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Nature's Benefits: Natural Capital in
the South Atlantic

12 March 2019



Introduction to St. Helena

Touch down or drop anchor! This is how one visitor explained to me the aircraft landing at our airport last Saturday. He experienced a hard landing and described it as if the anchor of a ship was being lowered. Either way welcome to St Helena Island, my humble abode or home to some 4500 + inhabitants better known as Saints and not forgetting 1 of our indescribable mammals Johnathan the tortoise. If Johnathan could talk or write a story I would have entrusted him to do this introduction to St. Helena Island for me. I'm sure he would have some very good stories that he would ramble on about and beneath his shell would be many more untold stories. As islanders we have become accustomed to just having him around, to others he has become an admirable long living legend who can claim to know more of our island's history than anyone alive today. Gone are the days when he would escape his paddock and be found wondering on the outskirts of the surrounding forest, but at least he is still amongst us and continue to be the centre of attraction for many a visitor to our island. For those of you who haven't seen him then please take this opportunity to do so as he is the essence of what all St Helena is and have to offer.

An introduction to St Helena Island should be rather easy to compose but with so much to offer it became a daunting task to write about one and not the other. Our natural beauty and our historic monuments and buildings can easily be described as our valued treasures. They have created our past and although recognizing them is made easy by their distinct facade caused by the south easterly trade winds that have swept across their faces it is difficult to say which one has a more sense of dignity amongst the others.

Our natural beauty has so much to offer and to witness four seasons in one day on an island only 47 square miles is in itself something to behold. From the rising hillsides and mountains to the winding roads that meander throughout the island each one is on course of allowing you to see the island in its own beauty that only you will be able to witness and remember in its own right.

Our very own indigenous Wirebird has played its part in evolving our island and as it spread its wings to migrate from one part of the island to a new habitat so to do we as humans spread our knowledge and learn from others as we embark on a new chapter in the History of our island. The Wirebird has taught us lessons of its own that to survive you can't stand still.

