



South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

Office of the Commissioner
Government House
Stanley
Falkland Islands
7th July 2015

Dear IAATO members,

As the 2015/16 tourism season approaches, the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) would like to take the opportunity to highlight two important environmental issues which you will wish to take into account in planning for the forthcoming season.

1. Additional rodent biosecurity measures

Recently the South Georgia Heritage Trust has completed the final baiting phase of a project to eradicate rodents from South Georgia. This is part of a broader programme of work aimed at restoring the native wildlife of South Georgia and which will provide an enhanced experience for visitors. It is imperative that rodents are not re-introduced, as this will undermine this multi-million pound conservation project.

GSGSSI are committed to ensuring the highest standards of biosecurity within the Territory. To safeguard against rodents being introduced on cruise ships or yachts, before arrival on South Georgia, Government Officers will write to all vessels and ask visit permit holders to confirm in writing that, to the best of their knowledge, the vessel is free from rodents. The vessel must carry an up to date ships sanitation certificate and the master/permit holder should carry out regular inspections to check that there are no signs of rodents on board. Vessels will also be required to carry rodent monitoring devices that will be provided by the Government Officer at King Edward Point during the first visit of the season and which will be inspected by the Government Officer on subsequent visits.

To help ensure that rodents are not able to board a vessel, operators are encouraged to ensure that, when visiting gateway ports, any gangways are lifted at night or are well lit and rat guards are in place on all mooring lines.

If rodents are discovered on board a vessel, that vessel will be required to leave South Georgia waters until such time as GSGSSI has been satisfied that all rodents have been killed.

2. De-banding of Antarctic fur seals

From time to time, expedition staff or passengers come across fur seals that have become entangled with discarded fishing gear or packing bands. However, GSGSSI would like to remind all IAATO members that under section 6(1) of the Wildlife and Protected Areas Ordinance (2011) it is an offence to capture or handle wild birds or mammals. De-banding seals requires specialist equipment and training. If done incorrectly it can cause additional distress to the banded-animal and disturbance to other animals in the vicinity. It also puts staff members at risk of sustaining a serious bite.

If visitors or expedition staff encounter a banded seal they are advised that rather than attempting to disentangle the animal themselves, they should report it to the GSGSSI Government Officer.

Your assistance and co-operation with both of these matters is much appreciated. We look forward to welcoming you back to South Georgia in the forthcoming season.

Kind regards,

Jennifer Lee
Environment Officer