Gough Island – Field Assistant

What the job is about ….

These two contract positions are designed primarily to conduct seabird monitoring on Gough Island, including supporting activities for the mouse eradication operation and control (using herbicide) of an invasive plant *Sagina procumbens*. These positions will work alongside the Senior Field Assistant that is being recruited at the same time as these posts. All staff will take part in all activities as required by the work plan and agreed priorities.

Biological monitoring will involve monitoring of breeding success, survival, population counts, and other field work for selected breeding species throughout the entire year.

Training in advanced first aid, wilderness survival, safe use of herbicides and an induction to the plant eradication and monitoring plan will be provided for all team members prior to departure to Gough Island. Any other training identified as necessary to support the eradication operation will also be provided, at an appropriate time.

The induction to Gough Island and the annual work plan will be provided by our Conservation Science team based in the UK, the outgoing Gough overwintering team during the changeover period as well as the eradication team on island, details see below.

Qualifications

- A minimum of a science degree in a relevant subject
- Equivalent experience in carrying out relevant field work. Equivalent experience is defined as a minimum of three years of related work.
- Experience of remote, unsupervised fieldwork and appropriate animal handling skills (i.e. of wild animals in their natural habitat) are essential requirements.

Duties

- Conduct fieldwork according to a workplan and scientific methodology devised by the conservation science team.
- Make day-to-day decisions about work priorities and fieldwork protocols.
- Assist in scientific research, *Sagina* control, fieldwork and monitoring as required.
- Assist in a range of aviculture activities that may include daily husbandry work, release (trials) of captive birds, and post-release monitoring.
- Maintain accurate records of the work and computer databases of the work.
- Responsible for your own safety and that of your team members at all times.

Remuneration and conditions

- During Gough Island deployment, all food, accommodation and necessary personal protective clothing are provided for.
- All pre-deployment training and accommodation (away from RSPB HQ) are covered.
- Agreed travel between home country and Cape Town are covered.
- All candidates must complete a detailed medical and dental check-up in order to be allowed to travel to and work on Gough Island and any employment offer will be dependent on successfully passing these important safety checks.
- This role will be subject to a three-month probation period.
- Starting salary £19,602 - 21,236 per annum (RSPB Pay Band P6, Assistant Warden)
Location
- Staff will be based on Gough Island for a continuous period of 13 months. Gough Island is part of the UK Overseas Territory of Tristan da Cunha which make it exempt from UK and EU immigration restrictions.
- The climate and terrain on Gough are challenging with high winds and heavy rain regular occurrences.
- Departure will take place from Cape Town, South Africa on the South African Government owned research ship, the SA Agulhas II. While the changeover voyage occurs during September/October of each year, the departure date for the SA Agulhas II has not been confirmed yet, but usually falls on the first Thursday of September.
- Travel to Gough Island requires 6 – 10 days onboard the SA Agulhas II.
- Pre-deployment training is usually carried out in both the UK and South Africa. However, ultimately the location of the training will be dependent on the nationality of the selected applicants i.e. respective Visa requirements.

Skills / Experience
- Wild bird/animal handling experience in the field with a focus on bird identification, bird banding/ringing, safe handling – Essential
- Seabird-specific ringing experience/permit (preferably British Trust for Ornithology license) – Desirable
- Undertaking fieldwork in a mountainous environment and inclement weather conditions – Essential
- Working on remote islands for extended periods (or equivalent remote locations) – Essential
- Strong ability to implement scientific methodology – Essential
- Conducting surveys and censuses for breeding seabirds – Essential
- Data collection/data management skills or a demonstrable ability to adhere to data standards – Essential
- Firm understanding of eradication principles – Desirable
- Avicultural experience (specific details on tasks see below) – Desirable
- Taking blood sampling from birds – Desirable
- Laboratory work experience – Desirable
- Practical/technical skills (e.g. carpentry, construction, radio telemetry etc.) – Desirable

Interpersonal skills
- An ability to live and work in a very small team on one of the world’s most remote islands for a prolonged period – Essential
- Aptitude and/or proven experience in successfully undertaking unsupervised fieldwork, with safety as a first priority – Essential

Communication skills - a) oral skills b) written skills
- Fluent in written and spoken English language – Essential
- Proven ability to present research effectively in written and oral form with examples of publication in peer reviewed papers or scientific report writing – Essential

Computer / IT skills
- Confident entering, managing, analysing and reporting data (and posses some basic awareness of databases) – Essential

Decision Making
- Good time management, attention to detail, effective communication and the ability to learn quickly – Essential

Managerial ability
- Self-motivated and can work unsupervised – Essential
- Ability to balance time between projects – Essential
- Ability to follow management decisions from a remote setting – Essential

Other factors
- Ability to adhere to health and safety policies and procedures at all times – Essential
- Physically fit and capable of carrying out fieldwork in rugged terrain – Essential
- Knowledge of wilderness survival techniques and first aid – Desirable
- Flexible and adaptable to changing work requirements and work load – Essential
How to apply

Interested applicants should send the following two items, by email, to Kate Towler (kate.towler@rspb.org.uk) by **midnight BST on 5th April 2020**:

1. A letter expressing your interest for the position and your suitability for the post. Please explain why you are suited for this position against the key responsibilities, skills and experience outlined in the accompanying job description (maximum 2 pages in length).
2. Full CV.

