

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Malvern Group

Thursday 7th September 2017

Margaret Vernon: Islands of the South Atlantic

Margaret, who is Vice-Chairman of the WWT Malvern Group, has made several trips to the South Atlantic and visited many of the islands there. In 2013 she gave a talk on the Falkland Islands and this time she focussed on Ascension Island, St Helena and the coast of Antarctica. We were given a fascinating insight into life on the islands, both for humans and wildlife, in these remote and unforgiving places.

Ascension Island is near the equator; it is hot, barren, volcanic and jagged. The RAF base is not far from the cloud forest on Green Mountain, where fairy terns nest and amaryllis plants grow wild. Noddies, frigate birds and boobies are plentiful, and the turtles which nest on the beach are now a protected species. A little further south is St Helena, where the cliffs rise straight out of the sea and there are very few access points. Bougainvillea, hibiscus and morning glory flowers ornament the roadsides, which are steep and treacherous. The island's most famous resident is Jonathan, the tortoise estimated to be nearly 200 years old. Finally Margaret described the wildlife of Antarctica, including albatrosses, giant and snow petrels, five species of penguin and elephant seals. Thank goodness the whaling has now stopped in that area and the giants of our seas are slowly recovering in numbers.

