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Important Bird Areas AMERICAS

# FALKLAND ISLANDS (Malvinas)

Robin Woods, Rebecca Ingham & Ann Brown





## Country facts at a glance

Area:	12,173 km <sup>2</sup>
Population (2006):	2955
Capital:	Stanley
Altitude:	0–705 m
<b>Number of IBAs:</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Total IBA area:</b>	<b>76,953 ha</b>
<b>IBA coverage of land area:</b>	<b>6.3%</b>
Total number of birds:	227
Globally threatened birds:	10
Globally threatened birds in IBAs:	5
Country endemics:	2

## General introduction

The Falkland Islands (Malvinas)<sup>1</sup> are situated in the South Atlantic between latitudes 51°S and 53°S and longitudes 57°30' W and 61°30' W. They cover an area of 12,173 km<sup>2</sup>, with two main islands, East and West Falkland, and about 750 smaller offshore islands and islets (Woods 2001).

As a United Kingdom Overseas Territory, executive authority in the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) is exercised by the Islands' Governor who presides over and is advised by an Executive Council. This body consists of three members of the Legislative Assembly as well as two ex-officio members, the Chief Executive and Financial Secretary. The Legislative Assembly, in turn, is made up of eight elected Legislative Councilors, five from Stanley and three from Camp (the local name for everywhere outside Stanley) who serve four-year terms. The current Falkland Islands Constitution, setting out the terms of the Islands' governance, came into force in 2009.

The human population of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) was 2955 at the last census in March 2006. The majority of inhabitants live in Stanley, the only town, which is on the extreme east of East Falkland. About 400 people live in widely scattered coastal settlements. Approximately 2000 temporary inhabitants live on the Mount Pleasant military base to the south-west of Stanley. The traditional economic activity of the islands is sheep ranching for the production of wool (Shackleton 1982). Since 1987, the primary source of income has been the sale of fishing licenses to foreign squid and finfish fleets operating within offshore fisheries conservation zones. The Falkland Islands Tourist Board was established in 1985. Tourism is directed at three main sectors: overseas wildlife and trout fishing enthusiasts; cruise ships; and the local civilian and military communities. Cruise ship visits have seen an eightfold increase in recent years, with passenger numbers surpassing 60,000 in the 2007/08 season. This rise in numbers is mostly due to an increase in the number of large, luxury vessels and a world wide development of the cruise industry.

The Falkland Islands (Malvinas) have a cool-temperate oceanic climate, characterized by persistent strong winds, particularly in the spring and summer. Rain falls on approximately half the days of the year, though there tends to be more in summer. Average annual precipitation is 635 mm at Stanley, which has the longest series of reliable climatic records. Average monthly temperatures range from 9 °C in January to 2 °C in July.

The Islands are composed of sedimentary rocks: the landscape is generally rugged and hilly, with the highest peaks being Mount Osborne (705 m) on East Falkland and Mount Adam (700 m) on West Falkland. East Falkland is divided into two large land blocks, connected by a narrow isthmus; in the south is the plain of Lafonia, an area of gentle relief and open grasslands, while the area to the north is more rugged and rocky, with large upland areas of peat bog and permanent pools. West Falkland is generally more rugged, with an undulating landscape of open plains and upland acid grasslands. The coastline is deeply indented around both East and West Falkland (Aldiss & Edwards 1999). Natural vegetation on the Islands consists of coastal fringes of tussac grass (*Poa flabellata*), oceanic heath, acid grassland, peat bog and upland feldmark communities (Clark 1991). There are no native trees. Tussac is the tallest native plant on the Islands and originally formed stands around the coasts, extending at least 200 m and sometimes 800 m inland, and covered small islands. The vascular plant flora consists of 171 native taxa (Broughton & McAdam 2002a, Broughton & McAdam 2005) of which 14 are currently considered to be endemic. A further 177 species of introduced plants have been recorded. A published Red Data List includes 23 plants considered to be threatened (Broughton & McAdam 2002b).

Currently, there are no native land mammals on the Falkland Islands (Malvinas). However, in the late 18th century, at the time of the early settlers, there was one native species on East and West Falkland, the Falkland fox or warrah (*Dusicyon australis*), although it was never very numerous and was hunted to extinction by 1876. In a land without native trees, reptiles, amphibians or surviving terrestrial mammals, the insect life forms a very important part of the Islands' ecology (Robinson 1984) with over 350 insect species recorded. A reduction in wing size, and indeed absence of wings, is a feature of many Falkland insects, in common with other island systems.

