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Site management of Elephant Point, Livingston Island, South Shetland Islands

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Information Paper submitted by Spain, the United Kingdom, Portugal and IAATO

Summary

Elephant Point (Livingston Island, South Shetland Islands, Antarctica) is an area visited increasingly by tourists and scientists. The ice-free ground contains, in a very small area (approx. 1 km²), high ecological values and important historical sites. The increasing number of visits and the apparent fragility of the ecosystem indicates that further management is needed to preserve the values of the area. Following a recent site visit, of the different protection and management tools available, the development of Site Guidelines for Visitors is proposed as the most practical approach for this area.

Background

Elephant Point is an ice-free area of 1.16 km² located to the south of Rotch Dome and 1.2 km southeast of ASPA 126 Byers Peninsula, Livingston Island. Despite its small size, Elephant Point contains outstanding values including six geo-ecological environments, five well-preserved archaeological sites that were used by sealers and whalers during the nineteenth century and a wide distribution of diverse fauna and flora. Currently, Elephant Point receives only moderate numbers of tourist landing. However, visitor numbers have shown a general increase since 2012-13 (see Table 1), and it is likely that numbers may increase further in the future.

Austral season	No. vessel calls	No. visitor landings
2018-2019	No data	No data
2017-2018	8	988
2016-2017	17	2191
2015-2016	8	980
2014-2015	4	374
2013-2014	1	101
2012-2013	0	0

Table 1. Number of IAATO vessel calls and tourist visitor landings at Elephant Point between 2012-13 and 2018-19. No landings were recorded in the period 2003-2004 to 2012-2013. The data was provided by IAATO under Open Database Licensing (ODbL), the terms of which are described at: <http://opendatacommons.org/licenses/odbl/1.0/>.

At CEP XX, Portugal, Brazil, Spain and the United Kingdom presented ATCM XL IP23, *Historical and geo-ecological values of Elephant Point, Livingston Island, South Shetland Islands*, which raised concerns regarding the management of Elephant Point. Proposed management options included designation of the area as an ASPA, or the incorporation of Elephant Point into ASPA 126 Byers Peninsula, Livingston Island.

New developments

An environmental management visit was undertaken by Spain during the 2018/19 summer season, and the vulnerability of the area reassessed. Based on this analysis, it is proposed that general site visitation should

continue, but with some restrictions on levels of visitation and the extent of the area available for visitor access.

Specific closed areas could include:

- The moraine area where several southern giant petrels nest; and
- The glacier front, which contains very soft and potentially dangerous ground.

Conclusion

Elephant Point contains a rich biodiversity and is of high geomorphological and historical significance. Following a site visit by Spain in 2018/19, it was concluded that use of further management tools may be appropriate to avoid disturbance to the ecosystem and potential risks to tourist visitors. Spain, the United Kingdom, IAATO and Portugal propose the development of Site Guidelines for Visitors for Elephant Point for presentation at ATCM XLIII and invite interested Parties to participate in this work.