of non-target poisoning of birds, and visits to potential preliminary eradication sites. It was important to visit as much of the island as possible, to assess rodent levels and to ensure that fieldwork sites were as representative of the island as possible.

Subsequent analysis showed the animals to have large home-ranges, with individuals utilising multiple burrows, with a heavy bias towards low-lying coastal tussac habitat. These data allow any future effort to be targeted to key areas, and poison distribution levels to be varied – minimising the amount of poison that would be deployed in the event of an eradication.

The blank biomarker bait taken to South Georgia was spread around in easily observable areas, and monitored for any feeding by birds. During the fieldwork, bait was offered also to birds as and when they were encountered. The intention was not to perform a detailed scientific study as to non-target bait take, but to give an initial impression as to whether significant issues were encountered. Fortunately, initial observations did not indicate significant levels of bait-take by vulnerable species. A full study would be carried out in an Environmental Impact Assessment for any proposed eradication effort.

The feasibility study has now been published (see www.sgisland.org) and concluded that, whilst technically feasible, there are enormous financial and practical difficulties involved with an island-wide eradication effort. The plan identifies also conditions that need to be in place before eradication can begin (e.g. improved biosecurity, baseline studies). The South Georgia Government is working to put these conditions in place and the South Georgia Heritage Trust, an independent charity, is currently raising funds to help achieve the ideal of a rat free South Georgia.

Darren Christie, Email: djchristie@mac.com

Protected Area Planning for the Central Peaks (STH003)

The *Protected Area Plan* for St Helena's Central Peaks has been prepared. Comments and feedback from the public are now being sought, with the expectation that the *Plan* will be finalised by the end of March 2008, prior to seeking endorsement from the Executive Council.

The Central Peaks are a special place of outstanding natural and scenic beauty, with their own unique mix of ancient and unusual plants and animals found nowhere else on earth. They are an important 'asset' for the island as a place for education, recreation and tourism. In addition, water from springs and streams with catchments within the Peaks provides a significant proportion of the overall water supply for St Helena. Expansion of the native plants in the catchment areas could provide long-term benefits to the island in relation to ground water reserves. The Peaks habitats are also under threat, principally from alien invasive species.

The *Protected Area Plan* for the Central Peaks is the result of planning workshops facilitated by Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks and further discussions and meetings with individuals and smaller groups to agree actions. The process has been informed by surveys of the invertebrates of the Peaks by Dr Philip & Mrs Myrtle Ashmole and Howard Mendel; the bryoflora (mosses, liverworts and hornworts) by Mr Martin Wigginton; and the vegetation of the Peaks that has been stored and analysed within a database (created by Alan Mills & Edsel Daniels).

The *Plan* establishes a framework for the management of the Central Peaks. It sets out the values and thinking behind why we should want to conserve the Central Peaks, and provides strategies for solving problems and achieving identified management objectives and actions. It is a working document to guide management, implementation and planning and it is intended that the *Plan* will be used as a major input to annual planning cycles of the St Helena Government, as well as those of non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders.

The Vision for the Central Peaks is *"for St Helena to manage and restore the native habitats and species of the peaks, valued by present and future generations for recreation, education, tourism, and water catchment."*

Enquires about the project and the *Protected Area Plan* can be directed to Rebecca Cairns-Wicks at Mount.Pleasant@cwimail.sh.

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Monitoring and Raising Public Awareness of Grouper at St Helena – Using Ascension Island as a Control (STH202)

In 2005 an OTEP project was proposed to monitor the grouper, or jack as it is locally known, at St Helena. The project had been planned for a number of years, but funding had proved to be difficult. The start of this project involved two international scientists visiting the island from 11th to 27th May 2006. Personnel from the Fisheries Section, ANRD, worked closely with them to acquire new skills.

The basis of this preliminary survey involved the collection of a number of jacks, along with underwater counts of jacks. It covered most of the leeward side of the island and rounded both corners as far as Bird Island and Merry Men Island.

The reason for collecting jacks is to determine their age and other population dynamics. Their age can be found by taking out their ear bones. All fish have ear bones (or otoliths as they are known scientifically), and this gives an indication of their age. These bones have similar markings to that of a tree – one can see growth rings in them, with each ring marking one year. There are also two other sets of ear bones in the fish, and these can tell much more, such as daily growth rates.

Ten groupers were caught every month and the extracted otoliths were sent for analysis. This was done for a year and once analysis is completed, a much clearer picture of what is happening to the groupers around St Helena will result.

Leeann Henry, Marine Assistant, Fisheries Department, Email: fishdir@anrd.gov.sh

St Helena's Millennium Forest: a symbol of small island's fight to defend fragile ecosystems (STH404)

Just 50 years after the British colonised St Helena, in a report from the Governor in Council, he complained:

> *'The Island in 20 years time will be utterly ruined for want of wood, for no man can say there is one tree in the Great Wood, or other wood less than 20 years old. Consequently it will die with age.'*

The Great Wood was the largest expanse of forest within St Helena's 47 square miles and home to an unknown number of birds, plants and insects now extinct. The Great Wood was entirely destroyed as settlers cut down the trees for firewood, stripped bark for tanning (unnecessarily killing the trees), and allowed goats and other introduced animals to graze on the saplings.

An enormous reforestation project was started, which will inevitably need to continue for decades if most of the area previously occupied by the Great Wood is again to become an established forest. The enormity of the task is magnified by the miniscule size of St Helena and the resources available on the Island for a project of this sort.

The area designated for reforestation was named 'The Millennium Forest'. The project was launched in 2000 with tremendous energy from the Island community. Virtually every Islander paid for a tree, with many of them planting their tree themselves. During this first phase, about 3,000 trees were planted. Eight years on, much has been achieved and, of course, there is still much to do. About 25 hectares have been planted so far and the total land area designated for reforestation is now 250 hectares.

Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks was