

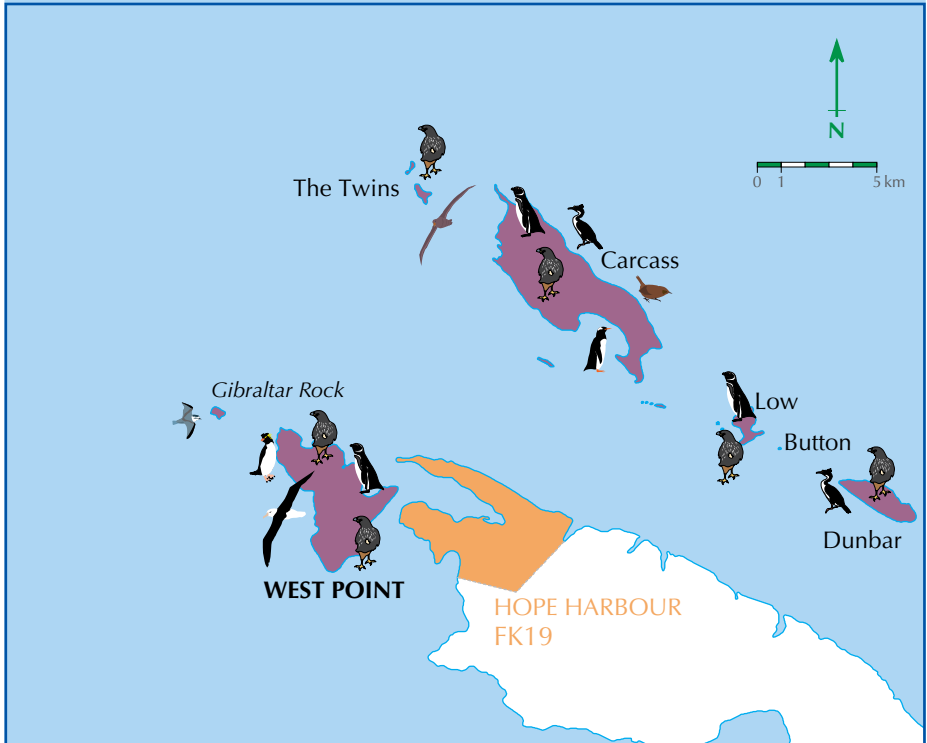
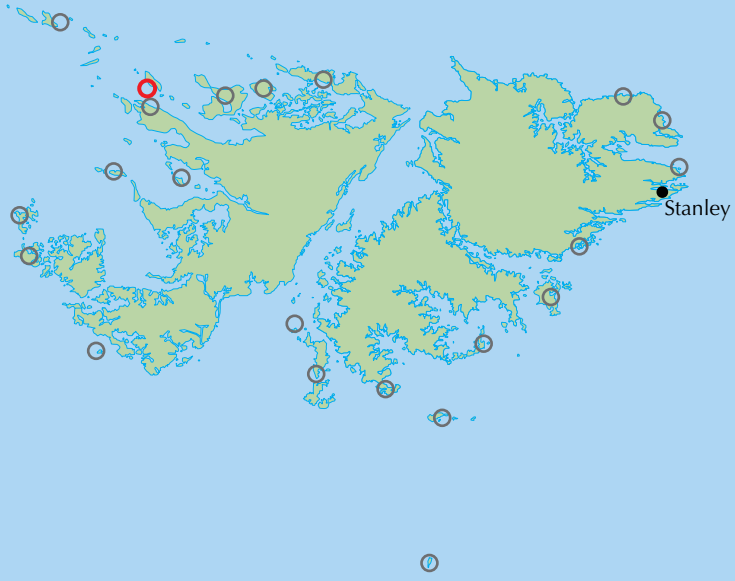
West Point Island Group

Ref number	FK17
Admin Region	Falkland Islands
Co-ordinates	51°19'S, 60°35'W
Area	West Point Island* (1,255 ha), Gibraltar Rock (20 ha), Low Island and two islets (76 ha), Dunbar Island (225 ha) and Button Islet (<1 ha), Carcass Island (1,894 ha), Beechams Island (1 ha), Carcass Reef (<1 ha) and Needles Rocks (five islets) (c5 ha), The Twins (Northern, 8 ha, Southern, 15 ha) [* = rats present]
Altitude	0–369 m
IBA categories	A1, A2, A4ii, A4iii
Status	West Point, Gibraltar Rock, Low and two islets, Dunbar, Button Islet: privately owned by R. B. Napier, West Point Island. Low Island is a National Nature Reserve (designated 1964), Dunbar Island is a private nature reserve. Carcass, Beechams, Carcass Reef, Needles Rocks: privately owned by R. P. McGill, Carcass Island. The Twins: National Nature Reserve (designated 1964) owned by Falklands Conservation.

