

Completion of Fieldwork – Soil Mapping project

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The Soil Mapping fieldwork is now completed, which is good for adhering to the project timeline but sad because I will miss exploring the Falkland Islands. One of my favourite days in the field was working on a Sphagnum peat at Kingsford Valley, East Falkland. It was a misty eerie morning with invisible snipe flying around us, their presence only known through the sound of their winnowing. Wet blanket carpets of Sphagnum moss and a water table at surface level made the logistics a bit more challenging; we normally sit down for the field descriptions! The soil profile was very unique and different from what we normally encounter: the first meter was just undecomposed Sphagnum moss. The entire peat layer was approximately two meters deep followed by ca. 50 cm of smooth silty clay with a greenish-grey colour. The absence of oxygen in waterlogged soils chemically changes the iron compounds (brownish colours) so they appear greyish. A greenish-grey clay therefore indicates permanent waterlogging.

The site also provided great examples of Sphagnum magellanicum mounds. As they grow and rise above the surrounding vegetation they become drier and tougher and make a good substrate for other plants to grow in: pig vine, teaberry, mountain berry, fachine, small fern, diddle dee.

The project is funded by the Darwin Initiative through the UK Government and has a number of collaborating organisations including: the Falkland Islands Government's Department of Agriculture, UK Falkland Island Trust, James Hutton Institute, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Natural History Museum (London) and the University of Magallanes.

