

# EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

## CONFIDENTIAL

**Title of Report:** Applications to visit Beauchene Island  
**Paper No:** 162/11  
**Date:** 28 July 2011  
**Report of:** Environmental Planning Officer

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### 1.0 Purpose

1.1 To advise Honourable Members of an application from Dr Juan Masello of the Max Planck Institute to visit Beauchêne Island in November 2011 in order to conduct genetic studies into Fairy Prions, in addition to a follow-up visit by Falklands Conservation in October 2011 to retrieve satellite trackers from rockhopper penguins.

### 2.0 Recommendation

(a) That Honourable Members agree to the proposed research visit to Beauchêne Island by the Max Planck Institute, led by Dr Juan Masello in November 2011, subject to the conditions listed in Appendix 1.

(b) That Honourable Members agree to the follow-up visit to Beauchêne Island by Falklands Conservation in October 2011, subject to the conditions listed in Appendix 1.

### 3.0 Summary of financial implications - None

### 4.0 Background

4.1 Beauchêne Island is an FIG-owned National Nature Reserve and is the most southerly and remote island in the Falklands archipelago. Lying thirty miles to the south of Sea Lion Island, the island is a pristine environment hosting a wealth of seabird biodiversity. This biodiversity includes the largest population of rockhopper penguins in the Falkland Islands, the second largest population of black browed albatrosses and the only breeding site for fairy prions in the Falkland Islands.

4.2 Historically Beauchêne Island has been visited infrequently due to its remoteness and difficult landing aspect. In more recent years access to the island has been strictly controlled by FIG in order to reduce disturbance to the wildlife on the Island and minimise the risk of invasive plants and animals being introduced.

- 4.3 Landings on Beauchêne Island were last made by Falklands Conservation to undertake census and tracking work on rockhopper penguins on the island in the summer of 2010/11.
- 4.4 Two groups wish to undertake research visits to Beauchene Island this summer. Both of these are one off visits and due to timing restrictions the visits cannot be combined.

## **5.0 Max Planck Institute Research Procedure**

- 5.1 The Fairy Prion (*Pachyptila turtur*) occurs in the Falkland Islands only on Beauchene Island, where a few thousand pairs are estimated to breed. The species / subspecies status of this population has been disputed.
- 5.2 Dr Juan Masello of the Max Planck Institute of Ornithology has conducted research on New Island for the last 8 years and intends to study Fairy Prions on Beauchene Island over a 4 day research visit this summer. The visiting party will number four people, Dr Juan Masello, Dr Klemens Pütz, Benno Lüthi and Peter Kühne and will involve staying overnight on the island.
- 5.3 The aim of the study is to determine the species / subspecies status of Fairy Prions breeding at Beauchene Island, using genetic and acoustical data. This information will also be used in a wider framework, in a study of *Pachyptila* (prion) and *Halobaena* (blue petrel) global genetic structure and at-sea distribution. This project (estimated to be concluded by 2013) is headed by Dr Masello and his colleague Dr Petra Quillfeldt, and supported by colleagues from France, UK, South Africa, Spain and New Zealand. More information on this larger project is available on request.
- 5.4 As an additional part of this study, the researchers would like to collect genetic material (small feather and blood samples) from the other two small petrels breeding on Beauchene Island (Wilson's Storm-petrels and Common Diving petrels), which are very likely to be caught as bycatch in mistnets while trying to catch Fairy Prions.
- 5.5 This research project was approved by the meeting of Environment Committee held on 7 February 2011 (research license R01.2011). Additional details are available from the Environmental Planning Department on request.

## **6.0 Falklands Conservation visit**

- 6.1 Falklands Conservation wish to visit Beauchene Island in late October 2011 to undertake follow-up work from their research visits the previous summer. This work involves retrieving 41 (GLS) geolocator devices deployed on male and female adult rockhopper penguins last summer. This research work was given approval by Environmental Committee (research license R03.2009) and the visit was approved by Executive Council on 24 June 2010 (ExCo paper 139/10).

6.2 The satellite devices need to be removed in late October prior to the egg laying period for several reasons:

1. Both male and female adults will be ashore attending their nests during late October to early November.
2. Egg-laying typically commences around the beginning of November.
3. To avoid disturbance during the egg laying and incubation period.

6.3 It is envisaged that the trip duration ashore will be less than 2 days (including provisioning for bad weather). The research team intend sleeping on the yacht near the island. However for safety reason, Falklands Conservation plan to take a tent and sleeping bags, and a small amount of provisions ashore in case of bad weather and unsuitable landing conditions at the landing Bay.

