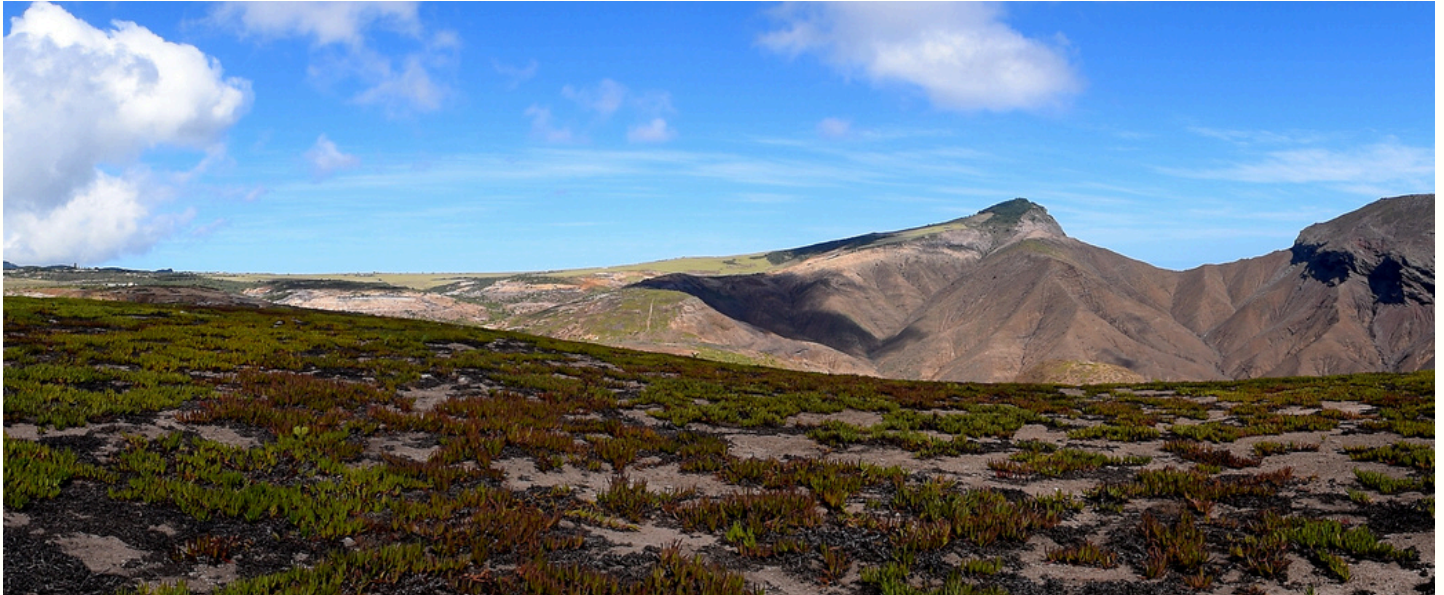


SEPTEMBER 2024

# ST HELENA AMBASSADOR



## Editorial

*Katelyn Benjamin (SHG New Communications Officer) started the role on 09 September and is responsible for all internal Comms including the Intranet, weekly Public Service Update and The Ambassador*

Welcome to the September 2024 edition of the St Helena Ambassador!

This issue spotlights the Health Promotion team's impressive work in tackling public health challenges through events and social media. From high blood pressure to smoking risks, their commitment to healthier lifestyles shines.

In addition, St Helena Tourism proudly celebrated the achievements of over 200 participants in a comprehensive hospitality training program designed to revive visitor numbers to their pre-pandemic levels. In partnership with NQtac (hotel school and hospitality training), this initiative emphasised essential skills such as customer service, leadership, hospitality operations, and brand awareness, drawing interest from over 400 local business registrations.

Finally, a 'hidden gem' thrives in the cloud forests of St Helena. Dr. Cassandra Bradshaw's research on St Helena's Endemic Grass indicates notable genetic diversity, potentially marking it as a distinct species.

If you'd like to contribute a story to the St Helena Ambassador or have any suggestions on what you'd like to see included, please feel free to contact us by telephone on 22470 or via email through [katelyn.benjamin@sainthelena.gov.sh](mailto:katelyn.benjamin@sainthelena.gov.sh).

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# Health Promotion Team Makes Significant Impact With Year-Long Health Campaigns

The Health Promotion team has been instrumental in raising awareness of critical health issues on St Helena this year. Through a series of events and social media campaigns, the team has tackled a range of health concerns, including hypertension (High Blood Pressure), tobacco use, diabetes, blood donation, childhood obesity, and alcohol consumption.

The Community Nursing and Health Promotion teams hosted a stall at the Canister, Jamestown on Friday 17 May 2024 to raise awareness about World Hypertension Day. The event emphasised the link between hypertension and cardiovascular disease, offering blood pressure checks and smoking cessation advice to the community.

On 14 June, a collaborative effort between the Pathology Lab and the Health Promotion team culminated in a successful blood drive within the community. This vital initiative not only bolstered the island's blood supply but also identified individuals with blood types crucial for transfusions.