<sup>1</sup> BirdLife International recognizes that a dispute exists between the governments of the Argentine Republic and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland concerning the sovereignty over the Falkland Islands (Malvinas). This dispute is also recognized by the United Nations and other international organizations, and UN terminology is used throughout this publication to refer to the islands' name.

Conservation and protected area system



Steeple Jason, part of the Jason Islands Group (FK007), contains both national and privately-owned nature reserves, the earliest of which dates back to 1966. Photo: Sarah Crofts

Legal protection for sites of conservation importance is contained in the Conservation of Wildlife and Nature Ordinance 1999, which provides for the designation of National Nature Reserves (NNRs). Previous legislation had protected some NNRs before the Ordinance came into force. There are currently 27 islands or coastal regions on both islands designated as NNRs, covering a total area of approximately 400 km<sup>2</sup>. Eighteen islands (and associated islets) covering about 7.5 km<sup>2</sup>, are owned by Falklands Conservation, and another 45 islands (covering c.65 km<sup>2</sup>) are also treated as nature reserves by their owners although they have no official status as yet. In all, some measure of protection for wildlife is given in 476 km<sup>2</sup> or about 3.9% of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas). There is no requirement for National Nature Reserves to be actively managed, although there has been an increasing focus on biosecurity measures.

National legislation includes protection measures for all bird species through the Conservation of Wildlife and Nature Ordinance (1999), with the exception of the Upland Goose (*Chloephaga picta*) and feral domestic or Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*) which can be killed at any time; and Crested Duck (*Lophonetta specularioides*) and Speckled Teal (*Anas flavirostris*) which cannot be killed during the closed season, 1 July to 31 March. The most recent environmental legislation introduced Environmental Impact Assessment regulations (as an amendment to the Planning Ordinance 1990) and are based on the current EC Directive as adopted in the UK. Recent amendments to the 1999 Ordinance prohibit the collection of Black-browed Albatross (*Thalassarche melanophrys*) and Rockhopper Penguin (*Eudyptes chrysocome*) eggs under any circumstances. A new system of granting licenses for collecting eggs of other penguin species is now designed to take into account the size of colonies and breeding success of the birds from year to year. Eggs (or live birds) of any species are not currently exported from the Islands for breeding purposes or collections due to a Government moratorium. This decision will only be reversed if there is a significant change in the conservation status of any species and captive breeding is considered necessary for their survival.

The Falkland Islands Government has signed up to the Environment Charter for the UK Overseas Territories which carries a broad commitment to preserving native species and habitats, creating sustainable development initiatives and supporting education policies. On a national level, the Islands Plan 2008–2012 has a key policy section solely on the environment, with a commitment to conserve and

enhance the natural diversity, ecological processes and heritage of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) in harmony with sustainable economic development. Further, a Falkland Islands Biodiversity Strategy, which prioritizes environmental work within the Islands, was agreed upon in December 2008.

In terms of international environmental agreements, the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) are party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (through the UK), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS; including all migrant seabird species susceptible to longline mortality in Falkland Island (Malvinas) waters) and the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), ratified by the UK Government on behalf of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

In 2002, Bertha's Beach on East Falkland and Sea Lion Island lying off the southern tip of East Falkland were formally classified as Ramsar sites. Falklands Conservation has undertaken to continue the process of recommending sites for future inclusion within this Convention.

**“The Government has adopted a “National Plan of Action” for seabirds, written by Falklands Conservation, to address incidental mortality in fisheries.”**

As a consequence of ACAP, steps are being taken to fully protect all the ACAP-listed species, by reducing the level of incidental mortality related to fisheries and protecting the birds' terrestrial breeding sites by adopting management plans. Two listed species (Black-browed Albatross; *Thalassarche melanophrys* and Southern Giant-petrel; *Macronectes giganteus*) breeding in the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) make up significant parts of the world populations with a third, White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*), breeding in low numbers. In addition to this step, the Government adopted a Food and Agriculture Organization “National Plan of Action” for seabirds to address incidental mortality in fisheries. This Plan was written by the BirdLife partner, Falklands Conservation, with funding and technical support from the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK).

