



MACQUARIE DISPATCH

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Project team visits Macquarie Island

A short visit to Macquarie Island in October by the Macquarie Island Pest Eradication Project team, members of the steering committee and contractors was extremely valuable for all involved.

The purpose of the Australian Antarctic Division's voyage was to re-fuel and re-supply the island so the time allocated to a visit ashore by the project team was dictated by that objective. Unfortunately, weather conditions resulted in the project team members having only one day ashore.

Despite the limited time, much was accomplished. Steering committee members including Parks and Wildlife Service general manager Peter Mooney, Veronica Blazely, director Natural Heritage East with the Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts and Keith Broome, senior technical officer with the New Zealand Department of Conservation (DOC) were among those to make the voyage.

Project team members included Keith Springer, Geoff Woodhouse, Yeutha May and Graeme Beech. Others associated with the project included dog trainer Steve Austin and two springer spaniels, helicopter pilot John Oakes, Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment communications officer Jane Lovibond and Australian Associated Press reporter Paul Carter.

While on the island the steering committee and media contingent were hosted on a walk by Macquarie Island's Parks and



Project team members had the opportunity to see first hand the large numbers of rabbits and the scale of their impacts on Macquarie Island on a voyage to the island in October.

Wildlife Service resident ranger Dave Dowie. The group walked along the west coast as far as Half Moon Bay, looking at rabbit grazing damage and wildlife, and North Head, an area of the island that has been fenced to exclude rabbits. The party also had a brief look around the station facilities.

Project manager Keith Springer said that although the one day on the island was less than hoped, the 11 days spent aboard the Australian Antarctic Division vessel, the *Aurora Australis*, provided an invaluable opportunity to bring a number of people associated with the project together at the same time.

"You could call it team building, but it was more of a consolidation, with people getting a sense of who's involved, their specific roles and the skills they bring to

the project," Keith said.

Dog trainer Steve Austin and his two springer spaniels, Ash and Gus, took home much from the island experience. Steve was more than pleased with the dogs' adaptability to the real situation following 12 months' training.

Once back in Hobart, the Macquarie Island project team's priorities were to finalise the contract for helicopter services and tenders for shipping services and bait containers.

Staff recruitment is moving ahead with three selection centres in Hobart, Sydney and Wellington, New Zealand scheduled to be held in November. This process involves applicants being presented with a range of scenarios over a 24-hour period to allow assessors to observe how they respond to specific situations.



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Wealth of knowledge in supporting committee

The role of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) is to respond to requests for advice from the Macquarie Island Pest Eradication Steering Committee and the project manager on scientific and technical matters. The committee membership is based on expertise in island pest eradication, sub-Antarctic conservation, wildlife and logistics. The members are appointed by the steering committee. Members include those listed below as well as Melinda Brouwer (representing the Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts) and Gwen Fenton (Australian Antarctic Division).

Michael Pemberton

Michael Pemberton is the manager of the Biodiversity Conservation Branch in the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment. Staff within this branch manage a number of important conservation programs on Macquarie Island such as the vegetation and sea bird monitoring programs. Michael was involved in the nomination of the island for World Heritage Listing. He edited, reviewed and provided additional information for the geological text in the nomination document. He has served on the Macquarie Island Research Advisory Group and chaired the group for a number of years. Michael maintains an active interest in the conservation of the island's

natural diversity and the vertebrate pest eradication program. He also has previous experience assessing and mapping land degradation in Tasmania including erosion in the State's natural areas.

Elaine Murphy

Elaine Murphy is a program leader for the Australian Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre and has been a scientist for the NZ Department of Conservation for the last 19 years. She specialises in small mammal pests and toxins. Her PhD was on the population dynamics of mice on islands and since then, she has been involved in a number of mouse and ship rat research projects, focussing on their ecology and on techniques for their control and eradication.

Elaine is really pleased to be involved with the Macquarie Island project, as the eradication of rabbits and rodents will allow this World Heritage Area to recover, and will be a significant step forward in the restoration of islands world-wide.

Dr Brian Cooke

Dr Brian Cooke has worked on rabbit control in Australia for over 40 years, initially within the South Australian Animal and Plant Control Commission and subsequently with CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems in Canberra. He played a major research role in the introduction of Spanish rabbit fleas as new vectors

of myxomatosis for arid inland Australia and subsequently with the introduction of rabbit haemorrhagic disease virus. He currently works with the Invasive Animals CRC and the Institute of Applied Ecology at the University of Canberra where his main interests lie in documenting the ecological benefits from the introduction of RHDV and promoting ongoing research into biological control agents for rabbits. He contributes to the STAC through his practical approach to rabbit control and experience with pest control both in the sub-Antarctic Kerguelen Islands and tropical Galapagos Islands.

Keith Springer

Keith Springer is the Macquarie Island Pest Eradication Project manager and represents the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service on the committee. Keith has been managing the project since 2007 but previously worked on Macquarie Island as the ranger-in-charge. He also led the cat eradication team on the island in 2000. Recruited from New Zealand, Keith has also worked in Antarctica and spent 20 years as a forest ranger and national park ranger with the Department of Conservation in New Zealand.

Robb Clifton

Robb is the STAC chair. He was the station leader on Macquarie Island from November 2000 to March 2002, during the final stages of the cat eradication project. During this time he provided community leadership along with management of numerous research, conservation and management projects. Since then he has made short trips to the island as voyage leader, led a research expedition to sub-Antarctic Heard Island and made numerous trips to Antarctica. Currently Robb is the Operations Planning manager with the Australian Antarctic Division.

Feral species on Macquarie Island

Like many islands around the world, Macquarie Island has suffered from the introduction of non-native species.

After Macquarie Island's discovery in 1810 by the sealing brig *Perseverance*, the island's native wildlife, particularly seals and penguins were exploited for their skins and oil. The sealers also brought with them many unwelcome visitors. The house mouse and ship rat became established on the island during the 1800s.

Cats and dogs were established on the island by 1820 and in the 1870s rabbits and weka were introduced by sealers. Weka are a large flightless rail native to New Zealand. Both rabbits and weka provided food resources for the island's inhabitants. The combination of introduced species drove the endemic Macquarie Island parakeet and a land rail to extinction.

Weka were eradicated from the island in 1988.

The first cat control program began in 1985 due to heavy predation on burrowing petrels. An intensive cat eradication program began in 1998 and was declared to be successful in 2002.

Rodents and rabbits have been eradicated from more than 300 islands worldwide, using techniques similar to those planned for Macquarie Island.



Weka, a New Zealand rail.

Contact Us

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