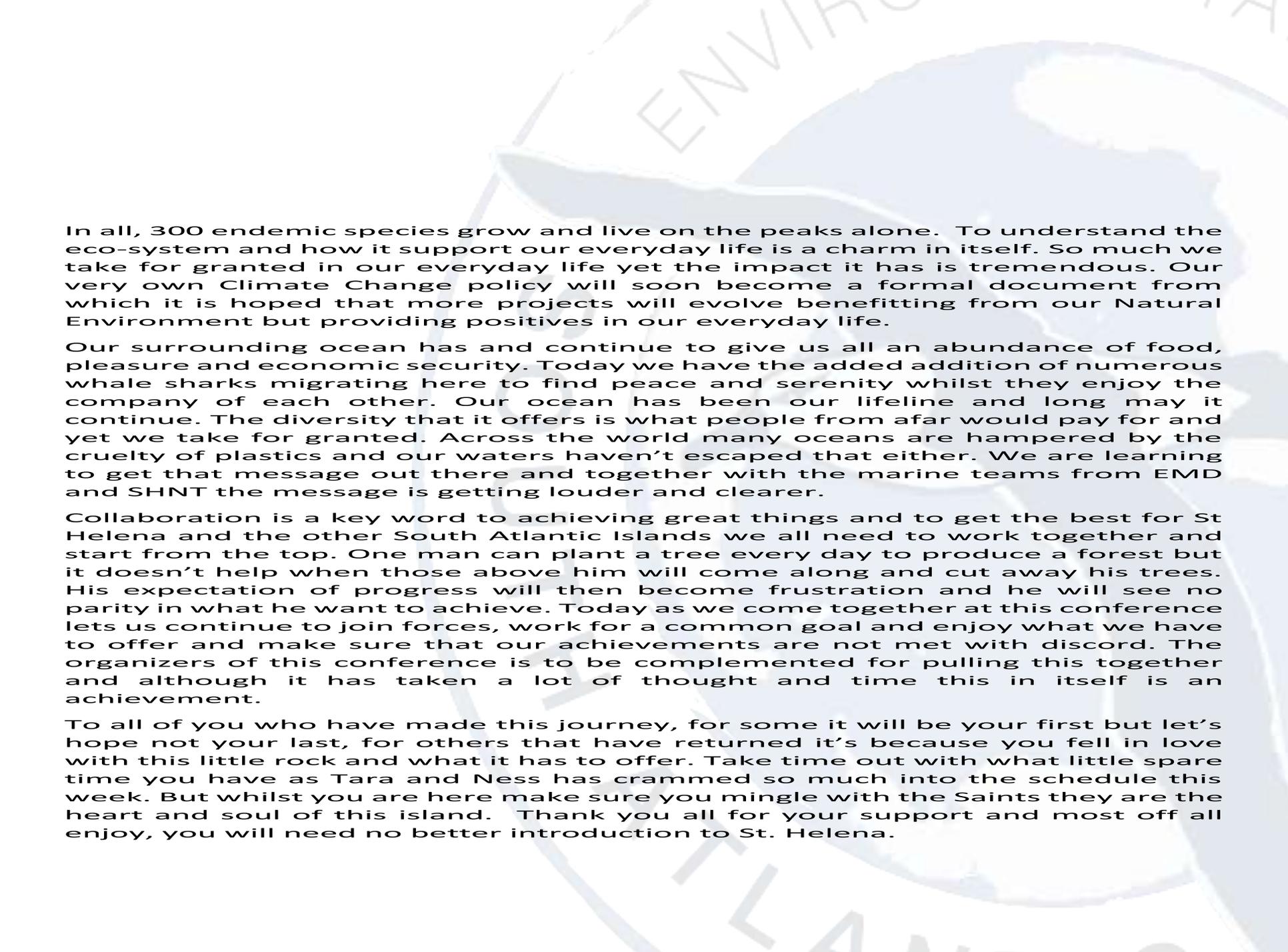


Something Saints have learned a lot about and we continued to migrate to find greener pastures or to support ourselves in building our homes and taking steps to make a better life for ourselves when we eventually return to the Island. Saints has become known for their skillset and being able to put their hands to many a job. I learned that from the time you can master one job it is always great to learn another. It has become one of our natural wonders being jack of all trades and masters of none. Our Saints have become our biggest asset in more ways than one.

For so long we have been relying on the ships to get us from A to B, how times changed when we became in receipt of our own airport. For years many dreamt of having an airport on the island and muscled with the idea. For far too long we have bellowed for a better means of transport to get us from A to B. Today we have our airport and although not operating to its full potential we are fulfilling part of our dreams. In 2014 as an employee of Basil Read, excavation and construction works was well on its way and for one day alone, a 24 hour shift a total of 72,000 gallons of diesel fuel was dispensed to vehicles and equipment operating at the construction site. No one has ever mentioned the fuel used in constructing the airport but providing that commodity was just as important as moving the tonnes of material it took to fill in Dry Gut. In total 8.7 million gallons of fuel was imported for the construction phase alone.

Today we have a magnificent feat before us and although we have encountered problems with wind shear and low cloud base aircraft are landing here and we able to see our own saints together with other visitors and tourist embark and disembark. Some of us have witness family members who have been away for numerous years now take advantage of the time frame away from their adopted homes to visit their loved ones here. It is also a pleasure to see so many people gathered from different corners of the world here today in what is now the second conference to be held on St. Helena. A few years ago this would have been unheard off. The wheels are turning, no matter how slow some achievements has already been made and are now the foundations of what is to come.

Just a few weeks ago two members of the RSPB gave a presentation on Management Planning for Diana's Peak National Park, especially addressing biodiversity, climate change and water security. The aim is to have one project with all stakeholders working together and implementing a 20 year plan for the future of the peaks and identifying funding to support this project.



In all, 300 endemic species grow and live on the peaks alone. To understand the eco-system and how it support our everyday life is a charm in itself. So much we take for granted in our everyday life yet the impact it has is tremendous. Our very own Climate Change policy will soon become a formal document from which it is hoped that more projects will evolve benefitting from our Natural Environment but providing positives in our everyday life.

Our surrounding ocean has and continue to give us all an abundance of food, pleasure and economic security. Today we have the added addition of numerous whale sharks migrating here to find peace and serenity whilst they enjoy the company of each other. Our ocean has been our lifeline and long may it continue. The diversity that it offers is what people from afar would pay for and yet we take for granted. Across the world many oceans are hampered by the cruelty of plastics and our waters haven't escaped that either. We are learning to get that message out there and together with the marine teams from EMD and SHNT the message is getting louder and clearer.

Collaboration is a key word to achieving great things and to get the best for St Helena and the other South Atlantic Islands we all need to work together and start from the top. One man can plant a tree every day to produce a forest but it doesn't help when those above him will come along and cut away his trees. His expectation of progress will then become frustration and he will see no parity in what he want to achieve. Today as we come together at this conference lets us continue to join forces, work for a common goal and enjoy what we have to offer and make sure that our achievements are not met with discord. The organizers of this conference is to be complemented for pulling this together and although it has taken a lot of thought and time this in itself is an achievement.

To all of you who have made this journey, for some it will be your first but let's hope not your last, for others that have returned it's because you fell in love with this little rock and what it has to offer. Take time out with what little spare time you have as Tara and Ness has crammed so much into the schedule this week. But whilst you are here make sure you mingle with the Saints they are the heart and soul of this island. Thank you all for your support and most off all enjoy, you will need no better introduction to St. Helena.

Thank you to our funders



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