## **7.0 Transport**

7.1 The Max Planck Institute plan to access Beauchene Island by the yacht Golden Fleece, captained by Dion Poncet.

7.2 The Falklands Conservation landing party intends to access Beauchene Island by yacht, the vessel to be used will be confirmed at a later date.

## **8.0 Conditions of visit**

8.1 As landowner FIG is entitled to control access to Beauchêne Island. Where FIG agrees to grant permission to visit the island, it is entitled to impose such conditions as it considers appropriate in the interests of the preservation of the environment.

8.2 The Environmental Planning Department supports the research visit to assess the genetics of the Fairy Prion as this species has not been studied in any detail in the Falkland Islands. The Environmental Planning Department also support the Falklands Conservation visit to retrieve satellite trackers from Rockhopper Penguins. It is recommended that the visits should be allowed subject to strict biosecurity and safety conditions. These are listed in Appendix 1 and incorporate strict biosecurity policy and invasive species mitigation measures.

8.3 In addition, the visiting researchers will be required to abide by the Falkland Islands Countryside Code, including controls over biosecurity, lighting fires, smoking and proximity to wildlife.

8.4 As with all visits to FIG-owned Islands, a Post Visit Report will be required to be completed and returned to the Environmental Planning Department. This will provide an update on the general environmental condition of Beauchêne Island.

**9.0 Financial Implications** – none.

**10.0 Legal Implications** – none.

**11.0 Human Resources Implications – none.**

## Appendix 1

To: Dr Juan Masello, Max Planck Institute for Ornithology; and  
To: Sarah Crofts, Falklands Conservation

XX July 2011

### Conditions of visit to Beauchêne Island by the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology/ Falklands Conservation

Dear Juan/Sarah,

Your application to visit Beauchêne Island in October/November 2011 was approved by Executive Council on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2011, subject to the following conditions:

1. All members of the Group shall be made aware of, and carry, a copy of the Countryside Code (see below).
2. The zodiac shall be thoroughly inspected for pests and organic material before each shore deployment.
3. Take note that access beaches may be occupied by southern sea lions, elephant seals or South American fur seals, so extreme caution must be taken while landing and alternative routes taken if necessary.
4. There is to be no smoking, use of fuel stoves or camp fires to be lit on any part of the island.
5. No rubbish of any sorts shall be left ashore.
6. Extreme caution shall be taken not to trample the burrows of nesting seabirds. Areas of high burrow density must be avoided.
7. Do not damage or remove historical objects.
8. No animals, plants or soil of any description to be brought ashore accidentally or intentionally.
9. No fresh meat, vegetables, fruit or dairy products (especially poultry products and eggs) shall be brought ashore. Food must be stored in airtight containers and be checked thoroughly before leaving the vessel.
10. Ensure boots, clothing and equipment are clean before going ashore, paying particular attention to soil and seeds. Boots should be washed in a biocide.
11. Unless agreed in advance with the Environmental Planning Officer, no person shall stay overnight or cook/heat food on the island, (except in an emergency).
12. A Post Visit Report form shall be completed and returned to the Environmental Planning Department.

For additional safety it is advised that:

1. A two-metre set be carried and a contact arranged in case of emergency.
2. All persons requiring access to be physically fit, given that access is off launches/ zodiacs and across rocky beaches.

Finally, access to this island is entirely at your own risk and the Falkland Islands Government cannot accept any liability.

(Signed) Antony Payne, Environmental Planning Officer, Falkland Islands Government

## **The Falkland Islands Countryside Code**

1. Always ask permission before entering private land.
2. Keep to paths wherever possible. Leave gates open or shut as you find them.
3. Be aware of the high fire risks throughout the Islands. Be extremely careful when smoking not to start fires. Take cigarette butts away with you.
4. Do not drop litter\*. Take your rubbish home with you.
5. Do not disfigure rocks or buildings.
6. Do not touch, handle, injure or kill any wild bird or other wild animal\*.
7. Never feed wild animals.
8. Always give animals the right of way. Remember not to block the routes of seabirds and seals coming ashore to their colonies.
9. Try to prevent any undue disturbance to wild animals. Stay on the outside of bird and seal colonies. Remain at least 6 m (20 ft) away. When taking photograph or filming stay low to the ground. Move slowly and quietly. Do not startle or chase wildlife from resting or breeding areas.
10. Some plants are protected and should not be picked\*. Wildflowers are there for all to enjoy.
11. Whalebones, skulls, eggs or other such items may not be exported from the Falkland Islands\*. They should be left where they are found.

\* Such actions (with a few special exceptions) may constitute an offence in the Falkland Islands and could result in fines up to £3,000.