The annual National Childhood Obesity Week, observed from 1 to 7 July, highlighted the issue of childhood obesity, and a collaborative 'Healthy Eating' workshop with the 0-19 Health Service team equipped Year 6 students at St Paul's Primary and their parents with practical knowledge for healthier lifestyles. Positive feedback from parents and the school nurse, Cheryl Bedwell, underscored the workshop's success.

From World Hypertension Day to Alcohol Awareness Week, the Health Promotion team has consistently educated the public and promoted healthy lifestyles. The team is committed to evaluating the 'Healthy Eating' workshop's impact and expanding this initiative to other schools.

By addressing a wide range of health issues, the Health Promotion team has made significant strides in improving the overall well-being of the St Helena community. The team extends its gratitude to everyone who participated in these events and campaigns.



# St Helena Tourism Awards Hospitality Certificates To Over 200 Participants

On Friday 23 August 2024, St Helena Tourism awarded certificates to over 200 participants who successfully completed courses in the - Hospitality training programme. The training, conducted in partnership with NQtac hotel school and hospitality training , was part of the second year of the Tourism Development Programme (TDP2).

The TDP aims to increase visitor numbers to pre-pandemic levels by March 2025, expand the tourism workforce, and improve visitor service. Hospitality training is a crucial component of achieving this goal. By providing participants with the necessary skills and knowledge, the programme aims to ensure that visitors receive exceptional service and are more likely to return. This year's training included a variety of courses, such as customer service, leadership management, train the trainer, hospitality operations, food and beverage upselling, reservation and sales, food hygiene, cultural awareness and brand awareness. The brand awareness course focused on promoting St Helena as a destination and encouraging businesses to work together to enhance the island's tourism offerings.



Over 400 individuals registered for the training, demonstrating strong demand for these programmes. Participants included representatives from various businesses, including St Helena Airport, Solomons, Rose & Crown, SHG, SHAPE, accommodation owners, tour guides, restaurants, and food vendors. In his remarks Portfolio Director of Economic Development Damian Burns, emphasised the importance of hospitality in the island's tourism industry. He commented:

*"The way visitors are treated during their stay can significantly impact their overall experience and their likelihood of returning. By investing in hospitality training, we are investing in the future of St Helena's tourism sector.*

*I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the tourism team for their hard work in organising this training and for their ongoing commitment to representing and promoting St Helena's tourism industry. I also wish to extend my thanks and appreciation to Irene Smith and Lisa Gibbs from NQtac and the participating businesses for their invaluable contributions and unwavering support."*



# A Genetic Discovery: New Insights into St Helena's Endemic Grass

*Tucked away in the misty peaks of Diana's Peak National Park is a rare species of sedge that is telling us an incredible story.*

This is not just any grass. The Diana's Peak Grass (*Carex diana*) is a rare sedge that is a tough little survivor, living only in the island's cloud forests. Populations in the wild are only found at the Peaks, the ridge between High Peak and the Depot at Blue Hill, and on Longwood Barn which provides essential weed smothering ground cover and supports other rare creatures, like the Diana's Peak grass moth. But recently, scientists have carried out studies that uncovered a secret hidden in its genes.

## So, what's the big deal?

Through the first-ever genetic study of this rare sedge, Researcher Cassandra Bradshaw (Ph.D.) of the Department of Botany and Biodiversity Research Centre, University of British Columbia in Canada, supported by a team of researchers including Diana Percy, Quentin Cronk, and St Helena conservationist, Vanessa Thomas-Williams, made a surprising discovery. Despite St Helena's small size, the Diana's Peak Grass is more genetically diverse than anyone expected. The population on Longwood Barn might be so genetically different, it could be its own species altogether.



Scientists believe that the grass's ancestors may have arrived on the island millions of years ago, possibly carried by birds traveling from South Africa or even Australia. Imagine a bird flying thousands of miles across oceans, carrying the seeds of life to our little island. The trade winds and the wild "Roaring Forties" could have helped it along the way, connecting St Helena with far-off lands.

## Why does this matter to you?

This discovery isn't just about grass. It's about how life on St Helena has evolved over millions of years, how connected we are to the rest of the world, and how fragile these connections can be. As we continue to restore the island's unique cloud forest, this humble grass holds the key to a healthier environment for future generations—protecting not only the landscape but also the rare creatures and plants that call this place home.

## What's next?

Scientists are still working to understand exactly how many different species of *Carex* grass might exist here on St Helena. As the research continues, we're learning more about the incredible biodiversity that makes our island so special. This discovery is just the beginning.

Further updates will be provided as we uncover the fascinating secrets of the cloud forest, right here on St Helena.

The researchers thank Cassandra Bradshaw, Vanessa Thomas-Williams, Quentin Cronk, Diana Percy, Alan Gray, and Rebecca Cairns-Wicks for their contributions to this study. If you are interested in more information about this important study, the full scientific paper can be downloaded at <https://cdnsiencepub.com/doi/full/10.1139/cjb-2023-0147>.

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