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Tales of the Desolation Islands

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Abstract: French southern archipelago of Kerguelen is one of the most remote places of the world. As biogeography would have it, these islands host a remarkable yet reduced biodiversity, long sheltered from human activities by distance. But as the “desolation” tag hints, the islands also harbour a rich history of failed ventures by people from many countries, which have left marks on the islands and their natural wealth. Part of these marks are the numerous willingly or non-willingly introduced taxa. Some of them thrived, often at the expense of the native species. The introduction of salmonid species led to various outcomes, since among 8 introduced taxa, 5 remain, and one of them is currently invading the whole archipelago.

The story that we will follow together tells about how and why were these fish introduced, what can explain their contrasted fates, and what our long-term monitoring has taught us so far. We will focus on some observed patterns, experiments and results, and the next questions in line. But we will also get a glimpse at how science is done in Kerguelen, at the everyday life in these wonderous landscapes, at our own failures and successes. All these little bits that make practicing science in the far corners of the map both a challenge and its own reward.