



*Championing UK's most special species:  
the wildlife of UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and  
Crown Dependencies (CDs)*

FACT-SHEET ON:

**Sei Whale *Balaenoptera borealis***  
**UK Overseas Territory: Falkland Islands**

Sei Whales were heavily exploited during the whaling era, resulting in its current Endangered global status. Despite its distribution around the southern oceans, the world population is estimated as only 50,000 mature individuals. Consequently, protection for key areas is vital, and the Falkland waters are one of these keys. While whaling has ceased in most regions, current threats may include vessel collisions, entanglement in fishing gear, prey reduction, contaminants, harmful algal blooms, and disturbance from shipping noise.

Sei Whales are present in Falklands waters mainly between January and May 2017. Falklands Conservation has carried out sei whale field research since late 2016, funded by the European Union BEST 2.0 Programme and others. This aims to document their distribution, ecology and population structure in order to implement evidence-based conservation and management, including the identification of suitable protected areas.

Survey work has confirmed the importance of the Berkeley Sound (East Falkland) candidate Key Biodiversity Area (cKBA), indicating that the KBA qualifies for full status for Sei Whales. The study showed that the whales occur in minimum water depths of around 15 m but are otherwise seen both very close to shore and out in deeper, open waters with their spatial distributions varying between surveys and months. Single animals and groups of 2 to 7 individuals were recorded, with larger foraging aggregations forming in late January and early February.

Sei whales appear to use the Berkeley Sound cKBA primarily as a feeding area; particularly on Lobster Krill *Munida gregaria*. The movements of individual whales were monitored, using photo-identification, finding that some animals stayed in the cKBA for only a day while others remained for several weeks. Almost all individuals were covered in small scars from cookie-cutter shark bites, confirming that they had travelled to subtropical waters in previous years. Additionally, at least one whale had diatom films on its body indicative of time spent in Antarctica.

The fieldwork has highlighted the significance of Berkeley Sound for endangered Sei Whales, emphasising the importance of taking this species into account when considering any future development of human activities in the region.



*Above: Sei Whales, Falkland Islands.*

*Below: Two Sei Whales in Berkeley Sound, Falkland Islands.*

*Bottom: Close up of a Sei Whale's dorsal fin with a distinctive notch in it, the sort of feature allowing identification of individuals.*

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