Where possible, interviews will be in-person in Sandy, Bedfordshire, UK. Travel and interview costs will be reimbursed. For candidates based overseas, Skype or telephone interviews will be offered.

Interview date: 22 and 23 April 2020
Starting date: TBC. Most likely on or shortly after 1 July 2020
Contract end date: TBC. This role is a 15-month contract

Please note, there is little flexibility over the starting date for these positions due to the pre-deployment training requirements.

Interview dates: ____________________________
About Gough Island

Gough Island is an exceptionally remote island in the Tristan da Cunha island group in the South Atlantic Ocean, recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance, a Tristan da Cunha Nature Reserve, an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area, and an Endemic Bird Area. It is part of the United Kingdom Overseas Territory of St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha. Gough Island is the second largest island (around 6520 hectares, or 65 km²) in the Tristan da Cunha island group, volcanic, with steep mountainous terrain, and regarded as one of the most pristine temperate islands in the Southern Ocean.

Gough Island is widely considered one of the most important seabird islands in the world. The island holds virtually the entire world population of the highly threatened Tristan albatross Diomedea dabbenena and Atlantic petrel Pterodroma incerta, both of which are endemic to the Trista da Cunha group, and most of the world’s highly threatened MacGillivray’s prion Pachyptila macgillivrayi. Four other globally threatened or Near Threatened seabirds breed on the island: the world’s largest population of sooty albatrosses Phoebetria fusca; the second largest population of Atlantic yellow-nosed albatrosses Thalassarche chlororhynchos; around 20% of the global population of northern rockhopper penguins Eudyptes moseleyi; and one of the largest populations of grey petrel Procellaria cinerea. It also holds significant global populations of (non-threatened) burrowing petrels and most of the global population of the subspecies Tristan skua Catharacta antarctica hamiltoni. There are also two globally threatened land birds, the endemic Gough bunting Rowettia goughensis and the formerly endemic Gough moorhen Gallinula comeri (an introduced population of the latter persists on Tristan da Cunha Island). Approximately 80% of the global population of Subantarctic fur seal Arctocephalus tropicalis breed on the island, along with a small, and potentially decreasing number of southern elephant seals Mirounga leonina.

Gough Island itself is entirely uninhabited except for the seven South African meteorological station staff and three RSPB field assistants who work on the island in one-year rotations. This year, as part of the Gough Island Restoration Project, an additional team of five, the Aviculture team, will be on the island until January 2021.

The community of Tristan da Cunha Island are the closest community to Gough, 350km away. The RSPB has a 25-year history of conservation work with Tristan da Cunha, and almost 20 years on Gough.

The Gough Island Restoration Project

Our overarching vision of the Gough Island Restoration Programme is to save endangered species from extinction and restore the Natural Values of this World Heritage Site. This will be achieved by eradicating house mice from Gough Island and safeguarding the island from potential introductions of invasive non-native species.

The main threat to Gough’s wildlife is invasive non-native mice. The mice are thought to have arrived at Gough on sealers’ ships in the 19th Century, but it was not until the early 2000s that nest cameras first captured the mice predating on seabird chicks and eggs.

Of the 22 seabirds breeding on Gough, we know that 15 of them are affected by mouse predation. The situation is severe. We cannot stand by and allow these declines to continue, which is why the Gough Island Restoration Project was established.

The Gough Island Restoration is one of the most challenging island restorations ever undertaken. Saving two Critically Endangered birds from extinction and preventing the deaths of a huge number of seabird chicks every year, has the potential for significant, long-lasting conservation impact. This is a rare opportunity to be a part of the team that will secure the future of Gough Island and its unique biodiversity.

There is more information on the Gough Island Restoration Programme at [www.goughisland.com](http://www.goughisland.com) and see The Gough Island Restoration Facebook page or follow us on Twitter @GoughIsland for more about island life and the operation.
**Aviculture work**

During the mouse eradication operation on Gough Island, there is the risk of significant non-target poisoning of the two endemic and globally threatened landbird species – the Gough bunting (*Rowettla goughensis*) and Gough moorhen (*Gallinula comeri*). Therefore, a successful island restoration operation is dependent upon the establishment of a safeguard population of both these species.

A dedicated Aviculture Team will be deployed on the island from February 2020 to January 2021 and will maintain and safeguard populations of these two landbirds in captivity to ensure that the populations of both species remain viable and secure.

Given the unpredictable nature of the eradication work and as a member of the larger Gough Operational Team, the Senior Field Assistant will be expected to work very closely with the Aviculture Team and participate in a range of aviculture activities, that can be summarised as follows:

- Undertaking daily husbandry of the captive populations, including: food preparation, feeding, cleaning, providing veterinary care, aviary maintenance, mouse control and record-keeping.

- Following the bait drop and degradation of the pellets, the Aviculture Team will be responsible for the release of the buntings and moorhens back into the wild. The birds might have to be taken to remote locations for release. Initially a trial cohort will be monitored intensively for one-month post-release, followed by the release of the remainder of the captive flock.

- The timing for the trial releases and ultimately the full-scale release will be dependent on both the timing of the baiting operation and the persistence of brodifacoum in the environment that precludes the release of birds.

- Prior to the arrival of the SA *Agulhas II* in September 2021, the team may need to help prepare the temporary aviculture facilities and associated eradication resources for removal from the Island.

These roles will be vital in delivering the restoration of Gough Island – it is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to save species from extinction and leave a lasting conservation legacy. Are you up for the challenge?