provide for the long term protection of wandering albatrosses, and conservation of wildlife, flora and aesthetic values of the island."

Sally showed photographs of the situation at Prion Island. She suggested alternatives to the boardwalk such as capping visitor numbers, using natural materials for a track, closing the island during the breeding season and using other sites to see wandering albatrosses.

The resolution was discussed - some comments from members were:

Dave Fletcher - a boardwalk would encourage bigger ships to visit. The boardwalk would look awful.

David Rootes - recent Antarctic Treaty meetings suggested management plans should be developed for specific sites.

Cindy Buxton - compare the situation with the Galapagos where visitor numbers are restricted. Animals are sensitive at breeding times when visitors have to be very careful.

Ute Bowen, Michael Gilkes and Richard Ralph - offered whole-hearted support for the resolution.

The Resolution was seconded by Jon Barker, and the meeting voted in favour of the resolution.

Richard Ralph agreed to write to GSGSSI to explain SGA's concern, and offer any help and advice from expertise within SGA.

The meeting was followed by a lecture by Sally Poncet on 'Duncan Carse and his South Georgia Legacy'.

Message from the Government of SG and SSI

South Georgia has again seen an extremely busy year with a record number of cruise ships (49) and a record number of yacht visits (27). The average number of passengers per ship has also increased, with a total of approximately 5500 tourist visits to the island in the last austral summer. This rise in the number of paying visitors obviously increases the income to the Government but gives concern about their impacts. At one site, Prion Island, the general disturbance,

erosion and potential damage to the nests of burrowing petrels being caused by the ever increasing numbers of visitors, led to the decision by the Commissioner that either it should be closed or a boardwalk built. If built, tourists would not be permitted to stray from the boardwalk and would have to observe the wandering albatrosses, South Georgia pipits and all the other wildlife from two viewing platforms. This would allow the wildlife to determine a suitable range from people and not the other way around. An Environmental Impact Assessment for the boardwalk is presently underway.

The increase in numbers of tourists has also improved the income of the Museum Trust as the Commissioner has hypothecated 10% of all landing fees to them. The Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands has also built a new facilities building for the Museum this season and continues to refurbish and maintain the older structures. The costs of that work are now in excess of £300,000 over the last two years.

The major capital project currently being considered by the Government is reintroduction of hydro electric power. The Gull Lake dam is not in imminent danger of collapse but is deteriorating and whether or not the hydro project goes ahead some work will be needed to ensure that a sudden flood does not wash out the cemetery. The costs of reinstalling hydro power are approximately £1.8 million but today's fuel prices mean that this could be recouped within about 18 years, and less if they continue to rise. The prospect of being a carbon-free Territory is also extremely important in environmental terms. An environmental impact assessment for this project has just been completed.

The environment generally is, as ever, high on the priority list for the Government and work continues on production of the revision of the Environmental Management Plan. The new document is to be called Plan for Progress - Managing the Environment 2006 - 2010. It had been hoped to publish it in March but a second round of public consultation has taken place to ensure that all stakeholder views could be considered and that has delayed the final production until June. Thank you to all those who have given of your time to inform this process.

Fishing is of course the major industry and most time consuming part of Government business. The news has been generally good over the last year with a slight increase in the TAC for Patagonian toothfish from CCAMLR, continued certification by the Marine Stewardship Council and growing international confidence in the new stock assessment technology using a tagging or capture/recapture system. The recent research cruise suggested the biggest stock of icefish for many years and the fishing season was successful also for that species. Work continues on technological aspects of krill processing to make it a more profitable commodity and that bodes well for the future. There is also, however, concern about krill as sea ice further south seems to be in decline and this might affect the production of krill carried by the currents to South Georgia waters.

Better fishing revenue than in the previous year is tempered with increased costs for fuel. Our patrol vessel, so

necessary to keep poachers out, protect stocks, protect the birds and make it worthwhile for legal fishermen to buy licences, now burns over £500,000 worth of fuel a year on top of the circa £1.5 million charter fees.

This year we intend, when final approval is obtained, to publish our annual estimates and accounts on the Government website. This is a logical step as many people have said they are keen to see how the Government earns its money and how it spends it. I would commend the website (www.sgisland.org), which is managed for us by Project Atlantis, to you all. It has monthly news updates that have proven very popular and also shows a webcam image from KEP so that visitors to the site can get live pictures of the island. There is a wealth of other information and imagery, as well as educational games for the younger, and maybe not so young, visitors. Try the quiz; it does test the grey cells a bit.

