

# **'Far from Moderate'** <sup>1</sup>

**An account and appraisal of some aspects  
of the human involvement  
with the natural environment of  
the Falkland Islands and South Georgia**

by Stephen Palmer

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<sup>1</sup> From a despatch to Governor of the Falkland Islands by the Stipendiary Magistrate on South Georgia.  
MSS SPRI 240/1; 30 November 1908.

## **Declaration**

This dissertation is the result of my own work unless otherwise stated and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration. No part of this dissertation has been submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at any other University.

This dissertation represents my own original work and conforms to accepted standards of citation in those instances in which I have availed myself of the work of others.

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the main events in the human history of the Falkland Islands and South Georgia which have had an effect upon the natural environment.

The dissertation contains four case studies, *i.e.* Sealing, Whaling, Farming and Fishing. Much of the documentary material used in this dissertation has not been subjected to scrutiny before.

Each case study is examined in its own right; the story is outlined and conclusions are drawn. Common themes between the case studies are noted and comparisons are made.

Sheep farming has been the dominant human activity on the Falkland Islands from first settlement until very recently; the effects of the grazing of large numbers of herbivores on native grasses has been significant. Until recently there has been consistent failure to address the decline in the grasslands, and to adopt a more sustainable farming system.

Sealing was the first human activity associated with these Islands; the various phases of the exploitation of this vast natural resource culminated in the near disappearance of some species and a considerable reduction in all other species.

Southern Ocean whaling began at the beginning of the 20th century; within 60 years whale stocks had been reduced by 90% and all attempts to ensure that whaling companies exercised restraint ultimately failed.

Fishing began in the late 1970s, and is now the foremost economic activity. The revenue accrued from the sale of fishing licences has enabled extensive social change to occur on the Islands. Considerable efforts to control the scale of the fishing effort have been made; the conservation of the stocks, through regulation and enforcement, has been a central concern.

Until very recently, with the exception of the fishing industry, the majority of conservation measures in the Falkland Islands and South Georgia have been largely ineffective. The dissertation considers why this has occurred.

The dissertation shows that the human effects on the natural environment of the Falkland Islands and South Georgia have been far from moderate. It evaluates the reasons for the degradation of the Islands natural environment, and it suggests that rather than giving prominence to one particular aspect as the prime cause of the degradation, in practice there are normally a number of factors involved. Most of the circumstances that are described in the four case studies are usually the product of a combination of a number of factors.

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## Abbreviations

AET	Absolute escapement target
ARC	Agricultural Research Centre
BAS	British Antarctic Survey
BWU	Blue Whale Unit
CCAMLR	Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
CDC	Colonial Development Corporation
CO	Colonial Office (located in London)
CEMAR	Centre for Ecosystem Management and Restoration
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (of wild flora and fauna)
CISRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
CS	Colonial Secretary (located in Stanley)
CSO	Colonial Secretary's Office (located in Stanley)
DAR	Darwin Archive
DoA	Department of Agriculture
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations Organisation
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FIC	Falkland Islands Company
FICZ	Falkland Islands Interim Conservation Zone
FIDC	Falkland Islands Development Corporation
FIDS	Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey
FIG	Falkland Islands Government
FIGA	Falkland Islands Government Archive
FIFD	Falkland Islands Fisheries Department
FIJ	Falkland Islands Journal
FIPZ	Falkland Islands Protection Zone
FISOA	Falkland Islands Sheepowners Association
FLH	Falkland Landholdings
FOCZ	Falkland Islands Outer Conservation Zone
GTU	Grasslands Trials Unit
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
IUU	Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (fishing)
IWC	International Whaling Commission
KEP	King Edward Point (located on South Georgia)
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MRRAG	Marine Renewable Resources Assessment Group
MS/MSS	Manuscript
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
PRO	Public Records Office, Kew
QUB	Queens University Belfast

RAMSAR	Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (ratified at Ramsar, Iran, in 1971)
RGS	Royal Geographical Society
RRAG	Renewable Resources Assessment Group
SAMS	South American Mission Society
SBW	Southern Blue Whiting
SGSSI	South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands
SPRI	Scott Polar Research Institute
TAC	Total Allowable Catch

## 1. Introduction

This dissertation is an account and appraisal of the human effects on the islands of the Falkland Islands (hereafter called ‘the Islands’) and South Georgia, and their surrounding waters; *i.e.* a history of the use by human beings of the natural resources of this area. The natural resources found in the area will be outlined, and their management, and the environmental consequences of that management since the 18th century, will be described.

The dissertation is based on four case studies (Farming, Sealing, Whaling and Fishing) which both ‘stand alone’ as studies in their own right, but are also closely related to each other. Human activity, and its impact, will be compared and contrasted between the case studies throughout the dissertation. There are a number of similarities and linking themes between the case studies.

Not all the effects of human activity in the Islands and South Georgia are covered in this dissertation *e.g.* the effects of an emerging oil industry; the effects of a growing tourist industry; the work and effectiveness of various conservation groups; the effects of the 1982 conflict. Farming, sealing, whaling and fishing constitute the major components of the story of human activity in this area to the present time. In each of the case studies the questions will be asked - how, and why, did human beings seek to exploit and change their natural environment? The dissertation acknowledges the importance of ‘story-telling’ as an aid to understanding the past and also as a framework for future life and action:

... stories about the past are better, all other things being equal, if they increase our attention to nature and the place of people within it. They succeed when they make us look at the grasslands and their peoples in a new way.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cronon, W; (1992) *The Journal of American History*; p1347.

The dissertation will show the interdependence between the environment and the social and cultural histories of 18th/19th century sealers and settlers, and 20th/21st century farmers, sealers, whalers and fishermen.

The methods of research during the writing of this dissertation have included:

- The analysis and comparison of primary and original sources held at:
  - i. The Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge
  - ii. The Public Records Office, Kew
  - iii. Royal Botanic Garden Kew Archive
  - iv. The Falkland Islands Government Archive, Stanley
  - v. The Falkland Islands Company Archive held in both Stanley and Bishops Stortford
  
- A detailed account of the human activity in this area; noting the values, key events, and political and economic attitudes.
  
- Research during a five year residence in the Islands (1991-1996) and a three month field trip to the Islands in 2001.
  
- Review and consultation with various authorities during the draft stage of case studies.

*'The Land where nature is still in charge'* is the proud slogan of the Islands Tourist Board; this dissertation will demonstrate that this commonly held perception is not accurate. The dissertation will show that the human effects on the natural environment of the Falkland Islands and South Georgia have been far from moderate, and that the natural environment has been damaged considerably since human discovery and settlement.

The dissertation will evaluate the reasons for the degradation of the Islands natural environment, and it will suggest that rather than highlighting one particular aspect as the prime cause of the degradation, in practice there are generally a number of factors

involved. Most of the circumstances that are described in the four case studies are generally the product of a combination of a number of factors.

The dissertation will also show that, with a few notable exceptions, the desire to preserve and conserve the natural environment has played a relatively minor role in the life and attitudes of those who settled in the Islands. It will also show that, until relatively recently, attempts to construct a practical policy of conservation have faced a constant struggle. The dissertation will show why it has proved to be so difficult to effect beneficial changes in the Islands, and to live on them in a sustainable manner.

This dissertation is the first systematic attempt to review the history of the environmental management of the Islands and South Georgia and to outline the commonalities of that management. A significant proportion of the source material cited in this dissertation has not been previously published.