Falklands Conservation, was originally set up in 1979 as the Falkland Islands Foundation to protect the Islands' wildlife and its historic wrecks. The organization currently works on wildlife protection, research, practical conservation and environmental education. Other ongoing activities include monitoring seabird populations, tussac planting and rat eradication programs (with successful eradication on 17 Government- and privately-owned islands between the winter of 2001 and 2007). The organization is also working with landowners to promote best practice and increase the number of sites covered by conservation agreements and management plans.

Other conservation organizations with island management programs include the New Island Conservation Trust on New Island and the Wildlife Conservation Society which owns Steeple and Grand Jason. Draft management plans for the two Ramsar sites at Bertha's Beach (FK022) and Sea Lion Island (FK015) are awaiting final approval.

The main threats to biodiversity on the Islands come from the deliberate or accidental introduction of non-native species, such as domesticated sheep, goats, cattle, horses and reindeer for farming and particularly predators such as rats (*Rattus* spp.) as well as house mice (*Mus musculus*) and cats, many of which have become feral. Climate change is also likely to impact on biodiversity, and in terms of bird populations, particularly on marine food resources.

Introduction of grazing animals, together with the burning of maritime tussac communities in the early 1800s by itinerant sealers and current

“Rats and mice introduced to many offshore islands since the 18th century have greatly reduced bird populations.”

trends in pasture improvement programs have significantly affected native vegetation over an increasing area of the islands. In particular, tussac, very important for a great variety of Falkland birds, has almost disappeared from the coasts of East and West Falkland, and only survives in its original state on some relatively inaccessible and remote offshore islands. There is concern at the lack of environmental impact regulations for this and other agricultural developments (Dunnet 1983).

Rats and mice introduced from the 18th century onwards to many offshore islands during sealing and whaling activities or from wrecked ships, and feral cats, have greatly reduced bird populations. The accidental introduction of rodents continues as a serious threat despite the introduction of pest prevention measures for freight shipped within the Falklands. Introduced plants such as European gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), calafate (*Berberis buxifolia*) and spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) are beginning to take a firm hold in the islands. Potential threats for the future include oil exploration: surveying began in 1998 and continues at present, possibly leading to exploitation in the near future (Brown 1994). A lack of marine protected areas leaves much of the valuable marine resources open to pollution from this source.

## Ornithological importance



Avifauna on the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) is well documented with a comprehensive guide (Woods 1988), an Atlas of Breeding Birds (Woods & Woods 1997) and a recent publication on birds and mammals (Woods & Woods 2006). By 2007, a total of 227 bird species had been recorded, with a few that are not fully substantiated. This total consists of 21 resident landbirds, 18 waterbirds, 22 breeding seabirds, 18 annual non-breeding migrants and at least 148 occasional visitors. The only known local extinction as a breeding species is Cinereous Harrier (*Circus cinereus*), which still occurs infrequently as a vagrant. Only nine species of songbird have been able to adapt to the windy and exposed habitats that lack native trees (Pettingill 1974). The native songbirds are representatives of southern South American species and most of them have been isolated from the original populations long enough to develop slight differences allowing them to be classed as geographic races or subspecies.

A total of 15 species of global conservation concern occur regularly on the Islands (BirdLife International 2007), including nine threatened species (one Endangered and eight Vulnerable<sup>2</sup>). However, four Vulnerable species are non-breeding, transient visitors, only seen on migration<sup>3</sup>. There are also six regularly occurring Near Threatened species, including one transient species, Northern Giant-petrel (*Macronectes halli*). Several other threatened or Near Threatened species, for example, the Endangered Northern Royal Albatross (*Diomedea sanfordi*), have been reported as vagrants to the Islands.



Striated Caracara (*Phalacrocorax australis*) - the majority of the global population of this Near Threatened bird is on the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).  
Photo: Sarah Crofts

“Severe population declines have been seen in several threatened seabirds, most likely associated with longline fishing and trawling in the south-west Atlantic.”

The Vulnerable Cobb's Wren (*Troglodytes cobbi*) cannot survive with introduced rats, one of the major causes of biodiversity loss on small islands.  
Photo: James C Lowen; [www.pbase.com/james\\_lowen](http://www.pbase.com/james_lowen)

<sup>2</sup> Atlantic Petrel (*Pterodroma incerta*) has been uplisted from VU to EN in the 2008 red list. See note 4 for other changes in threat category. This directory uses 2007 IUCN categories throughout.  
<sup>3</sup> These are Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*), Southern Royal Albatross (*Diomedea epomophora*), Grey-headed Albatross (*Thalassarche chrysostoma*) and Atlantic Petrel (*Pterodroma incerta*).

