

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands



Office of the Commissioner
Government House
Stanley
Falkland Islands

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RODENT INCURSION RESPONSE UNDERWAY AT KING EDWARD POINT, SOUTH GEORGIA

On Thursday 23rd October, personnel at King Edward Point identified tracks of what is thought to be a rat in fresh snow close to one of the accommodation buildings. This area was baited during the first phase of the South Georgia Heritage Trust rodent eradication project in 2011. Since the baiting operation the area around King Edward Point, has been regularly monitored by the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) for rodent presence and was considered to be rat free.

As part of its continued commitment to protect South Georgia's biodiversity GSGSSI has a suite of biosecurity measures in place to reduce the risk of rodents entering the territory and a pre-prepared incursion response plan, so that immediate action can be taken should they occur.

In reaction to the sighting, GSGSSI staff, with assistance from British Antarctic Survey personnel, implemented this plan to eliminate the rat and determine its origin. Steps taken include spreading brodifacoum laced poison bait and deploying snap-traps in the immediate vicinity.

GSGSSI are optimistic that these measures will be successful but it will be several weeks until it is known if King Edward Point is once again rat free.

GSGSSI strive to have the highest standards of environmental management and in light of this event, following best practice, will review its biosecurity and response procedures and see if any lessons can be learned.

Additional notes:

1. South Georgia is a mountainous, ice-covered island, situated 600 miles SE of the Falkland Islands and south of the Antarctic Polar Front. Huge glaciers, ice caps and snowfields cover about 75% of the island in the austral summer (November to January); in winter (July to September) a snow blanket reaches the sea.
2. The island is home to an amazing array of wildlife including elephant seals, Antarctic fur seals, albatross (wandering, black-browed, grey-headed and sooty) and penguins (macaroni, king, chinstrap & gentoo).
3. South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) have been a separate UK Overseas Territory since 1985, with a Commissioner as head of the Government. Previously SGSSI had been part of the Falkland Islands Dependencies. Continuous UK administration has been in place since 1908. At the height of the whaling period some 2,000 people lived on the island. Now there are no permanent residents, but there are two Government Officer at the administration centre at King Edward Point plus British Antarctic Research Stations at Bird Island and King Edward Point.
4. The Commissioner for South Georgia & South Sandwich Islands has vested in him, legal, financial and administrative authority and responsibility for the governance of the Territory. His Excellency, Colin Roberts CVO is the current Commissioner.
5. The GSGSSI has five full-time staff in its office in Stanley. On South Georgia the Government Officers at King Edward Point are the Government's representatives and have responsibility for local administration. Their duties include those of Harbour Master, Customs and Immigration Officer, Fisheries Officer and administering tourism.

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