



media release

Please find below the latest press release issued by RSPB, reporting on joint work by the following organisations:

The Tristan Island Government;
and The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

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TRISTAN DA CUNHA CELEBRATES 500TH ANNIVERSARY WITH NEW ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION LAWS

Five hundred years after the discovery of the South Atlantic islands of Tristan Da Cunha, the unique wildlife of the UK Overseas Territory will receive greater protection, thanks to a new Conservation Ordinance.

At a ceremony, on the 9th of February, celebrating the 500th anniversary of the islands' discovery, His Excellency the Governor of St Helena and Dependencies, Michael Clancy, presented the new ordinance to: Mr Mike Hentley, the islands' Administrator; Ms Anne Green, the Chief Islander; and Mr James Glass, Head of the Tristan Natural Resources Department.

The author of the ordinance, John Cooper, of the University of Cape Town and a Tristan honorary conservation officer, said: "We hope this ordinance will take the environmental protection of Tristan da Cunha and its outlying islands into the first half of the new century: it really is a major achievement. Among many other matters, it results in the creation of seven new reserves for rockhopper penguins on the main island

of Tristan. The Islanders should be proud of their conservation achievements that this new ordinance marks.”

UK Biodiversity Minister Jim Knight said the new ordinance was good news for all of Tristan da Cunha's important wildlife, and particularly for three globally-threatened species of albatross.

"The UK is determined to do everything we can to protect albatrosses throughout the world, both in our own territories and elsewhere. I am delighted that Tristan da Cunha has taken this important step and we will be working with them to ensure they can be included in ACAP as soon as possible.

"The UK has been an instrumental partner in developing international efforts to protect and conserve albatrosses, and some UK's Overseas Territories, including Tristan da Cunha, are at the front line of the fight to save these magnificent birds."

Measuring just 178 square kilometres - less than half the size of the Isle of Wight - and described as the most remote inhabited place on earth, the territory contains ten species of bird found nowhere else in the world, including two species of albatross and the spectacled petrel, another seabird, which are all threatened with global extinction. Of the remaining seven endemic land birds, only the Tristan thrush is not considered to be in danger of extinction.

Dr Geoff Hilton, an RSPB international biologist, said: "The albatrosses and petrels are falling victim to the longline fishing industry. The baited hooks of international fishing vessels are fatally attractive to these birds, which become hooked and drown in their thousands - an estimated 100,000 albatrosses, of 21 species, have been dying on longlines every year. Meanwhile on land, the rats and mice, inadvertently introduced by shipwrecks, over the years are preying on many of the birds, and other less noticeable wildlife."

The new ordinance entitled 'Conservation of Native Organisms and Natural Habitats (Tristan da Cunha) Ordinance 2006' replaces a previous conservation ordinance drafted

in 1976 by Sir Martin Holdgate and the late Dr Nigel Wace. Sir Martin attended the presentation ceremony on Tristan, and expressed his approval of the new ordinance, which he said 'is a great step forward for the Territory and for its human and animal inhabitants'.

Sarah Sanders, the RSPB's UK Overseas Territories Officer, said: "The earlier ordinance served Tristan for over a quarter of a century but became increasingly inadequate as Tristan moved forward, accepting its responsibilities under international agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP)".

Tristan da Cunha is now asking the UK Government that it be included within ACAP as soon as possible, and it is expected that this will take place by the time of the Second Session of ACAP's Meeting of the Parties, planned to be held in the second half of this year.

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For further information and to arrange an interview, please contact:

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Mike Hentley, Administrator, Tristan da Cunha, South Atlantic on 00870 764 341816

Photographs:

Photographs are available free of charge from Grahame Madge at the RSPB.

Broadcast-quality radio interviews:

To arrange an ISDN interview with an RSPB spokesman please contact Grahame Madge at the RSPB press office.

Editor's notes:

- 1). As part of the Quincentenary Celebrations marking the passing of 500 years since Tristao d'Acunha discovered the island that bears his name a new Conservation Ordinance has been enacted by His Excellency the Governor of St Helena, Michael Clancey, to take the environmental protection of Tristan da Cunha and its outlying islands into the 21st Century and the new millennium.
- 2) The new ordinance takes a new approach to the protection of fauna and flora in the islands. Using a process known as "reverse listing" it states that all native organisms are fully protected unless listed otherwise. This means, for example, that all non-breeding seabirds that visit Tristan and Gough waters are fully protected, and may not be killed or disturbed without a Permit issued by the Administrator of Tristan da Cunha, or in the case of marine species of commercial value (such as the Tristan Rock Lobster) by the issuance of a fishing licence.
- 3) The new ordinance lists only two species of seabirds, rockhopper penguin and great shearwater, whose

products (eggs, chicks and guano) may be taken without a permit, further restricting such take to the island of Nightingale, and to the Tristan Islanders themselves. This means that the inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha will be able to follow their traditional harvesting visits to Nightingale.

4) In late 2004, Dr Peter Ryan re-visited Inaccessible to conduct a count of the critically endangered spectacled petrel, a bird found nowhere else on earth. In a project jointly managed by RSPB, the University of Cape Town and Tristan Natural Resources Department, and funded by the Overseas Territories Environment Programme, Dr Ryan was repeating a census conducted five years previously. The petrel is believed to be a major victim of longline fishing vessels, and so there was real concern that the species would be on the brink of extinction. Fortunately, the situation was reassuringly positive: the spectacled petrel appears to be making a comeback, and there is real hope that its precarious status can be improved further in coming years, with the enactment of the ACAP principles.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

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