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Dear Dr Rossler,

Gough and Inaccessible Islands (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (740bis))

In accordance with your letter dated 24 March 2016, I am submitting the State of Conservation Report for the Gough and Inaccessible Islands World Heritage Site. We have used the format stipulated as far as is possible.

I can confirm that I am content for the report to be posted on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website.

Kind regards,

Hannah Jones
World Heritage Site and Underwater Policy Advisor

cc
HE Matthew Sudders, UK Permanent Delegate to UNESCO
UK National Commission for UNESCO
Henry Owen-John, Historic England



GOUGH AND INACCESSIBLE ISLANDS (UNITED KINGDOM) (740bis)

- 1. Executive Summary of the report [Note: each of the sections described below should be summarized. The maximum length of the executive summary is 1 page.]**

Executive Summary

In accordance with the request from the Director of the World Heritage Centre dated 24 March 2016, the United Kingdom State Party has produced a State of Conservation Report for the Gough and Inaccessible Islands World Heritage Site.

- 2. Response to the Decision of the World Heritage Committee [Note: The State(s) Party(ies) is/are requested to address the most recent Decision of the World Heritage Committee for this property, paragraph by paragraph.]**

This property has not been discussed at the World Heritage Committee since 2009 (decision 33COM 7B.32). There is therefore no recent decision to which to respond, and the information on the state of conservation is instead provided in sections 3 and 4 below as agreed with the World Heritage Centre.

- 3. Other current conservation issues identified by the State(s) Party(ies) which may have an impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value. [Note: this includes conservation issues which are not mentioned in the Decision of the World Heritage Committee or in any information request from the World Heritage Centre]**

The World Heritage property of Gough and Inaccessible Islands constitutes one of the most important sites for biodiversity within the United Kingdom Overseas Territories, supporting globally significant populations of seabirds, endemic plants, invertebrates and land birds which all contribute to its Outstanding Universal Value. In recent years, however, an invasion of mice descended from house mice brought in on ships in the 19th century has caused an increasing threat to some critically endangered species on the islands, including the Gough bunting, the Tristan albatross and the Atlantic petrel, through predation of their eggs and chicks. A second issue is the invasion of an alien groundcover, *sagina procumbens*, which forms dense mats and competes strongly with existing vegetation.

In May 2008, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) published a feasibility study for the eradication of mice from Gough Island, which raised several significant research questions to be addressed prior to any such programme beginning. Following this study, the RSPB has worked in conjunction with other partners to carry out research on how such a programme can be executed, aided by a grant of £253,636 from the Darwin Initiative, a UK Government fund for environmental projects in the UK Overseas Territories. The findings of this research phase have been encouraging, and the RSPB has concluded that it will be feasible to eradicate both the mice and the *sagina procumbens* from Gough, in order to ensure that the property retains its exceptional biodiversity and Outstanding Universal Value. The research has identified a preferred bait and dosage to provide an effective toxin for the mice on Gough, as well as mitigation solutions for handling non-target species. One particular area of concern was whether it would be possible to distribute the bait on the steep cliffs and caves on Gough, and therefore tests were carried out on

these areas as part of the research. The results indicate that with regard to the cliffs, it will be possible to treat these areas by applying extra bait, and in the caves mice were found to have eaten the bait, indicating that these areas will not prove an obstacle to a successful eradication programme.

A programme to eradicate the *sagina procumbens* has been almost continuous since 2009, and all parties remain committed to the complete extermination of this plant from Gough. A review of all previous efforts to destroy the species was undertaken in 2014, resulting in a proposal to undertake a further coordinated and concerted eradication campaign over five years, led by RSPB as the most qualified organisation to undertake this work.

The UK Government is committed to not only sustaining, but to strengthening the diverse environmental assets of each and every UK Overseas Territory. Gough was identified as the top priority for invasive vertebrates in the UK Overseas Territories in a 2015 survey, and the research over the last few years has shown that eradicating mice from the island is feasible using current technology.

4. In conformity with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, describe any potential major restorations, alterations and/or new construction(s) intended within the property, the buffer zone(s) and/or corridors or other areas, where such developments may affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including authenticity and integrity.

The research phase of the mice eradication programme has now been completed and the project is ready to be implemented. The proposed approach, following best practice developed in New Zealand, is to apply rodent bait pellets containing the anticoagulant brodifacoum across the island. This will be achieved through two applications of rodent baits from four helicopters using under-slung bucket spreaders. Differential Global Positioning System technology will guide the helicopters to ensure all areas are covered adequately. All man-made structures on the island could conceivably provide habitat for mice and therefore will be treated by ground based application of bait. This approach has been used successfully on a number of different islands, targeting both rats and mice.

In order to mitigate the risks of primary poisoning of other species on Gough during this programme, representative individuals of each species will be taken into captivity and held on the island where they cannot access bait for the required period. This will preserve as much of the genetic diversity of each species as can be practically achieved to form the nucleus of what is predicted to be thriving new populations in the absence of mice. This work will be guided by a captive management plan and is a project in itself requiring considerable logistical planning to enable a pre-determined number of pairs (or potential pairs) of the Gough moorhen and the Gough bunting to be caught before bait application begins. Protocols for captive management have been developed, and have been reviewed by four independent avicultural experts. A new partnership has been established to provide the necessary skills required to deliver this component of the programme.

The estimated cost of the eradication programme is £7.5 million. RSPB have begun a concerted fundraising campaign for the project and anticipate that they will be able to contribute 75% of the

cost. They will also lead on the eradication because of their extensive expertise in this area, working in conjunction with the UK and Overseas Territory governments. The UK Government is currently holding discussions regarding potential sources of funding from where the remainder of the required money can be acquired, and the State Party anticipates the submission of a bid for such funding in late 2016. The operational phase of the mice eradication is expected to begin in 2018-19, with a two-year follow up programme once the eradication work has been completed. The State Party will keep the World Heritage Centre informed on the progress of this programme.

- 5. Public access to the State of Conservation Report [Note: this report will be uploaded for public access on the World Heritage Centre's State of conservation Information System (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc>). Should your State Party request that the full report should not be uploaded, only the 1-page executive summary provided in point (1.) above will be uploaded for public access].**

The State Party is content for the full report to be uploaded to the World Heritage Centre's State of Conservation Information System.

6. Signature of the Authority

Ms Hannah Jones
World Heritage Site and Underwater Policy Advisor