



Appeal to Help Rebuild the Juan Fernández Islands, Chile



Peter Hodum, Co-Director, Juan Fernández Islands Conservancy, a program of Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge

In 2001, my colleague Dr. Erin Hagen and I began what we hoped would be a long-term conservation project in the Juan Fernández Islands, Chile. Nearly ten years later, we now have a well-established program, the Juan Fernández Islands Conservancy, that focuses on applied ecological research and community-based conservation, education and capacity-building. Our research approach has been to use applied ecology to understand trends of, and threats to, the threatened land- and seabird communities of the archipelago, including satellite tracking of pink-footed shearwaters to better understand at-sea threats on their foraging grounds and migratory routes. We are now also working on invasive plant control and habitat restoration in critically endangered native forest systems.

A critical part of our work on the islands has involved community outreach, education and capacity-building. We strongly believe in training island residents in conservation and restoration work, with all of our projects having active involvement by islanders. Over the years, this strong engagement with the local community has resulted in extremely close professional and personal relationships. The community has welcomed us not just as conservation biologists and colleagues, but also as friends.

Thus, the tsunami that struck the Juan Fernández Islands after the massive earthquake in Chile on 27 February 2010 has affected us personally. In fact, Erin was actually on the principal island of Robinson Crusoe when the tsunami hit. Thankfully, she was okay but the small community lost 16 people, including five children, all of whom we knew well. In addition to the human tragedy, the town was devastated by the impact of the waves. The entire coastal zone of the single town on the island was erased. The school, pre-school, community/cultural center, gymnasium, municipal offices, most shops, many hostels and a number of homes disappeared. Fishing is the principal economic driver for the town and the fishing community suffered serious losses, with their offices, boat shop, gear storage sheds and nearly one quarter of the small artisanal fleet of boats being destroyed.

In the short-term, the island community is being well taken care of by the Chilean government. However, the town is going to need long-term assistance to help rebuild and recover. We have established a charitable fund through our non-profit organization, Oikonos Ecosystem Knowledge, to raise money to help with the recovery. 100% of all donations will go directly to community rebuilding efforts. Because of

our long-term relationships with the island community, we are in a unique position to direct resources to projects that the community considers to be of highest priority and of greatest benefit.

If you are interested in learning more, please visit: www.helpjuanfernandezislands.org and if you have any questions about the fund or our work in the islands, please contact Peter Hodum: peter@oikonos.org



Photo by Peter Hodum

Cristian Lopez, islander and on-island co-coordinator for Juan Fernández Islands Conservancy, using an infra-red camera probe to show children from the local community a pink-footed shearwater breeding burrow, Robinson Crusoe Island, Juan Fernández Islands.

