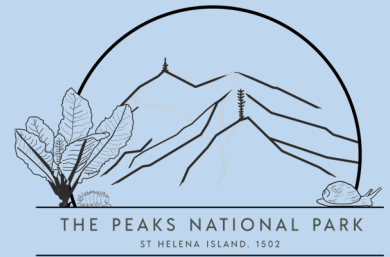


St Helena Cloud Forest Project update: July - September 2023

What is the St Helena Cloud Forest Project?

The St Helena Cloud Forest Project is a highly collaborative multi-year project working to implement the Peaks Management Plan for St Helena's 'Peaks National Park'; a globally significant area for biodiversity which is also vital for St Helena's long-term water security. Key actions across the first four years of the project include monitoring and research to inform and secure the island's water security and climate change adaptation efforts; improving, restoring and creating cloud forest habitat to increase areas for mist capture and ensure the conservation of associated species; and supporting the sustainable development of St Helena by developing opportunities through ecotourism, education, sustainable land use and conservation training.



What happened under each pillar?

Biodiversity

- In addition to ongoing maintenance of cloud forest restoration sites, which has been limited by poor weather throughout the winter season, the SHG Peaks teams focussed on contingency tasks away from the restricted areas of the cloud forest, to avoid further spread of pathogens. These included:
 - ◇ Clearance of 250m of pheasant tail fern along path buffer zone at Halley's Mount
 - ◇ Clearance of invasive species at new living gene bank sites at Girlings
 - ◇ Infrastructure maintenance and repair at EMD's endemic nursery
 - ◇ Supporting the EMD endemic nursery with cleaning and processing seed for long-term storage
- At Scotland, deep cleaning of the nurseries continued and a propagation plan for cloud forest species was agreed and is now being delivered. Bulk soil sterilisation to support production of pathogen free plants is also being undertaken. In addition:
 - ◇ Renovation of two existing shade houses and planning for two new shade houses is in progress.
 - ◇ Seed collection of Peaks species for storage and propagation, and fern micro-propagation activities, are on-going
- At the St Helena National Trust the focus has been on data analysis and report drafting following the conclusion of the annual invertebrate monitoring and Diana's Peak Grass moth monitoring. Scoping continued for Golden Sail Spider monitoring sites, as well as suitable freshwater invertebrate monitoring sites. The invasive invertebrate team focused on invasive monitoring and control trials for ants and wasps.



Clearance works at Girlings



Golden Sail Spider © R. Key

Water security and climate change

- Monthly climate data from the eight automatic weather stations and four pairs of mist and rain gauges was collected. Water level and flow monitoring continued. Six soil temperature probes installed at various points around the Peaks National Park, close to existing weather and mist monitoring equipment.
 - ◇ Real-time data from the automatic weather stations can be accessed via: <https://wow.metoffice.gov.uk/> (pan to St Helena).
- Planning and preparation was completed for the international water research team's arrival in Q3 and for an associated education outreach day around the water pillar.
- Connect Saint Helena's Water Resources Monitoring Technician completed training on use of the Terrameter for conducting geophysical surveys, and for analysis of the data.

Socio-economic

- The Cloud Forest Primary Education Pack was launched at the Museum on 16 August, with lots of fun activities and attended by almost 60 members of the community.
- The St Helena Research Institute Co-ordinator completed a capacity building and knowledge sharing trip, visiting key partners in the UK including the RSPB, the Natural History Museum, CABI, and the British Society for Plant Pathology.
- The St Helena National Trust's Education & Outreach Officer also started a UK exposure visit to connect with partners and share ideas on outreach and education, from planning to delivery of school, family and volunteer programs, fundraising, citizen science and more.
- The St Helena National Trust Bug Club visited SHG's Biosecurity team and learned about the importance of biosecurity for the cloud forest.
- Work continued on drafting resources for the secondary education pack on St Helena's cloud forest.



CF Primary Education Pack launch

St Helena Cloud Forest Project update: July - September 2023

Update on pathogens

- The St Helena Government prohibited public access to critical areas of the Peaks National Park including the cloud forest from 11 April until December 2023 to help to prevent the further spread of the pathogens.
- Pathogen testing and monitoring continues, and research and mitigation measures such as soil sterilisation are on-going. Some Cloud Forest Project priority conservation works and infrastructure maintenance have been allowed access to continue. A protocol has also been drafted covering enhanced phytosanitary procedures for the EMD endemic nurseries. A public information session was also held on 5th July.
- SHG will be reviewing the closure and are expected to make a decision in November regarding access beyond December 2023.

What's coming up October to December 2023?

- Propagation of cloud forest species for pathogen trials, living gene banks and restoration work, as well as ongoing fern micro-propagation.
- Maintenance of restored habitat, invasive clearance works, and infrastructure repairs will continue on the Peaks, at living gene banks and the Scotland nursery.
- Completion of exposure visit for St Helena National Trust's Education Officer.
- Completion of invertebrate survey reports
- Aerial mapping of cloud forest habitat to assess tree health, pathogen spread and habitat expansion.
- Seasonal fieldwork and capacity-building on island with the water research team, and the Species Recovery Trust.
- Visioning workshop with RSPB to commence planning for phase 2 of the Cloud Forest Project post-2025.

Project Outreach

- A story map for the project has been published: <https://rb.gy/d5uti>.
- The project's Year 2 annual report has been produced (https://www.sthelenatourism.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CFP_Y2-AnnualReport_single.pdf) along with a 2-page 'Key Achievements' document: https://www.sthelenatourism.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CFP_Achievements-Y2.pdf
- The project featured in an RSPB Conservation Action blog: Sharing knowledge across the waves <https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/actionfornature/posts/sharing-knowledge-across-the-waves-how-knowledge-exchange-visits-are-helping-the-st-helena-cloud-forest-project-to-protect-rare-and-special-species>
- The cloud forest new spider species story was picked up by The Guardian [Wolf spider discovered on St Helena already endangered | Spiders | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/nature/2023/oct/03/st-helena-spider-species), this also led to a huge amount of engagement within the science community (some examples below):
 - ◊ [As It Happens with Nil Köksal, Chris Howden | Live Radio | CBC Listen](#)
 - ◊ [Three New Wolf Spiders with Danni Sherwood by New Species \(spotify.com\)](#)
- Spider Research on St Helena: Past, Present and Future, published in The Wirebird THE JOURNAL OF THE FRIENDS OF ST HELENA number 52 2023: ([PDF Spider research on St Helena: past, present and future \(researchgate.net\)](#))
- RSPB's Annual Report 2022/23 was published in September with a mention of the CFP on page 44: [332-0273-22-23-annual-report-22-23_interactive.pdf \(rspb.org.uk\)](https://www.rspb.org.uk/annual-report-2022-23-annual-report-22-23-interactive.pdf)
- The project continues to be promoted on social media, see our Twitter and Facebook links below.

- Watch the Cloud Forest project films on YouTube:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| o Biodiversity | https://youtu.be/8xB9VxD1PjY |
| o Water Security | https://youtu.be/-tMwOD1eKn0 |
| o Socio-Economic | https://youtu.be/oL0dEOLj2Eo |
| o Partners Involved | https://youtu.be/C5 -lhJd6OA |
| o Capacity-Building | https://youtu.be/ucpOid9noF0 |
| o Biosecurity | https://youtu.be/IWFDnBHLCAM |



- Follow us online:

- ◊ Facebook: [St Helena Peaks National Park](#)
- ◊ Twitter: [StHelenaPeaksNP](#)
- ◊ Website: <https://www.sthelenatourism.com/st-helenas-cloud-forest-project/>

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