Heritage issues have been addressed not only at the Museum but during last summer a team, sponsored by the Norwegian branch of the South Georgia Heritage Trust, renovated the exterior of the Husvik Manager's Villa and the signal shack next door to it. It is hoped that this can form the base for a longterm project to study climate change on the island. This is to be carried out by a combination of professional scientists and international youth working in association with the Danish Polar Institute.

I hope I have covered many of the issues that will be of interest to members of the SGA. In considering what to include, I looked at the list of files that we use each year. There are currently 120 of them and I have probably referred to a lot less than half. The website, I would reiterate, is a good place to go to find out more. Sarah Lurcock is the main author of the monthly news update and we are very grateful to her, and Javier Fernandez who stepped in during Sarah's leave, for keeping people informed.

Both as a Government official and as a member of the SGA. I am sorry not to be able to join you for the AGM, but hope that the Association goes from strength to strength. It remains for me a privilege to work for the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and the SGA is important in ensuring that interest in the island does not diminish.

Viola's bell - a centenary for Dias



Everyone knows *Dias*, the old sealer that lies beside *Albatros*, at Grytviken. It is less well-known that she started life in 1906 as the steam trawler *Viola* at Hull. After the War she was sold to Norwegian owners and renamed *Kapduen*, then converted into a whale-catcher. In 1927 she was taken to

Grytviken to become the sealer *Dias*.

Almost 100 years to the day that *Viola* sailed on her first voyage from Hull, her bell was located on a farm near Sandefjord. Robb Robinson, who is planning to bring *Dias* back to Hull, has been able to buy the bell for Hull Maritime Museum.

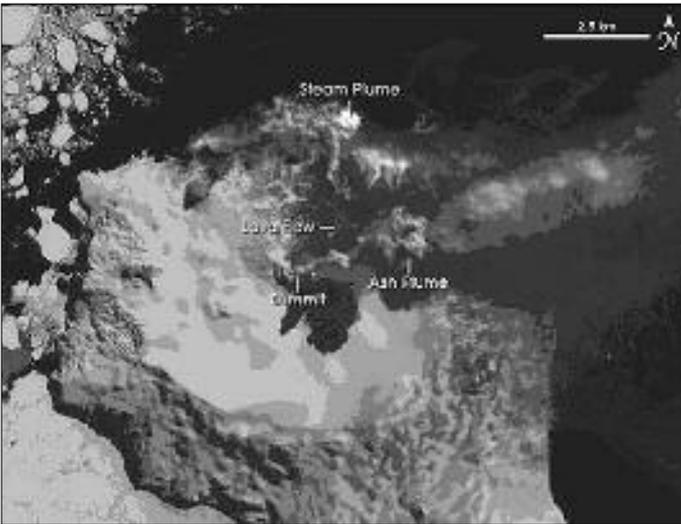
South Sandwich eruption - an exciting new phase

Back in 2001, satellite imagery detected anomalous hotspot activity on Montagu Island, the largest island in the centre of the South Sandwich Islands. Working with Matt Patrick (Hawaii Institute of Geophysics and Planetology), we were able to track the eruption with more satellite imagery. The eruption was trivial by volcanic standards - just a small steam column and some tiny quantities of black ash emitted from Mt Belinda, an ash cone surrounded by the extensive icefield that covers about 90 per cent of Montagu Island.

Then, in late September 2005, we detected enhanced thermal activity. It was hard to pin down due to the very low-resolution imagery available, but there seemed to be a new voluminous phase of eruption. We obtained an excellent visible wavelength image that showed an enormous river of glowing lava extending 3 km from the Mt Belinda summit crater all the way to the north coast, where it was lost to view in thick clouds of steam. A later image confirmed that the lava had entered the sea and was forming new land. At that stage about 20 hectares had been created, but by January-February 2006, the area had doubled to 40 hectares, in three prominent lobes. The eruption has now lasted five years and shows no signs of slowing down.

Because of my interest, I was invited by the RAF in the Falkland Islands to join an overflight of Montagu Island.