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Severe population declines have been seen in several of the breeding threatened species, especially seabirds. An 8.7% drop in the Endangered Black-browed Albatross (*Thalassarche melanophrys*) population in the Falklands (Malvinas) between 1995 and 2005 (Huin & Reid 2007) is most likely associated with longline fishing and trawling in the south-west Atlantic. The same threats affect the Vulnerable White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*), although it is only present in small numbers on the islands. Well-documented declines of the Vulnerable Rockhopper Penguin (*Eudyptes chrysocome*) since the 1960s have not been attributed to obvious reasons, but may be associated with changes in sea temperatures and availability of suitable prey. Similar factors may be affecting the Vulnerable Macaroni Penguin (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*) although its population has never been large on the islands.

The Vulnerable Cobb's Wren (*Troglodytes cobbi*) is a robust species of boulder beaches adjoining mature tussac. It cannot survive in competition with the widespread introduced Norway or brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) or Black rat (*R. rattus*) as rats and Cobb's Wrens use the same coastal habitat. It is hoped that several islands where rat eradication has been carried out recently will be recolonized by this wren.

There are signs that the Near Threatened Striated Caracara (*Phalcoeboenus australis*) population is increasing in number and range, although it is nowhere near as widespread or numerous as it was before the advent of sheep farming. Persecution of this remarkably tame and inquisitive bird of prey has extirpated it from East Falkland and almost all West Falkland since the mid-19th century.

The Falkland Islands (Malvinas) form part of the Southern Patagonia Endemic Bird Area (EBA 062), a large EBA covering 170,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998) which includes continental and insular areas of Chile and Argentina and the Falkland Islands (Malvinas). The EBA holds 10 restricted-range species in total, of which six occur on the islands. These are Cobb's Wren (*Troglodytes cobbi*), Ruddy-headed

Goose (*Chloephaga rubidiceps*), Falkland Steamerduck (*Tachyeres brachypterus*), Striated Caracara (*Phalcoeboenus australis*), the locally named "tussacbird" or Blackish Cinclodes (*Cinclodes antarcticus antarcticus*) and the Canary-winged Finch (*Melanodera m. melanodera*). Two of these species are endemic to the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), the Vulnerable Cobb's Wren, now restricted to rat-free offshore islands and Falkland Steamerduck, mostly found in harbors and creeks with large kelp beds. At least 13 endemic subspecies have been described, including White-tufted Grebe (*Rollandia rolland rolland*), which may well deserve treatment as a separate species from the continental forms. Two breeding species present on the islands are restricted to the Patagonia biome (PAT): Kelp Goose (*Chloephaga hybrida malvinarum*) and Dolphin Gull (*Leucophaeus scoresbii*), although this criterion was not taken into account for IBA identification.

**"About 65% of the global population of the Endangered Black-browed Albatross and up to 40% of the Vulnerable Rockhopper Penguin breed on the islands."**

The seabird populations of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) are of international importance (Croxall 1992, 1994). About 65% of the global population of the Endangered Black-browed Albatross and up to 40% of the Vulnerable Rockhopper Penguin<sup>4</sup> breed on the islands (Croxall *et al.* 1984, Huin & Reid 2007). Furthermore, just under a quarter of the world population of Gentoo Penguins (*Pygoscelis papua*) and a significant proportion (possibly 10%) of the world population of Magellanic Penguins (*Spheniscus magellanicus*) breed on the islands (Woods & Woods 1997). The King Penguin (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*) is at the northern extremity of its global range in the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), and its population is almost entirely concentrated at Volunteer Point (FK021; Woehler 1993, Clausen 2001).



The endemic Falkland Steamerduck (*Tachyeres brachypterus*) triggers IBA criteria at 17 sites across the islands. Photo: James C Lowen; [www.pbase.com/james\\_lowen](http://www.pbase.com/james_lowen)



**IBA overview**

The Important Bird Area program has identified 22 sites (Table 1, Figure 1) of global conservation importance covering a total area of 717 km<sup>2</sup>, representing 6.3% of the total land area of the islands. Only five IBAs are situated on the main islands (one on West and four on East Falkland); the other 17 IBAs consist of islands and island groups totaling 186 islands and dependent islets. This reflects the importance of seabirds within the avifauna and highlights the threats affecting these species. For example, birds such as the Blackish Cinclodes (*Cinclodes*

*antarcticus*) and Cobb's Wrens (*Troglodytes cobbi*) are now generally restricted to rat-free islands where human impacts have been lessened by their inaccessibility. Rats threaten biodiversity at 12 of the 22 IBAs, as do feral house mice on Steeple Jason (FK007) and New Island (FK011).

