

## **Prevention is better than cure: no one wants a poxy penguin**

By Naomi Baxter, Biosecurity Officer

Ever sat in the loo at FIGAS and pondered what you were taking on the plane? Did I remember my toothbrush? Have we bought enough beer?? Next time you're there, take a look at the back of the toilet door and you will see one of the new inter-island biosecurity posters...perhaps you are taking something that you don't intend to.

### **Inter-Island biosecurity versus border biosecurity**

Inter-island biosecurity is preventing the spread of pests, weeds and diseases *within* the Islands and it is just as important as border biosecurity (stopping things coming in in the first place). It might seem an impossible task to stop something that is already here, in Stanley say, from spreading around the Islands, but it is a worthwhile endeavour.

Imagine Rachel the Rambler turning up on holiday having visited granny's farm in the UK. Unbeknownst to granny, her farm is in the early stages of a foot and mouth outbreak – no visible signs as yet but the pathogen is silently spreading all through her livestock and onto Rachel's muddy boot. The pathogen is able to survive for months so as Rachel goes about her business, around MPA, out on a ramble round the Islands, she is spreading the disease further. It goes without saying that foot and mouth in the Islands would be utterly devastating. So, while border biosecurity is key, preventing the spread of anything once it gets here is just as important.

Day to day, the declaration cards filled in by each inbound passenger pick up on any visitors that have been on farms and have not cleaned their boots (Rachel was given a stern warning when she turned up at MPA with muddy boots. They were taken off her by the biosecurity team and were given a good scrub and disinfected). Although we don't routinely have a footbath out, it would be one of the first lines of defence in the event of any livestock disease outbreak in neighbouring countries or the UK. The vets get immediate notifications from all over the world when there is an outbreak of any serious disease and that would trigger a response, which would include putting out the footbath at MPA for incoming flights, and in some circumstances, banning certain meat products from being imported and sold.

### **Footbaths**

It's not just the spread of livestock diseases that can be prevented by footbaths, they also work in preventing the spread of wildlife diseases. We spoke to Suzan and David at Saunders to find out how using a footbath has worked for them. They have a footbath with a disinfectant dip on the airstrip and ask all their visitors to dip their footwear as they get off the plane. Suzan says "we started using it as there was a penguin pox getting around the Islands which we didn't get. As people were moving between Islands we thought we would try and stop it coming to us". Although, the footbath would not stop a penguin bringing pox to the island, it reduces the chances of the disease being spread by humans. Saunders penguins were fortunate to avoid that pox outbreak and the island continues to use a footbath.

A disinfectant footbath is an excellent way to stop unwanted diseases spreading around the islands, particularly during an outbreak, such as avian pox, which can be transmitted on visitors' boots and

clothing. However, disinfectant won't stop other invasives coming in such as weed seeds and insects – for that your visitors will need to scrub their boots and check clothing and bags for stowaways.



Another benefit of having the footbath on arrival is the focus it brings for visitors. If the first thing you do on arrival is disinfect, that shows you are coming somewhere really special where you have to take extra precautions. Focussing on the positive, i.e. that you are helping us protect somewhere exceptional, can enhance visitors' experience. Although it might feel a bit awkward asking people to step in it, Saunders find that no one has refused yet and report that most people think it is a good idea.

Whether you decide that a footbath is something you want to implement full time, or if you just want to have one available in the event of a disease outbreak, get in touch. The Agriculture Department has a limited number of footbaths to give out to farms. The footbath comes with some virkon tablets and set up instructions, but costs for additional disinfectant once the initial virkon has been used up, will be down to individuals. You might also consider supplying brushes and a bin into which folk can deposit seeds or contaminated soil that has been brushed off their contaminated footwear, clothes or equipment.

Email: [biosecurity@doa.gov.fk](mailto:biosecurity@doa.gov.fk) or call 27355 to enquire.


*Many thanks to Suzan and David for kindly answering our questions.*

**Wildlife Disease Response Group:** The DOA are part of an ongoing programme of work to develop a response plan for a wildlife disease outbreak. The group includes the vets, biosecurity, JNCC, Falklands Conservation and the Environment Officer. We are still in the early stages of putting the plan together but will be sharing it for comment with landowners and farmers when it is a bit further down the line.

 **BIOSECURITY FOR PLANE AND HELICOPTER TRAVEL** 


Biosecurity is concerned with preventing new pests, diseases or invasive species from entering the Falkland Islands as well as preventing any already established pests, diseases and invasive species from being spread between islands.

The Falklands are made up of over 750 islands, and each has its own mix of plants and animals. Many invasive species, pests and diseases are confined to just a few areas, and so it is important that we do what we can to prevent the spread of organisms around and between the islands.



**Before you begin your journey you can help:**

1. Clean your footwear by brushing/scrapping off any debris.
2. Check your clothing and remove any seeds and bugs (especially in velcro, pockets and zips).
3. Check your luggage including bags, camera cases and tripods and remove any seeds and bugs.



Biosecurity - Protecting our Islands  
Department of Natural Resources  
E: [biosecurity@doa.gov.fk](mailto:biosecurity@doa.gov.fk) T: 092 27355

*New posters at FIGAS*



*Boot scrub station and footbath set up*



*Penguin chicks with pox (S. Crofts)*