The RAF flies a few South Sandwich sorties each year, and I was glad to participate since local observations of the volcanic activity are extremely hard to obtain. After about 10 days of delay due to poor weather at the far end, we departed Mount Pleasant on a Hercules aircraft early on 27



March. The round trip is 10 hours, so we had to endure an air-to-air refuelling from a converted VC10 tanker, an awesome event in which we travelled at 350 mph for 20 minutes linked by an umbilical, with the gigantic tanker just 20 or so metres above us. Our pilot, Flt Lt Shelley Mackinnon, flew the entire sortie except during the last hour when she offered me the controls. So, for a brief but memorable five minutes, the lives of the 20 or so on board were in my hands, although I noted that Shelley never took one hand off her own controls.....

Our time over Montagu Island only lasted about 15 minutes. At first we circled under low cloud, observed the new land and saw steam rising from the lava front as the hot rock plunged into the icy ocean. Then we cut up through the dense cloud layer and I photographed the prominent dark grey ash column rising to about 2.5 km. After flying past the northern islands in the group, we headed back via South Georgia, which, unlike where we had just come from, was entirely cloud-free and breathtakingly beautiful.

The flight was a great success, allowing the first observations of the eruption by a volcano specialist. Unfortunately, with a layer of cloud sitting on the island's upper plateau, I was unable to view what impact the eruption has had on the cover of permanent snow and ice. That remains an important observation to make. So I am still keeping a close eye on the island and hoping the RAF will be successful in getting some clear views of the north-east corner of the island and of the lava as it flows northward across the icefield and into the sea.

John Smellie

Senior Volcanologist & Project Leader, BAS

Environmental Management Plan updated

Plan for Progress - the promised review and revision of the first Environmental Management Plan for South Georgia has been published. Its full title is *Plan for Progress: Managing the Environment 2006-2010* and it was compiled by Liz Pasteur and David Walton. The 74-page document is a lavish production with some stunning photographs. It could be described as more of a brochure than a plan. It gives a good overview of the island's history, natural environment, fisheries, research, visiting and so on, as well as formally summarising GSGSSI's policies. The reader is frequently referred to the government website but, as URLs are not given, it is not always easy to find the relevant information. Copies may be obtained for £10.00 (inc. postage) from Bluntisham Books, Oak House, 4 East Street, Bluntisham, Huntingdon PE28 3LS.

email: contact@bluntishambooks.co.uk

South Georgia Heritage Trust

Following the death of David Nicholls, there has been some reorganisation at the South Georgia Heritage Trust. Alison Stewart is now full-time Director and the sole executive of the Trust. Howard Pearce, former Commissioner, is chairman and the other trustees are Bjørn Basberg, Jan Cheek, John Croxall, Gordon Liddle, Michael Moore, David Munro and Frederik Paulsen.

The SGHT has taken over the management of the South Georgia Museum, Whalers' Church and all responsibilities of the soon-to-be dissolved SG Museum Trust. Niall Cooper, employed by SGHT, will replace Tim and Pauline Carr as the curator of the South Georgia Museum. Current

projects are a comprehensive set of signs explaining the working of the whaling station at Grytviken and the completion of the restoration of the Husvik Villa. SGHT is also undertaking a long-term fundraising initiative for a Habitat Restoration project with the objective of reintroducing threatened bird species to parts of South Georgia.

Captain Stensholt and the third birth



While researching South Georgia's social and maritime history I have always been intrigued by Birth No. 3. This occurred on 13 February 1915 when Evelyn Marjorie Stensholt, the wife of Captain Carl Gustav Andreassen Stensholt, gave birth to a boy, Rolf Derwent Stensholt. The birth was recorded in the

official register at South Georgia by the magistrate Edward Binnie four days later.

At first I thought that Captain Stensholt was a land-based employee of a whaling company on the island, because at that time it was not uncommon for senior officers at South Georgia to have their wives accompanying them. However, in this instance, Captain Stensholt was the master of a fully rigged sailing ship, *Derwent*, 1,890 tons, belonging to Chr. Nielsen & Company of Larvik, who owned the whaling station at New Fortuna Bay (now Ocean Harbour).

Stensholt took command of *Derwent* and brought her down to South Georgia for the first time, arriving on 27 February 1912. She sailed on 12 March in ballast for Port Adelaide, presumably to load a cargo of grain for Europe.