Site description

West Point Island lies off the most north-westerly point of West Falkland. It is about 6km long and no more than 4km at its widest. The dramatic west-facing cliffs with gullies or sheer rock faces rising from the open South Atlantic reach 350m or more in height and the scenery is spectacular. The southern third of the island has impressive rock faces below Cliff Mountain and further south, Mount Misery (337m) defines the narrow deep channel to the east, known as the Woolly Gut. The settlement is snug at the north-western edge of a large harbour on the eastern coast, sheltered from the prevailing westerlies. The vegetation is mostly short turf, upland heath or feldmark with several large Tussac paddocks, some with Cinnamon Grass *Hierochloe redolens*, replanted more than a century ago. The valley across the island from the settlement leads to the Devil's Nose, a sheer-sided promontory with accessible colonies of Black-browed Albatross and Rockhopper Penguin, which attract many tourists from cruise ships.

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FK17	West Point Island Group	Breeding (pairs)	Notes
Criteria	Key species		
A1, A4ii	Black-browed Albatross <i>Thalassarche melanophrys</i>	14,561	West Point, 2000/01, numbers slightly lower than in 1995
A1	Rockhopper Penguin <i>Eudyptes chrysolome</i>	4,800	West Point, 2000/01
A1	Gentoo Penguin <i>Pygoscelis papua</i>	610	Carcass only, increase of 430 on 1995 figures
A1	Magellanic Penguin <i>Spheniscus magellanicus</i>		Widespread, breeding all islands, no counts
A1, A2	Cobb's Wren <i>Troglodytes cobbi</i>		Numerous on all islands except West Point, no counts
A1, A2	Striated Caracara <i>Phalacrocorax australis</i>	36	All islands
A2	Tussacbird/Blackish Cinclodes <i>Cinclodes antarcticus</i>		Numerous, breeding all islands except West Point where scarce, no counts
A2	Ruddy-headed Goose <i>Chloephaga rubidiceps</i>		Numerous Carcass, also breeding Dunbar, Low and West Point
A2	Canary-winged/Black-throated Finch <i>Melanodera melanodera</i>		Breeding all islands except northern Twin, few on West Point
A2	Falkland Steamer Duck <i>Tachyeres brachypterus</i>		Breeding around coasts of all islands, no counts
A4iii	Combined seabirds	>18,500	

Gibraltar Rock lies approximately 1.5 km north-west of Cape Terrible, West Point Island, and when viewed from the sea appears in the shape of a slipper (hence its local name, The Slipper), with the cliffs on the western side forming the highest point at around 100m. The island is covered in very dense but low Tussac and there are no records of stocking or burning in the past.

Low Island is less than 1 km south-east of Carcass Island in the north-western entrance of Byron Sound, West Falkland. It reaches about 28 m in height towards the northern coast, which has steep cliffs and vertical rock strata. Large bays on the eastern and western coasts enclose a lower area of heath and open grassland, with bogs and a permanent pool. The southern coast is rocky. Low Island has dense, mature Tussac

on the northern part and a fringe on the southern. There were still some retired dairy cows present on the island in 2000 and these are thought to have had very little impact on the Tussac. There are no plans to stock the island again after they have died.

Dunbar Island lies at the entrance to Byron Sound about 750m south-east of Low Island. It is about 3.5 km from north-west to south-east and only about 1 km wide. The highest part, Dunbar Hill, is almost central at 89m while it reaches 38m and 53 m near the eastern and western points respectively. There is serious soil erosion on the northern slopes, probably due to heavy stocking with sheep until 1969, when livestock were removed and the vegetation was left to recover. Some mature Tussac remains around the coastline, especially at the north-western point and along the southern coastal slopes. Inland, the vegetation is heathland with rocky outcrops. A small shanty stands near the south-eastern point.

Carcass Island is 10km from north-west to south-east and has a maximum width of 2.5 km. There are large sand bays and a tidal rocky point to the north-west, while the north-eastern coast has cliffs and slopes. The highest point of the island is Mount Byng at 220m. The island also has several substantial freshwater ponds, mainly towards North West Point, which are important waterfowl sites. Carcass Island has been a sheep farm for more than a century, but excellent management has left it with a varied habitat and a diverse flora, including mature Tussac in replanted coastal paddocks.