Just over 50% of IBAs in the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) have some legal protection (either wholly or in part). Several other sites include private nature reserves.

**“Blackish Cinclodes and Cobb’s Wrens are now generally restricted to rat-free islands where human impacts have been lessened by their inaccessibility.”**

All IBAs have been designated under the A1 criterion (see methods). Five of the nine globally threatened species regularly present on the Islands have been confirmed in IBAs. The remaining four are transient visitors seen only on migration (see Ornithological importance). Good coverage of most threatened and Near Threatened species has been achieved, with the Near Threatened Magellanic Penguin (*Spheniscus magellanicus*) and Gentoo Penguin (*Pygoscelis papua*) present at

**Table 1.** Important Bird Areas in the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)

IBA code	IBA name	Area (ha)	A1				A2	A3	A4			
			CR	EN	VU	NT			A4i	A4ii	A4iii	A4iv
FK001	Beauchêne Island	172	1	2	2	X			X	X		
FK002	Beaver Island Group	5,956			3				X			
FK003	Bird Island	120	1	2	2	X			X			
FK004	Bleaker Island Group	2,146		1	3	X		X				
FK005	Elephant Cays Group	248			3				X	X		
FK006	Hummock Island Group	670		2				X				
FK007	Jason Islands Group	3,368	1	3	4	X			X	X		
FK008	Keppel Island	3,626	1	1	2	X						
FK009	Kidney Island Group	40		3	2	X			X	X		
FK010	Lively Island Group	6,796		1	3	X						
FK011	New Island Group	2,545	1	3	3	X		X	X	X		
FK012	Passage Islands Group	880		2	3	X						
FK013	Pebble Island Group	10,959		3	5	X					X	
FK014	Saunders Island	12,400	1	1	2	X		X	X	X		
FK015	Sea Lion Islands Group	1,035		2	5	X						
FK016	Speedwell Island Group	8,768		1	3	X		X	X	X		
FK017	West Point Island Group	3,501	1	2	3	X			X	X		
FK018	Bull Point, East Falkland	1,500			2	X			X			
FK019	Hope Harbour, West Falkland	1,763	1	1	2	X			X			
FK020	Seal Bay, East Falkland	3,100		1	2	X					X	
FK021	Volunteer Point, East Falkland	4,060			2	X						
FK022	Bertha's Beach, East Falkland	3,300			2	X					X	

For information on trigger species at each IBA, see individual site accounts at BirdLife's Data Zone: [www.birdlife.org/datazone/sites/](http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sites/)

18 However, both the Vulnerable White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) and Macaroni Penguin (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*) only trigger IBA criteria at two sites, although the latter species is present at nine (in numbers insufficient to meet IBA thresholds).

All but three IBAs have been confirmed under the A2 criterion for the Southern Patagonia Endemic Bird Area (EBA 062), covering all six of the restricted-range species present on the Islands. The A3 criterion was not applied as part of IBA identification.