On her second voyage to South Georgia, *Derwent* arrived at the island on 7 January 1915. And it was while she was berthed at New Fortuna Bay that the Stensholts' son was born, apparently the only birth at that location. It is not surprising that he was christened Rolf Derwent as he may well have been born on board his father's ship.



Derwent would have been lost at South Georgia but for the enterprise of her captain.

C a p t a i n Stensholt's 'excitements' on the *Derwent* at South Georgia did not end with that notable event. On her next voyage she arrived at New Fortuna Bay on 29 January 1917. The cargo was discharged and, just as she was on the point of sailing on 2 March, there was a tremendous storm which drove her ashore. The vessel was considerably damaged. Divers were called and, follow-

ing a surveyor's inspection, she was declared unseaworthy. Because South Georgia lacked a shipyard to conduct the necessary repairs, she was condemned. Papers confirming the loss were sent to the company and to the underwriters, but because of the erratic war-time postal services, Captain Stensholt heard nothing from either. However, the Captain never gave up on his ship. He made an inventory of the materials he needed to undertake a temporary repair sufficient to take the vessel to port where she could be fully renovated. The ship had extensive damage to the hull: 35 frames and 6 plates were broken. No one really wanted to undertake the work, but when he had gathered all the materials required he set about to repair her by using broken plates and concrete.

On 22 November 1917, some nine months after her stranding, the repair job was completed and she was ready to sail for Montevideo. When she arrived, she was put into drydock where some 40 frames had to be repaired or replaced, six plates had to be renewed, a further 25 plates had to be straightened, and the lower rudder pintle replaced.

Captain Stensholt gave up the sea in 1920 to take over the family farm in Norway with his wife and two children. As for *Derwent*, she continued sailing. In 1921 she was owned in Arendal, and was part of the Australian grain fleet of that year, sailing in 115 days from Port Adelaide to the Tyne. She was sold to the United States for conversion to a barge in 1925, and finally scrapped in 1949.

Captain Stensholt was not the first master to have a son born on South Georgia! No. 2 in the Register was an as yet un-named child born on 18 January 1915 to Agnes Anderssen, the wife of Anton Severin Anderssen, master of the factory ship/transport *Fridtjof Nansen II*. This birth, which was registered on 26 January 1915, probably took place at Stromness Harbour.

Ian Hart

Chippy's pigs

Andrew Leachman has written to ask about the names of the two pigs given to that much maligned carpenter, Harry McNish. According to Frank Hurley, they were called Lady Bridget Dennis and Sir Patrick Dennis and they were slaughtered on the 2nd and 3rd of April, respectively, as *Endurance* headed into the Weddell Sea. Chippy merely noted that he had 'pig fry and bacon for Breakfast' on the 5th. Apart from building them a pen, he seems to have shown little interest in his acquisitions because, according to Macklin, it was Cheetham who 'nursed them and reared them, fed them and housed them (in a straw-lined pigloo), and on the approach of midwinter and with thoughts of pork in his callous mind, cruelly did them to death, assisted by Vincent, equally callous.'

We have searched *Who was Who* and the Dictionary of National Biography, but we cannot find Sir Patrick and Lady Bridget Dennis. Perhaps they were characters in a play or song. Has anyone got any ideas?

Albatross meeting in Stanley

The plight of South Georgia's, and the world's, albatrosses and petrels have been highlighted several times in this newsletter, not least because, 35 years ago, the editor worked with them on Bird Island. As is well-known, albatrosses and their relatives are being caught in such huge numbers as a by-catch of several fisheries that they are in danger of becoming extinct. It is exasperating that mitigation measures are simple and effective. The Government of South Georgia and its staff are to be congratulated because, for the second year in succession, their enforcement policy has resulted in no flying seabirds being caught by toothfish vessels working in the SGSSI Maritime Zone. Unfortunately the issue of fisheries drowning seabirds crosses international boundaries. It requires multilateral action particularly by the UK and its Overseas Territories, South American and South African nations.

It is encouraging to report that the issue is now receiving international attention. Earlier this year, an international workshop held in Stanley brought together thirty five experts and key players to discuss what steps and resources are necessary to implement an effective rescue plan. Discussions focussed on the Agreement for the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels (ACAP), of which the UK is a signatory along with South Georgia and other Overseas Territories.

