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Dear Dr. Mechtild Rössler,

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

In accordance with Decision 40 COM 7B.103, 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,

Enid Williams  
Senior Heritage Policy Advisor



## STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORT BY THE STATES PARTIES

(in compliance with Paragraph 169 of the *Operational Guidelines*)

### 1. Executive Summary of the report

In accordance with decision 40 Com 7B.103 of the World Heritage Committee, the 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

#### 40 COM 7B.103

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

*The World Heritage Committee,*

1. *Having examined Document WHC/16/40.COM/7B.Add,*
2. *Recalling Decision 33 COM 7B.32, adopted at its 33rd session (Seville, 2009),*
3. *Notes with significant concern the rate of decline of seabird populations on Gough Island, including Atlantic petrel and Tristan albatross due to predation on chicks by the invasive house mouse ;*
4. *Requests the State Party to take urgent action to eradicate mice from the island and urges the State Party to make a firm commitment to allocate sufficient funds for the rapid implementation of the house mouse eradication project;*

#### RESPONSE TO PARAGRAPH 4:

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, an invasion of mice descended from house mice brought in on ships in the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 has significant potential to compete strongly with existing vegetation.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) undertook 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 RSPB has concluded based on this research 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 UK Government has committed £1.75 million towards the operation, with the RSPB leading efforts to secure further grants and donations. Over £4 million has been raised to date towards the project costs. The RSPB is continuing efforts to secure further funding, and has committed to carrying out the operation pending securing regulatory approvals and logistical arrangements. Detailed plans are currently in development in partnership working with the Department of Environmental Affairs in the Republic of South Africa. The operational phase of the project is expected to begin in 2019, with a two-year follow up programme once the eradication work has been completed.

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. 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.

*5. Appreciates however that the procumbent pearlwort (Sagina procumbens) eradication programme has been almost continuously implemented since 2009, and also requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre updated information on the current status of the species on the island and details of the further five-year eradication campaign;*

#### RESPONSE TO PARAGRAPH 5:

The procumbent pearlwort is an alien groundcover, *Sagina procumbens*, which forms dense mats and competes strongly with existing vegetation. Works to eradicate the species from the island are ongoing, with the species currently found on a limited area of the island. A review of the current progress will be published by the RSPB in early 2018, which will inform the future eradication strategy.

The current 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 should the review commissioned by the RSPB deem this remains the best course of

action. The eradication of *Sagina procumbens* is being delivered by the RSPB as part of the same programme to eradicate mice from the island. As part of this, a team of three conservationists are stationed on the island for 13 months to carry out the *Sagina procumbens* eradication project and monitoring the avifauna of the island.

*6. Further requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 December 2017, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 42nd session in 2018.*

**RESPONSE TO PARAGRAPH 6:**

This State of Conservation report forms the response to this request.

**3. Other current conservation issues identified by the State(s) Party(ies) which may have an impact on the property's Outstanding Universal Value.**

There are no other conservation issues identified by the State Party which may impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the site.

**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.**

This project will not include any permanent construction within the property, and will aim to protect and enhance the Outstanding Universal Value of the site. The works will include eradication of invasive species harmful to the outstanding universal value of the site.

**5. Public access to the State of Conservation Report**

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 Enid Williams  
Senior Heritage Policy Advisor