

Animal Health Top Priority for Falklands Biosecurity

The week of 8th April saw three biosecurity workshops taking place in Stanley. These were aimed at getting input from a wide range of stakeholders on how we can improve the biosecurity service and prevent any new pests, weeds or diseases getting into the Islands.



Animal health workshop

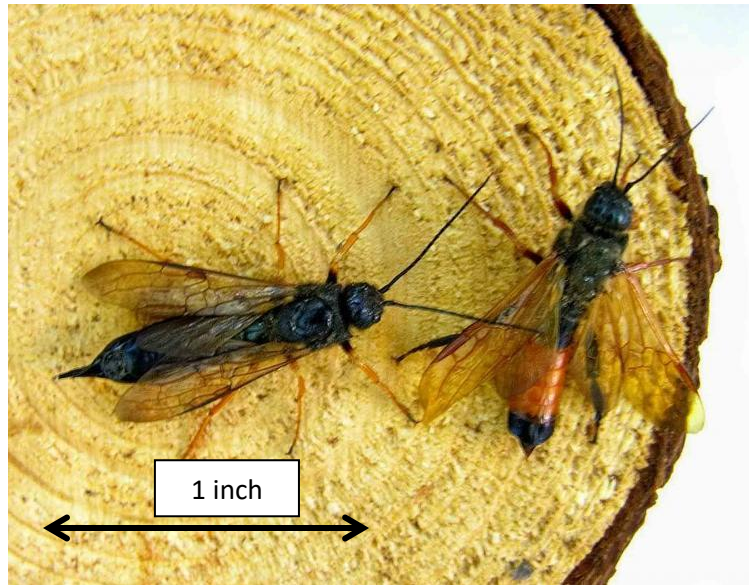
We started with animal health, arguably the most important part of biosecurity in the Falklands. Helen Roberts from Defra explained how the UK manages the risk posed by importing animals and meat products and we discussed how we were doing in the Falklands. With the relatively few animal imports, and strict regulations on any that are imported, that route is pretty tightly controlled. Similarly, all meat imports, which we know can also bring in foot and mouth disease as well as a raft of other nasties, is controlled via import permits and health certificates. The difficulty is when you have people essentially smuggling in meat in their luggage. It may seem a strange thing to want to bring meat to somewhere like the Falklands where the quality is so good but people like to bring a taste of home with them and we regularly find risky home-made salamis, sausages and biltong being brought in via the airport. We decided one way to help prevent people bringing in illegal meat would be to have detector dogs at the airport – they can search 100% of passengers without having them open their luggage and are much more effective than a human could ever be. Luckily the detector dog programme are actively looking for new scents to add to the dogs' repertoire so meat is now next on the training list.



Dogs can search a fishing vessel for rodents in ~20-30 minutes, much faster and more efficiently than a human; could they provide another layer of protection at the airport?

The next workshop focussed on the marine environment and the invasive species that could come in on fouled hulls of boats and in ballast water. This is a global issue and is a really challenging one. Even New Zealand have only just imposed restriction on vessels with un-clean hulls entering their waters. The biosecurity for marine invasives discussion centred around data gathering – how much of an issue is this for the Falklands? Are vessels coming into the harbour with heavy fouling and are all vessels equal? This means the top priority is inspecting a wide range of vessels and understanding the problem better so we can decide what would be the most appropriate action.

The third workshop was about terrestrial biosecurity; the insects, animals and diseases that can stowaway in our imported goods. Some pathways are relatively well controlled such as the import of fresh produce but others needs some attention. This was highlighted recently when some inch-long wood wasps started emerging from a batch of imported wood. These wood wasps had made their home in the raw timber, which had been imported to the UK and then made its way down to the Falklands. The wood wasp's eggs are laid by the mother deep into the wood and covered over with a paste to seal them in, so they can't be seen from the outside. Once the wood had been put in a warm house, the wood wasps developed, hatched and proceeded to chew their way out of the wood. So, we're going to be looking at developing guidelines for timber imports.



Female (left) and male Sirex woodwasps that were found emerging from imported timber

The issue of weeds was also raised. Weed seeds come in through various means: as rogue seeds in packaged seeds, with soil, compost, sand and aggregate. It is very difficult to spot seeds at the border so getting certified compost and fumigating imports prior to arrival really helps. Ultimately, plant surveys around areas where compost and aggregates are spread seemed like one of the best use of resources in tackling this problem.



Terrestrial biosecurity workshop

Overall, the key issues were having enough biosecurity staff to complete all the tasks that were highlighted, and having the legislative backing to enforce the guidelines that we currently have. With this in mind the work plan for 2019-20 will focus on: drafting a biosecurity policy to enable us to progress the legislation; collecting baseline data; increasing public awareness of what can and can't be imported and why it matters; reviewing the potential invasives coming in on the Brazil flight pathway and adding 'meat' as a new scent for the detector dogs.

Thanks to all those that gave their time to attend the workshops and those who couldn't make it but still passed their on comments.