Among the recommendations for South Georgia made at the meeting were, as High Priority, the establishment of an Environment Committee to advise the Government, the review of the Protected Area system, the strengthening of the policy for preventing the introduction of pests and diseases, and the investigation of potential threats (e.g. impact of visitors and fur seals) at key sites (e.g. Albatross and Prion Islands), the maintenance of annual monitoring of breeding numbers and success of threatened species, and the remote tracking of young birds which may be particularly vulnerable.

However, it is crucial that South Georgia's seabirds are protected outside the bounds of the Territory's jurisdiction. To this end, Operation Ocean Task Force (OOTF) has been set up by BirdLife International, an organisation based in Cambridge. It is placing instructors on fishing vessels to show the crews the simple and practical techniques that prevent seabird deaths. This costs money and, in the UK, the RSPB is conducting a very high profile 'Save the Albatross' fundraising campaign. Visitors to London will have noticed the posters on the Underground and Alexandra Shackleton was hugged by a man-sized albatross on leaving Peter Jones in Sloane Square (her grandfather feasted on wanderer chicks when the James Caird reached South Georgia!).

There also has to be a political will to save our albatrosses. Alistair Gammell, director of the RSPB's International Division, said: 'The level of support shown by the UK Government to this Report (of the Stanley meeting) will be a clear indication of its commitment to protecting the exceptional biodiversity of its Overseas Territories and, in

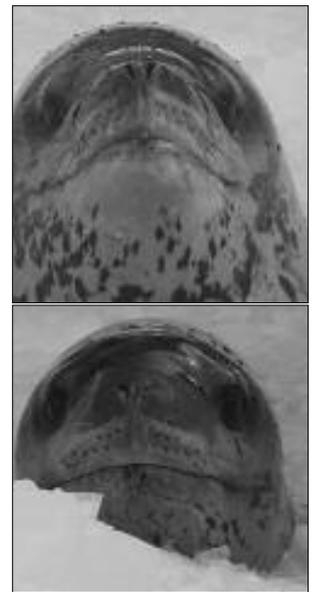
this case, arguably their most spectacular and iconic inhabitants. Will the UK Government let albatrosses become extinct, or will it take action necessary to give them a future?

How to raise funds - Jamie's Brilliant Initiative

At KEP last November, shaven-headed Jamie Watts accepted a challenge to grow a sponsored 'comb-over' in aid of 'Save the Albatross'. Nearly a year later, the sides of his head had been linked by hair and Sarah Lurcock, who paid for the privilege, clipped off the hard-grown locks. The result: £1750 which will go to Projecto Albatroz in Brazil and Birdlife Namibia for their observer programmes.

Lesser-known fauna at Bird Island

Bird Island is famous for its albatrosses and fur seals but anyone lucky enough to overwinter knows that this is a good time to see leopard seals. To get a better idea of how many come to the island, individuals are being identified by the unique patterns on their heads. This is a development of a programme of tagging leopard seals. Last year the winter population was estimated at around 80. (Harry Clagg, the entomologist on Lance Tickell's overwintering party in 1963, painted numbers on about 20 leopard seals.)



Spots the difference!

Also on Bird Island, 300 South Georgia pintails have been ringed to investigate their movements. So, if you see any ringed ducks anywhere around South Georgia, please report date, place and ring colours and numbers to Tony Martin at BAS.

Finally, Bird Island had an unwelcome visitor in the form of a rat. It was found dead on the shore and had presumably been swept across from the mainland. Extensive searches failed to find any more signs of rats on the island and monitoring will continue.

Bird Island Reunion

The Bird Island reunion immediately followed a symposium that celebrated the outstanding scientific career of Professor John Croxall, who has now retired after 30 years as Head of Birds and Mammals at BAS. The reunion on 8 July celebrated 50 years of occupation of Bird Island. It began with lunch at the Golden Ball, Boxworth. In the evening a party at Girton College started with a selection of welcome drinks including G&T, the traditional BI pre-dinner tippie, and the issuing of handouts, skillfully edited by Bob Burton, to mark the occasion. Among the 76 guests,

it was great to see Jenny Bonner and her son Martin, who had visited Bird Island in 1959 at the age of 20 months.

