

D

(Formerly)

D/11/59

D/11/59

INTRODUCTION OF
UPLAND GEESE INTO SOUTH
GEORGIA

CONNECTED FILES.

NUMBER

D/14/59

~~207~~
1

661
King Edward Point,
South Georgia.
3rd May, 1959.

From The Administrative Officer,
South Georgia,
To The Colonial Secretary,
Port Stanley



Upland Geese

~~2~~ 3.

I enclose herewith a memo; by Mr Bonner on the introduction of Upland Geese to South ~~Georgia~~. Georgia. As will be observed he is against it.

F. Matthews
Administrative Officer,
South Georgia.

Reply at ⁵~~2~~

A.C.S

~~207~~ 2

History may prove me only too wrong - but I cannot really get very worked up about this. Perhaps, however, it would be advisable to tell the A.O. that in view of Mr Bonner's recommendation no steps should be taken for the time being to introduce any more into the island.

F. Matthews
18.5.59

~~207~~
3

THE INTRODUCTION OF UPLAND GEESE INTO SOUTH GEORGIA

Early in 1958 a number of Upland Geese, Chloëphaga picta, were liberated in Cumberland Bay in South Georgia. I should like to offer my views on this introduction.

The history of the introduction of wild animals into exotic regions is not encouraging. One has only to think of the rabbit in Australia, the red deer in New Zealand and the grey squirrel in the United Kingdom to recall the vast sums of money spent in trying first to eradicate then control these pests. The two most damaging mammalian pests in England, the brown rat and the rabbit, are both introductions. The list of such unwelcome foreigners is all too extensive. Introductions of birds have been made much more rarely as, apart from game birds such as the French partridge, there has been little incentive to add to the avian fauna. However, the present campaign against the house sparrow in China and the position of the same species in the U.S.A. demonstrates that the same situation can occur.

It is extremely difficult to think of successful introductions apart from fish and certain insect predators introduced under the most rigorously controlled biological conditions. I do not know of one mammalian introduction that has been positively beneficial though a number of neutral ones, e.g. the South Georgia reindeer, come to mind.

From the point of view of its terrestrial fauna and flora South Georgia is absolutely unique. It presents a fascinating field laboratory for the study of isolated populations almost entirely exempt from Man's influence. For this reason, as well as aesthetic ones, it is undesirable to upset the natural balance of species on the island unless positively beneficial results can be expected.

The introduction of the upland goose will provide no such benefits. I understand the bird is too easy to shoot to offer good sport and as South Georgia already abounds in birds for the pot it is unlikely to be of much value for food except very locally around the whaling stations. On the other hand, should the geese become established it appears very likely that in the absence of any natural predators their numbers will increase rapidly and the introduction will spread over the whole island. Their feeding habits will alter the character of the vegetation and it is probably that the only two species of bird peculiar to South Georgia, the teal, Anas georgica, and the pipit, Anthus antarcticus, will suffer as both species are dependent on tussac for breeding. It is not maintained, of course, that such results will be rapid but I am certain that if the geese become established a drastic alteration in the flora will take place.

Control of the geese would be almost impossible as, one established on the south-west coast of the island they would be unapproachable and it is that very region, the only part of South Georgia not infested by the brown rat, that is the headquarters of the two species, the teal and the pipit, possibly

threatened by the geese.

The fact that a previous introduction of upland geese into South Georgia proved innocuous is not relevant as there is no evidence that these birds ever increased sufficiently to form a thriving colony capable of expansion but instead remained a small group confined to West Cumberland Bay.

I therefore recommend that further introduction of upland geese (or other alien species) be prohibited until a sufficient investigation has been made into the ecological effect they are likely to have on South Georgia and that steps be taken to ensure that the present introduced specimens are prevented from spreading over the whole island.

I have taken the opportunity of consulting Mr. W.L.N. Tickell, B.Sc., an ornithologist of some experience, on this matter and he is in full agreement with my views.

W. Nigel Bonner.

W. Nigel Bonner, B.Sc.

13th March 1959

D/12/51.

211 5
21st May, 59.

To: The Administrative Officer,

From: Acting Colonial Secretary.

SOUTH GEORGIA.

Upland Geese.

207 I am directed to refer to your Memorandum No. 661 of the 3rd May, 1959, and to inform you that in view of Mr. Bonner's recommendations no steps should be taken for the time being to introduce any more Upland Geese into South Georgia.

(Sgd.) *J Brand*
~~D. P. Morrison.~~

for ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY.

DRM/EH

h 21/59