The Twins are two Tussac-covered islands, lying approximately 2 km north-west of Carcass Island. The northern Twin is 600m long and low-lying, with dense Tussac cover and apparently supports a good population of Southern Sea Lions, while the southern Twin is 850m from south-east to north-west and has a more varied habitat. Apart from a bay and sand dunes to the north-east, the coast is mostly boulder beach.

Birds

See table opposite for details of key species.

A total of 50 species was recorded on or near West Point Island during the Breeding Birds Survey 1983–93, of which 30 were breeding or probably breeding. Seven of the native songbirds were present but their numbers were low compared with Carcass Island, where Tussacbird and Cobb's Wren were widespread and numerous. Gibraltar Rock has only four or five songbird species but supports a large breeding population of Thin-billed Prion, and it is probable that the Grey-backed Storm-petrel is breeding there and on Carcass, Low, Dunbar and The Twins. The Common Diving Petrel may breed on The Twins and Dunbar. The Rock Shag is breeding on most islands but the only breeding records for the Imperial Shag are for Carcass and Dunbar. West Point Island is a key site for breeding Black-browed Albatross, while the entire chain supports a small but significant number of breeding Striated Caracaras (>7% of the estimated Falkland population of about 500 breeding pairs). The Southern Giant Petrel is possibly breeding on the southern Twin as 40 adults were present in 1997.

Endemic subspecies present include Common Diving Petrel, Black-crowned Night-heron, Upland Goose, Dark-faced Ground-tyrant, Falkland Pipit, Falkland Grass Wren, Short-eared Owl, Falkland Thrush and Long-tailed Meadowlark.

Other species of interest

There are several breeding populations of Southern Sea Lions in the group. At the 2003 census, 59 pups were found on The Twins, 14 on Gibraltar Rock, 40 on Low Island and 51 on Dunbar Island.

The plants on West Point have been fairly well surveyed and 123 species were identified between 1995 and 1998. Of these, only four were endemic and 52 (42%) were introduced, including several grasses sown to improve pastures and others that have naturalised from garden plantings. On Carcass Island, about 107 species have been identified, including the uncommon Yellow Orchid *Gavilea littoralis*, the rare endemic Hairy Daisy *Erigeron incertus* and Whitlowgrass *Draba funiculosa*, and a large number of introduced species. In contrast, Low Island had 20 species, including one endemic and seven introduced, Dunbar had 23 species (one endemic and three introduced), the southern Twin had only seven species (two introduced) and Tussac was the only plant found on the northern Twin.

Conservation issues

West Point Island has been managed as a working sheep farm since about 1879. Historically, it was the first place in the Falklands where replanting of Tussac in fenced paddocks was undertaken successfully from late in the 19th century, to provide managed good-quality grazing and shelter for livestock. Unfortunately, West Point still has populations of Norway Rats and House Mouse, which are controlled by a programme of annual poisoning. Feral cats were numerous for many years but they were exterminated in about 1984. None of the other islands in the group has been colonised by mammalian predators. All visitors should be informed about the dangers of accidentally introducing alien species to the Falklands.

The first methodical fieldwork on Black-browed Albatross in the Falklands was carried out on West Point Island between 1960 and 1968, supported by the US Antarctic Research Program. Recoveries from about 11,000 albatrosses ringed as



nestlings, demonstrated that juveniles dispersed northwards quickly towards the eastern coast of South America. Some recoveries were from Argentine and Brazilian seafarers while others were found dead or dying on the coasts of Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil north to 23°S. A few reached the western coast of Africa in as little as 2½ months while one bird reached 16°S on the coast of Angola about 3½ months after leaving West Point. From all recoveries, it seems that birds ringed in the Falklands normally remain within the South Atlantic as they mature and return to their native colonies when about five years old.

West Point Island and Carcass Island are particularly noteworthy as two long-established sheep farms where Striated Caracaras are not persecuted but actively encouraged as having a place in the Falklands avifauna and being of great interest to visiting bird enthusiasts and tourists. With accessible colonies of Black-browed Albatross and Rockhopper Penguin, West Point was the first island to receive cruise ship tourists in 1968. Carcass Island is another popular destination, with hundreds of passengers landing either at Leopard Beach to the south-east or at the settlement. It is also a thriving self-catering holiday location, with land-based visitors being present on the island through the summer months. The tourism pressures on Carcass and West Point are well managed under current ownership and cause little disturbance at the sites used. It is very important that the Falkland Islands Countryside Code (see Appendix 1) is followed, particularly to guard against the risk of fire.

Falklands Conservation is aware that further survey work is needed to improve knowledge of the species present and their populations, particularly on the smaller islands in the group.

References

Clausen (2001), Huin (2001), Thompson (2003), Tickell (1967), Woods and Smith (1999).



Tussacbird ALAN HENRY