A webcam projected live images from Bird Island and many guests were astonished to see beautiful blue skies above Jordan Cove; some needed persuading the camera had not been pointed at a still photograph of a rare man-free day. However the constant bobbing of seals on the beach seemed to indicate the images were authentic. During the buffet meal a slide show was projected with images of Bird Islanders of the last 50 years at work and play. Many of the guests were seeing themselves as photographed by others for the first time, and of course some of the images were intentionally less than complimentary!

The incumbent Bird Island winterers participated in a live webcam link during the after-dinner speeches: John Croxall (opening remarks), Ron Pinder who talked about the early years, Bruce Pearson (1970s), Paul Copestake (1980s), Keith Reid (1990s) and Jane Tanton (2000s). Each speaker proposed a toast to 'their' decade, concluding with a toast from the Bird Island residents 'To the next 50 years'.

In addition, Bruce Pearson presented Fran Prince with the original Prince House sign (restored by Gill Clarke), and Ian Boyd gave John Croxall a polished steel lid from the last Bird Island Aga, engraved with a wandering albatross and a pair of macaroni penguins. The lid also had a clock fitted (a traditional retirement gift with a Bird Island twist). Finally, Keith Reid presented John with a Bruce Pearson original of a wandering albatross. This was a joint retirement gift from the Symposium delegates and the Reunion guests.

Greene King generously sponsored the darts and skittles



John Croxall receives his painting from Keith Reid and Andy Clarke.

contests. The main prize (two crates of Abbott Ale) was for the webcam darts final between the post-1985 Bird Islanders who had beaten their pre-1985 counterparts in a play off, and the current Bird Island winterers. Unfortunately the cam link died at the crucial moment, prompting the 1985ers to disperse (into the bar mainly). They could not be re-assembled when the cam link came back. Consequently the referees (Chris Green and Nic Warren) had no alternative than to declare Bird Island champions, which judging from the accuracy of their dart play when warming up, was a not unlikely outcome anyhow.

The party was a fitting and emotional final Goodbye to John.

Dirk Briggs

In Memoriam:

Venetia Carse, died on 27 September, was the widow of Duncan Carse who died in 2004. She was a hospital almoner when she met Duncan. Her acceptance of his proposal as he arrived at South Georgia on HMS *Owen* in 1961, was, paradoxically, the go-ahead he needed for his 'personal psychological experiment' into isolation by living alone. As it happened, Venetia was reunited with him sooner than expected when his hut was demolished by a wave. In later years Venetia was a tower of strength when Duncan hit hard times.

Angus Erskine, died 15 April, was one of the most widely-travelled visitors to polar regions. While in the Navy, he took part an expedition to Greenland and was later a FIDS base leader. Subsequently, he set up Erskine Expeditions to take small parties to the Arctic and was the first tour operator to visit the Falkland Islands after the 1982. He visited South Georgia in the pioneering days of Antarctic tourism.

David Nicholls, died suddenly 4 July, was Commander British Forces Falkland Islands in 1999 when he made his first climbing expedition to South Georgia. He returned to lead two British Schools Exploring Society Expeditions. Meanwhile he had established Project Atlantis that set up the South Georgia government website and instituted the South Georgia Heritage Trust, becoming its first chairman.

International Forum on the Subantarctic

6–7 July 2006, Hobart, Tasmania.

Members of the SGA would probably agree that those gems of the South Ocean, the Subantarctic islands, get insufficient international attention. Antarctic Tasmania, in particular Ben Galbraith and Heather Glidden, felt that this needed changing, so they convened a forum on the Subantarctic islands and surrounding seas. The last such meeting was a joint SCAR/IUCN Workshop at Paimpont back in 1992. Noting this, Antarctic Tasmania brought together a range of speakers to discuss the character, scientific significance and management issues presented by this biogeographical region. Very cleverly, the convenors guaranteed a large attendance by setting the date immediately before the joint SCAR/COMNAP conference and symposium, also in Hobart.

Prior to the Forum, there were fears that it would be taken over by political posturing about who owned which island group. I am pleased to report that this was completely ignored and we had an excellent meeting where a lot of catching-up was done on the current state of the islands. Following a brief description of subantarctic islands and surrounding oceans by representatives from administrations or concerned agencies, the Forum went on to review the Physical, Biological and Human Uses of the islands. This set the scene for two full sessions on the second day on Conservation and Management issues.

