



South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

Office of the Commissioner
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Management of introduced reindeer on South Georgia

As part of the Government of South Georgia's commitment to safeguarding and restoring the native species, habitats and landscape features of South Georgia, GSGSSI has identified key invasive species that pose a particular threat to native species or habitats, and whose removal can realistically be achieved. These species include rats, mice, reindeer, bittercress and pearlwort.

Due to the detrimental impact of reindeer on native species, the threat of glacial retreat and following stakeholder consultation, GSGSSI has decided to undertake a full eradication of reindeer from South Georgia. GSGSSI is committed to ensuring that any management is to be carried out in such a way as to protect the natural environment and cause the least impact on native species, and to ensuring that the removal of invasive mammals is carried out in as humane a manner as possible.

Reindeer were introduced to South Georgia in 1909 by Norwegian whalers, and now occupy two large peninsulas on the north coast of the island where they continue to degrade the native vegetation. The area of South Georgia that the reindeer can graze is limited due to the presence of glaciers, which act as barriers to their further spread. Over the past 50 years as a direct result of climate change, coastal glaciers on South Georgia have been retreating at an accelerating rate, with the most rapid retreat occurring in the past decade. Studies of the rates of advance or retreat of over 100 coastal glaciers on South Georgia from the 1950s to the present show that 97% of these glaciers have retreated over the period, some by over 4km.

This means that in the near future, the glaciers that at present are so effectively stopping the reindeer from spreading will retreat to the extent that they no longer present a barrier. The

reindeer will be able to access previously ungrazed areas, and the abundance of food will result in a significant increase in population, putting huge pressure on native species and causing great damage to the remaining pristine areas.

The South Georgia Heritage Trust began planning for an island-wide rat eradication in 2006. In a broader habitat restoration context, the GSGSSI felt it appropriate to reconsider the whole issue of reindeer management in its entirety, and develop a new policy in light of climate change, glacial retreat and future risk of the reindeer spreading from their current containment.

In 2010, GSGSSI carried out a stakeholder consultation based around a review of all published scientific literature pertaining to reindeer on South Georgia. 95% of respondents were in agreement that the GSGSSI needs to act to manage the reindeer. Following the stakeholder consultation, a stakeholder meeting was held in September 2010. A summary of the key issues was presented, followed by a summary of results from the consultation. General consensus was that the reindeer should be entirely removed from South Georgia, and that advisory groups be established to ascertain what methodology is most appropriate for removal of reindeer on South Georgia, and to identify what scientific research should be carried out before, during and after eradication operations. GSGSSI is currently establishing these advisory groups, the deliberations of which will inform a timetable for the management program.

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