



Department for  
Digital, Culture  
Media & Sport

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Dear Dr Rössler,

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

In accordance with Decision 42 COM 7B.8, 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 STATE PARTY

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

### 1. Executive Summary of the report

In accordance with decision 42 COM 7B.8 of the World Heritage Committee, the State Party has produced a State of Conservation Report for the Gough and Inaccessible Islands World Heritage Site for consideration by the 44<sup>th</sup>/45<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee. The purpose of this report is to update the Centre and Committee on the project to protect the ecosystem and endemic species on Gough Island. This report is submitted in addition to the interim response to the committee decision sent in 2019.

### Response to the Decision of the World Heritage Committee

#### 1. 42 COM 7B.8

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

3. *The World Heritage Committee,*

4. *Having examined Document WHC/18/42.COM/7B,*

5. *Recalling Decision 40 COM 7B.103, adopted at its 40th session (Istanbul/UNESCO, 2016),*

6. *Welcomes the planned implementation of the house mice (*Mus musculus*) eradication programme on Gough Island in 2019, and requests the State Party to ensure adequate funding to fully implement the programme as a matter of urgency;*

7. *Appreciates that a feasibility study for the eradication of house mice has been undertaken and that the captive management of two endemic land bird species is being planned to mitigate risk of poisoning of these species, and also requests the State Party to keep the World Heritage Centre informed on the results of the mice eradication programme and on progress to avoid collateral impact on any non-target species, particularly those that are components of the property's Outstanding Universal Value;*

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 and various partners including the UK and South African Governments began planning the eradication project.

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. Additionally, a new partnership was established to provide the necessary skills required to deliver this component of the programme.

The RSPB was committed to carrying out the operation beginning with preparatory work in 2019 and continuing into the bulk of the project in 2020. However, as a direct result of the restrictions put in place in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, it became impossible for the third group of project specialists to deploy to the island. As the project is seasonal and relied on the expertise of this group, it was therefore not possible to carry out the full project this year.

The decision was therefore taken in May to postpone the project until 2021 and a coordinated effort was undertaken to repatriate the staff already on the island.

Three new members of staff arrived to the island in early September 2020 to begin preparation for a 2021 mouse eradication attempt.

While the current situation presents a highly uncertain set of circumstances, the additional and initial preparations on the island have resulted in a better understanding of the likely procedures needed ahead of the 2021 operation. There will be a series of go/no go points over the coming months, and a decision to further postpone the project may need to be taken.

The RSPB is actively fundraising, so that there is a contingency source were the project to be further delayed.

8. *Further requests the State Party to submit the review of the effectiveness of the eradication programme for the invasive plant species, procumbent pearlwort (*Sagina procumbens*) to the World Heritage Centre as soon as it is available;*

The procumbent pearlwort is an alien groundcover, *Sagina procumbens*, which forms dense mats and competes strongly with existing vegetation. While this invasive plant is not yet entirely eradicated from the island, progress has been made which has limited the spread. Currently, the species is only present in the original location on the coast, and there is no evidence it has spread to the inner parts of the island where it has the potential to do greater damage.

Further work will be undertaken during the mouse eradication project, with the aim of fully eradicating this invasive species.

The State Party will provide further updates on this work following the 2020 season.

9. *Encourages the State Party to share its experience on invasive alien species eradication programmes to promote knowledge exchange with other States Parties facing similar challenges;*

Reports on such initiatives as the methods utilised to limit the spread of procumbent pearlwort are available online to assist future projects in other locations. Additionally, the RSPB has successfully undertaken similar initiatives such as rat eradication on other islands. One such project, on Lundy Island, showed a significant improvement in numbers of birds following the eradication programme, including an uplift of the number of puffins from 13 birds in 2001 to 337 in 2019. The lessons learned from this project have informed the development of the project on Gough, which will help ensure that the project is a success.

Partnerships between governments and NGOs is essential to the success of this project. The teams working on the island represent many nationalities, and this will help ensure that the outcomes of this project assist others with similar issues.

10. *Requests furthermore the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 December 2019, a progress report to confirm that funding has been secured for the eradication programme and its implementation has started on schedule, and by 1 December 2020, 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 45th session in 2021.*

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

A fishing vessel sank near the island on 15 October 2020. The crew of 62 managed to make their way to the base on Gough Island, and were picked up from the island several days later. While there is currently no ascertained damage to the island or the surrounding sea as a result of this event, work is ongoing by the UK and Tristan Island Governments to determine how the exact location where the boat sank, the depth at which it sank, and if there is any risk to sea or bird life.

**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 mouse eradication 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. The required Environmental Impact Assessments will be carried out ahead of the project.

### **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.

### **2. Signature of the Authority**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Enid Williams', is written over a faint, light-colored rectangular background.

Ms Enid Williams  
Senior Heritage Policy Advisor