What did the Forum achieve? Very rapidly, it became apparent that contact and communication between the

various concerned governments, agencies and conservation groups are not that good. We were all surprised by the range of scientific research going on at the islands and there is scope for more comparative studies. There are significant conservation issues (need I mention albatross decline?) that should promote further contact between the relevant administrations. Problems from non-native species, itself the subject of a useful workshop earlier in the year, were highlighted. We were told that the Macquarie Island rabbit eradication programme has stalled but that both New Zealand and South Georgia have completed successful, but expensive, eradication programmes.

It was depressing to note that many of the recommendations from the 1992 Paimpont meeting have still not been achieved, although significant progress has been made in some areas. The administrators of most subantarctic island groups are now guided by local environmental management plans and there is a general acceptance that stakeholders should be involved in planning developments.

The concluding Panel Discussion agreed that the meeting had achieved its main objective of identifying the distinct circumpolar domain of the subantarctic region and should be repeated. No date was set for future meetings or how regularly they should occur but it was felt that they could have a more specific topic, having now established the overview. The Forum was sponsored by the Tasmanian Polar Network and Tasmanian Convention Bureau and I should like to acknowledge support from the Forum.

David Rootes

Taxi to the Snow Line: Mountain Adventures on Nordic Skis

Guy Sheridan 2006. Camaurac, White Peak Publishing. ISBN 2-9525255-0-1. 352 pp. £29.50 inc. p&p (in EU) to members of the SGA, from Guy Sheridan, Comus, 11340 Espesel, France. Gsher3@aol.com

Readers might recall that the author, a regular Royal Marine officer, became well known as the commander of the force that re-took South Georgia from the Argentines in 1982. Members of the SGA will find the two sections dealing with South Georgia of particular interest, but the rest of the book will also be of great interest to lovers of wild places, and snow-covered mountains especially.

Guy Sheridan is a noted ski mountaineer and he records some of his most memorable travels on Nordic skis in small parties of two or three. These travels have taken him off the usual beat within Europe, especially Scandinavia, but also as far away as South America, Central Asia and New Zealand. He shares his enthusiasm in the planning of such routes, and then the delight he has for winter travel in remote mountain areas – which surely most SGA members will share, if not perhaps in such strenuous ways as are told here.

The story of the recapture of the island is graphically told in an annex, written in the form of a long 35-page letter to his wife and daughter which he wrote in Grytviken, and left to be opened should anything happen to him subsequently. It is a factual account of what took place, and makes for most fascinating reading. The problems of commanding a joint force are well brought out, and it is clear that this was not the finest hour of the SAS, admitted later by them as a 'bitter experience'. The loss of the two SAS helicopters on the Fortuna Glacier, well reported in the press at the time, is enlarged upon, and even allowing for the author's feelings at the time, and his Royal Marine loyalties, the risk to the whole operation through this loss, with all their equipment, is all too apparent, as well as his irritation with what he saw as an SAS hidden agenda.

A chapter is devoted to the failed attempt to climb the author's own peak, Peak Sheridan, in 1999 with the late David Nicholls. David had used all his influence as Commander, Falkland Islands Garrison, to give Guy, by now retired, the chance to climb his mountain. They faced an extremely fierce storm, even by South Georgia's famous standards, and their escape from this is dramatically told. Those who have faced the fierce weather in the island's mountains will recall other storms, though almost certainly not quite as severe.

The author is a talented writer of these accounts, and of the other tales of Nordic ski mountaineering around the world, which are told very clearly and with very evident love for these lonely places. The book is copiously illustrated with 150 excellent photos and clear maps, and is beautifully produced.

I found it hard to put down, and recommend it strongly to South Georgia aficionados and to all mountain lovers.

Patrick Fagan

Forthcoming events

May 18 Annual General Meeting with a talk on the international "Save the Albatross" programme.

July 7/8 Visit to HMS Endurance and Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, including HMS Victory, Mary Rose and other attractions. We have two options: a day trip costing about £15, or a two-day trip with overnight accommodation costing about £50. I will welcome your views about which option is preferred, by 15 January please.

A visit to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office is being planned, date to be announced.

Jane Tanton, Events Organiser. 13 Castle Street, Wouldham, Rochester, Kent. ME1 3UX. jltanton@yahoo.co.uk tel. 01634 684979

A message from the Membership Secretary: If you change your email address, please let me know - membership@southgeorgiaassociation.org

The South Georgia Association newsletter is produced twice a year, in April and November.

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