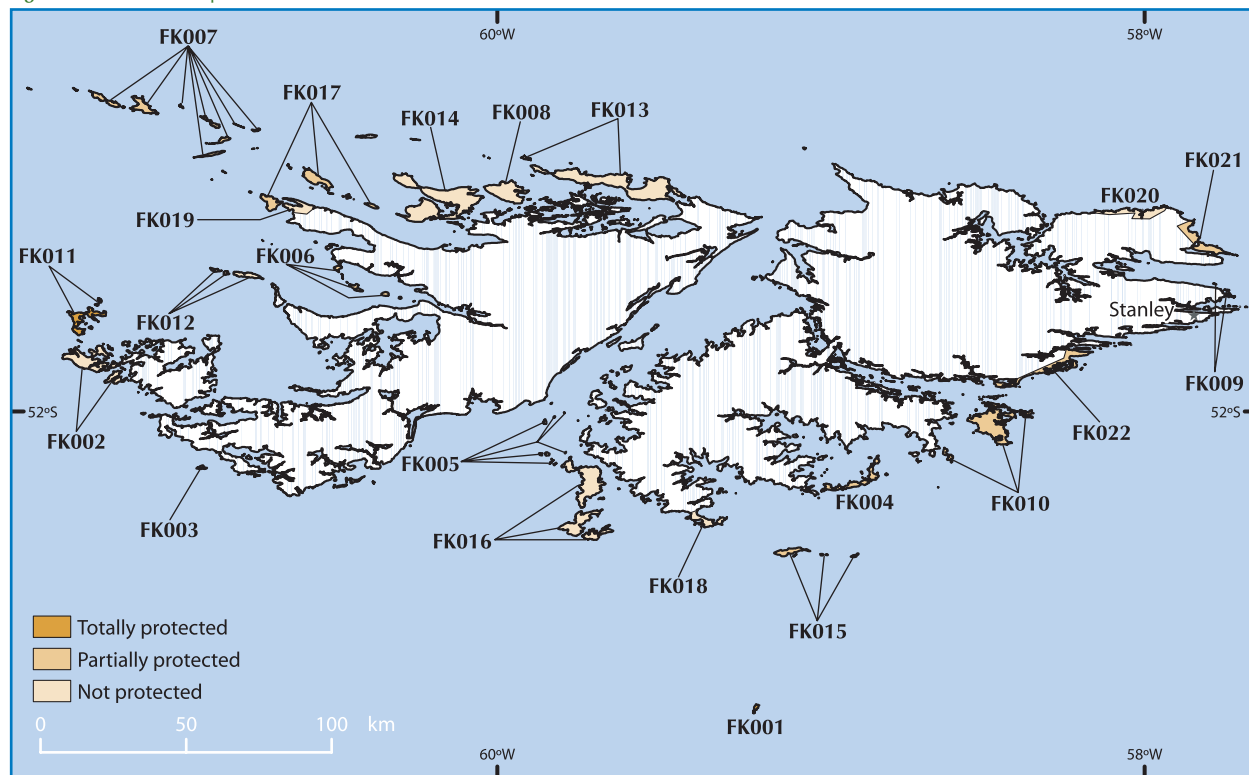
Seventeen IBAs have been designated under A4 criteria, with 11 sites meeting the A4iii criterion for globally important concentrations of more than 10,000 breeding pairs of seabirds, reflecting the huge importance of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) for seabird colonies. For example, Black-browed Albatross (*Thalassarche melanophrys*) and Rockhopper Penguin (*Eudyptes chrysocome*) have important colonies at eight and 15 IBAs respectively. A total of 10 species of waterbirds or seabirds trigger IBA criteria on the Islands.

A wardening scheme to control tourism at Volunteer Point (FK021), a popular destination on the islands, has considerably improved breeding success of the Gentoo Penguin (*Pygoscelis papua*) and King Penguin (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*) colonies. Photo: Sarah Crofts



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Figure 1. Location of Important Bird Areas in Falkland Islands (Malvinas)



### Opportunities

Having identified IBAs on the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), the stage is set for action to be taken at these sites. This will require commitment locally from Government, landowners and Falklands Conservation, and internationally from the UK Government and donors. The IBA program has highlighted those sites that require immediate attention, including activities such as site-specific conservation actions, advocacy and monitoring. Eradication of invasive non-native species is undoubtedly a priority, with rats currently a threat at 13 sites throughout the islands. Advocacy and mitigation measures at an international level will play a key role in lessening the catastrophic effect of fisheries bycatch on

“Advocacy and mitigation measures at an international level will play a key role in lessening the catastrophic effect of fisheries bycatch on seabirds.”

seabirds, including the globally threatened marine species for which the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) are so important.



Jason Islands Group (FK007) hosts one of the largest colonies of Black-browed Albatross (*Thalassarche melanophrys*) in the world. Eight IBAs are of major importance to this species; between them they provide breeding sites for three quarters of the global population.  
Photo: Sarah Crofts

## Further information

### Data sources

Several data sets were used for IBA designation, including the breeding birds atlas (Woods & Woods 1997), albatross surveys (Huin 2001), penguin surveys (Clausen 2001), Falkland Islands Seabird Monitoring Programme (Clausen & Huin 2002, Huin 2003) and Striated Caracara surveys (Woods & Smith 1999). Further data are from the Falklands Conservation database and records collected during surveys by Robin Woods. New Island South Conservation Trust compiled most of the section on New Island South (FK011). Other landowners contributed information. Breeding bird surveys were carried out where data was insufficient for IBA designation.

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