



UNCLASSIFIED

## South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

Office of the Commissioner  
Government House,  
Stanley,  
Falkland Islands.

Press release 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014

### LANDMARK REINDEER ERADICATION PROJECT HELPS PROTECT SOUTH GEORGIA'S NATIVE BIODIVERSITY

The Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) is pleased to announce the completion of a major project to eradicate reindeer from the island of South Georgia. The project, which was undertaken during two austral summers, included the humane removal of over 6,600 non-native reindeer from the island.

Reindeer were introduced to South Georgia in the early 1900s by Norwegian whalers and Norwegian expertise has been instrumental in their eradication. Since their introduction reindeer numbers have increased dramatically and these voracious grazers have had a devastating impact on the island's vegetation, with knock-on effects on native burrowing seabird communities. Rapid glacial retreat, associated with climate warming, also required that the Government act quickly before the reindeer spread to more pristine parts of the island.

Following consultation with experts and stakeholders, GSGSSI began work to remove these non-native animals from the island and, in January 2013, used a combination of herding and ground shooting, to eradicate reindeer (1900 animals) from the Busen area. The herding was undertaken by a team of Sami reindeer specialists from the north of Norway, whilst expert marksmen from the Norwegian Nature Inspectorate (SNO) did the ground shooting. In addition the marksmen reduced the population on the Barff Peninsula by 1,500 animals.

In early 2014 six Norwegian marksmen returned to South Georgia to complete the operation on the Barff Peninsula. The rugged terrain and lack of suitable anchorages on the Barff Peninsula meant that herding was not a viable option, so ground shooting was used as a stand-alone method. The marksmen were based in tented field camps and supported by the GSGSSI fisheries patrol vessel the *Pharos SG*. Despite challenging terrain and some of the worst summer weather in recent years, the marksmen completed systematic searches of all areas with reindeer and shot 3,140 animals in a six-week period. In the coming months, the area will be thoroughly checked to ensure that it has been cleared.

The eradication, which cost around £900,000, was funded from GSGSSI reserves. Some of those costs were offset by the sale of meat products recovered during the first phase of the operation.

Alongside the work to remove reindeer, several scientific research projects were undertaken, including the collection of samples for genetic analysis and filming for behavioural research. Science teams have also continued to monitor vegetation and bird communities to track the recovery of the island's systems after the eradication. Although it will take a number of years for the full benefits of the eradication to be realised, there are early signs of vegetation recovery, especially in the Busen area, which has now been free from reindeer for almost a year.

The eradication of reindeer is one of a number of projects that are designed to safeguard the native species, habitats and landscape of the unique environment of South Georgia. With the main phase of the reindeer

Email: [dof@gov.gs](mailto:dof@gov.gs)

Tel: (500) 28214 Facsimile: (500) 22811

UNCLASSIFIED

**UNCLASSIFIED**  
**REINDEER PRESS**

eradication complete, the way is now open for the South Georgia Heritage Trust to begin the third and final phase of their rat eradication project in 2015.

Quotes:

GSGSSI Environment Officer Jennifer Lee, who is the Project Manager, said:

“It has been a huge challenge to remove reindeer from South Georgia, but thanks to the hard work of all involved, the island’s native plant communities and burrowing seabirds will benefit tremendously”

GSGSSI Chief Executive Martin Collins, said: “The combination of reindeer and rat eradications will help return South Georgia to a more natural state. We expect to see a rapid recovery in vegetation, invertebrate populations and, in particular, ground nesting birds.”

Commissioner for GSGSSI Nigel Haywood said: “This represents a very important landmark in our efforts to safeguard the native fauna of South Georgia. I’d like to thank Jen and the team for ensuring the safe and timely completion of this project”

Additional notes:

1. South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands is one of the UK’s most remote and environmentally pristine Overseas Territories. It is internationally recognised for its biological importance, including its biodiversity and breeding populations of seabirds and marine mammals and was regularly featured in the recent BBC series *Frozen Planet*.
2. The first introduction of reindeer to South Georgia was 10 animals to Ocean Harbour on the Barff Peninsula in 1911, with further introductions in 1912 and 1925 to the Busen area (close to the whaling stations at Stromness, Leith and Husvik). During the whaling era numbers of reindeer were controlled by regular shooting for food and recreation. Following the end of land-based whaling the numbers increased rapidly to the point where their densities were as much as ten times what is found in sustainably managed herds in Scandinavia.
3. Reindeer are voracious grazers on tussac grass, flowering plants such as greater burnet (*Acaena magellanica*) and lichens. Tussac is an important habitat for many breeding birds and the loss of large areas of tussac has had a major impact on seabird populations.
4. The reindeer were restricted to two principal areas by large glaciers, but rapid glacial retreat on the island meant that urgent action was needed to ensure they did not spread further afield.

Contacts

Dr Jennifer Lee, Environment Officer, Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands ([env@gov.gs](mailto:env@gov.gs))

Dr Martin Collins, Chief Executive, Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands ([ceo@gov.gs](mailto:ceo@gov.gs))

**UNCLASSIFIED  
REINDEER PRESS**

Images:



Reindeer with a King Penguin. St Andrews Bay. Photograph - Jennifer Lee



King penguins and reindeer. Photograph – Martin Collins

**UNCLASSIFIED**  
**REINDEER PRESS**



A shooter searching for reindeer. Photograph – Carl Erik Kilander



Damaged tussac habitat. Photograph – GSGSSI

**UNCLASSIFIED**  
**REINDEER PRESS**



Reindeer enclosure (fenced off to prevent reindeer access) showing the impact of reindeer. Photograph – Martin Collins