

The Hon. Greg Hunt MP

Minister for the Environment

Macquarie Island is declared officially pest-free

Media release
7 April 2014

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I am delighted to announce the Macquarie Island Pest Eradication Programme has been completed—and after two years of extensive monitoring the island can now officially be declared pest free.

The island is the largest and most remote location where the total eradication of three invasive species has been successfully completed; ship rat, rabbit and house mouse. This success is due to the hard work and dedication of scientists, ecologists, hunters and trainers and their remarkable detector dogs.

Tonight the dogs have arrived home in Hobart signalling the completion of their task.

Before the programme started the Macquarie Island World Heritage Area was in severe danger. Ship rats were attacking and killing the chicks and eggs of endangered seabirds. Rabbits had destroyed the breeding grounds of nesting seabirds, including albatrosses, petrels and prions, and the pests had caused extensive erosion and destabilisation of the island's mountain slopes.

A landslide at Lusitania Bay resulted in the deaths of over 100 king penguins. The decline of the island's vegetation was an immediate threat to nine seabird species that used the area for breeding. It was estimated the island's rabbit population exceeded 100 000.

The Australian and Tasmanian governments have invested more than \$24 million to ensure one of the world's most fascinating places, and its inhabitants, is preserved.

After extensive planning and research, aerial baiting for the pests began in winter 2010. In 2011, to prevent seabird deaths from the consumption of poisoned rabbit carcasses, people were sent to the island to find and remove carcasses before they were eaten by the scavenging seabirds.

Teams of skilled hunters and specially trained detector dogs eliminated the remaining rabbits. The dogs were trained to locate rabbits but not to harm native animals. Three specially trained rodent detector dogs were sent to the island in March 2013.

Since August 2011 six dog handlers, four hunters plus two rodent hunters and a team leader have covered more than 90 000 km on foot looking for signs of rabbits, rats and mice.

There have been no confirmed sightings of ship rats or house mice since July 2011 and no confirmed sightings of rabbits since December 2011.

The programme has resulted in a dramatic recovery of the island's flora and fauna. Plant species that were at considerable risk of extinction and those which give Macquarie Island its distinctive character such as tussock grass, Macquarie cabbage and silver-leaf daisy are all showing a remarkable recovery.

The blue petrel is now breeding in a more widespread area on the main island and terns are now able to breed on cobblestone beaches. Grey petrels have had their most successful breeding season since recording of their populations commenced in 2000.

Most of the dogs are now enjoying a well earned retirement with some continuing to work with Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service.

I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in this important programme.

Background on Macquarie Island

Macquarie Island is roughly halfway between Tasmania and Antarctica and is recognised as having one of the greatest concentrations of seabirds in the world.

The island is renowned for the spectacular beauty of its remote and windswept landscape. Its steep escarpments, lakes, and dramatic changes in vegetation provide an outstanding spectacle of wild, natural beauty and are complemented by vast congregations of wildlife such as penguins and seals.

Macquarie Island was placed on the World Heritage List in 1997.

At almost 34 km long and 5.5 km wide, Macquarie Island is the only island in the world composed entirely of oceanic crust and rocks from deep within the earth's structure or mantle. Ten million years ago the rocky outcrops on the north of the island began their journey from 6 km below the earth's surface to the ocean's floor. Macquarie Island was born as the rock and oceanic crust was squeezed upwards in a 2.5 km journey to emerge above the sea surface nearly 700 000 years ago.

A permit system administered by the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service allows just 1000 people to visit the island each year.

Source: <http://bit.ly/1jX0X6D>

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