

**Citation read at the awards presentation ceremony on 1 November 2016**

### **The ZSL Conservationist of the Year Award is presented to Tony Martin**

Tony spent many years as a cetacean biologist with the Sea Mammal Research Unit before moving to the British Antarctic Survey to lead investigations into the Southern Ocean food web. In 2010 he took up a Chair in Animal Conservation at Dundee University and a secondment to the South Georgia Heritage Trust, where for the past six years he has been Director of the South Georgia Habitat Restoration Project.

In this role, Tony was tasked with overseeing the world's most ambitious invasive-rodent eradication, in order to reverse the devastation caused by rats that arrived on South Georgia on whaling and sealing vessels. Over the past two centuries rats have preyed on the island's ground-nesting seabirds, threatening this globally important seabird sanctuary, which is home to 31 breeding species, including petrels, prions, albatrosses, terns, penguins, pintails and the endemic South Georgia pipit.

The project was undertaken in three phases. The trial phase covered 128 km<sup>2</sup> on the central north coast and was successfully completed in March 2011. The evidence so far indicates that this part of South Georgia is now rat free. The second, much larger phase of fieldwork was completed in May 2013, when a further 580 km<sup>2</sup> in the north and east of the island was baited. In March 2015, after three field seasons and a thousand helicopter flying hours, the final bait of the South Georgia Habitat Restoration Project was laid.

The logistical challenges were huge because the island is remote and inhospitable, and the weather is highly variable at best, treacherous at worst. Tony planned meticulously: he purchased helicopters, researched and sourced the most effective bait, chartered an ice-breaking vessel from the British Antarctic Survey, and procured vast amounts of equipment and supplies. Most importantly, Tony brought together a group of specialists with expertise in rodent eradication, GIS and data management, meteorology, polar logistics, helicopter aviation and maintenance. We understand that these experts became known as "Team Rat".

The conservation gains of the Restoration Project are enormous. Successful eradication of rodents will transform South Georgia's ecology and allow an estimated 100 million seabirds to recolonise the island. Over the past year there has been exciting signs of early wildlife recovery. In January 2015 the first South Georgia pipit nest was discovered in an area cleared in phase two of the Habitat Restoration Project. As the season continued, large numbers of pipits and Wilson's storm petrels were observed around King Edward Point. The unprecedented number of birds seen suggests that the petrels are already exploring local scree slopes for future nesting opportunities.

The project has led to developments in the best practice for invasive-rodent eradications and Tony's ideas are already being adopted by other eradication projects around the world. Crucially, the project challenges the assumption that large-scale eradications can only be tackled by governments. Global capacity to remove invasive species will be greatly enhanced if more NGOs are encouraged to take up the challenge and this project really does show what can be achieved by a small NGO with ambition, planning and strong leadership.

This award recognises Tony's enormous contribution, his determination and his efforts to inspire others to take on similar challenges all over the globe.