

## Mapping South Georgia's dynamic coastal margin

The first island-wide effort to identify and map the coastal habitats of South Georgia since Jenny Scott and Sally Poncet's pioneering work in 2003 is now underway. The South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI) is leading this research project, supported by the Darwin Initiative through UK Government funding. It is using free medium resolution satellite imagery alongside other spatial information and local expert knowledge to develop the first, island-wide, 'satellite-derived' broad scale coastal margin (terrestrial, intertidal and subtidal) habitat maps for this remote and beautiful island. Where there are gaps in these broad scale maps, or additional information is needed to meet stakeholder priorities, fine scale habitat maps will be developed with the aid of very high resolution satellite imagery and imagery captured by drones.

South Georgia is home to globally important populations of marine birds and mammals, and their breeding habitat extends around its coastline. The habitat models (computer software 'trained' to identify and classify habitats from imagery, either from satellites or drones) and maps produced by this project will provide an important baseline for use in conservation planning, decision making and monitoring by GSGSSI and other stakeholders.

In November and December 2017, with the support of GSGSSI, project researchers worked alongside a rat-monitoring expedition team based aboard *Pharos SG*. They landed on some of the least visited beaches on the island. Watched by penguins, fur seals and elephant seals, they worked in sun, rain and snow, collecting vital information on a range of remarkable and diverse habitats. These data will help validate the habitat models created for South Georgia. A return research expedition is being planned for February 2019.

The project is truly an international collaboration. Together SAERI, Oregon State University, the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Shallow Marine Surveys Group, Falkland Islands Government and GSGSSI represent the leading edge in remote sensing, ecological knowledge and field expertise.

If you have information that can help us with this research, have views about priority areas/habitats that should be a focus for fine scale mapping or would just like to know more, please get in touch with the project manager, Neil Golding ([ProjectManager.CM@env.institute.ac.fk](mailto:ProjectManager.CM@env.institute.ac.fk)).



*Overlooking Gold Harbour, with Pharos SG awaiting the return of the field team.*

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*The recent issue of fur seal-themed stamps.*

The South Georgia Association newsletter is produced twice a year, in April and November.

Contributions should be submitted, at least one month before publication, to the editor:

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