

Gough



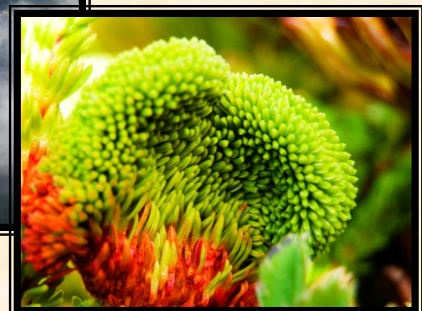
Index:

1. Breathtaking
2. About Island Fears
3. The Goff's Part 2
4. From the Lab
5. Tafelkop
6. Summer's gone
7. Up till now
8. Weather stats

Breathtaking

Waking up at 7 in the morning to go to Gonydale is not one of my best ideas. It's about a two and a half hour walk and fall. When u stop and rest for a bit u see a moment of beauty, the sun is just right the wind non existent. The calls of Skuas, Petrels and other bird life on the Island makes it worth it in the end of the day. The reason of going to Gonydale was to help Karen and Sylvain with monitoring of the Tristan Albatross. We split into two teams, I helped Sylvain. We marked some nests and others we found the partners marked them and moved on to the next nest. Climbing up and down ridges, falling laughing. Some other stuff that happened this month. We had some visitors form Tristan having other people on the Island was amazing, seeing new faces does not make u feel so alone. We also had a Birthday this month. Congrats to Karen.

Sunette



About Island fears

A friend told me the other day that he thinks I am not susceptible to fear. That is why I am able to keep on going to Antarctica. Well. He is wrong. There is definitely an amount of fear involved in being an islander.

I cannot talk for the others but I am sure they also have their fears from time to time.

I am sure the first fear you will encounter after deciding to apply for an expedition is the fear of commitment. Once you have been appointed there is no turning back. You will spend a great deal of money to equip yourself for the trip. Beside the great store issues you will get from DEA and which is more than adequate for your work and environment, you might also want to take along cameras, computer equipment, hobbies and other luxuries. Not to mention the costs involved of staying in Cape Town, the most expensive place in South Africa. The first few months' salary will have to replenish this big void in your bank account, if you are lucky to have something like that. So now just imagine you get hurt or ill during Takeover and have to be sent back. How will you be able to cover that loss?

Then I also suffer from a little problem they call aviophobia since childhood and although I love aircraft and has model aircraft as a hobby. I really do not feel at home in an airplane and being an islander involves quite a bit of flying. Whether it is in an airliner from central S.A to Cape Town or on a helicopter between the ship and base or between huts at Marion during takeover restocking, or over the vast Ice shelves of Antarctica in sub zero temperatures. I just cannot seem to get used to it makes me think of old B.A in the TV series, The A Team, who had to be hit over the head with a plank to prepare him for boarding an airplane. Also to travel on a ship for weeks in the South Atlantic in the greatness of nature. When that big majestic ship that you boarded in the harbour starts looking to you more than a bottle cap floating in the ocean with 6 Metre waves smashing over the bow, makes you think a lot about your own mortality and surely induces some degree of fear.

Staying in an environment with extreme wind conditions which can and had in the past, remove the roof over your head while you are sleeping can be a quite frightful.

One can also fear for your health on the Island. Maybe people do not realise but if you get critically sick or injured on the island and you are lucky enough that there is some type of ship around Tristan da Cunha. It might take them, 2 days to get to Gough and then only if weather permits and you can board the ship another 2 days back to the only fully equipped hospital at Tristan. Not to mention the predicament you can be in at Marion which is the most isolated and Antarctica where, during winter, you might have to travel in darkness 400 kilometres over the ice with a caterpillar to the German base. Although the bases are equipped with full paramedic facilities and expertise, we do not have all the medical equipment and specialists that a big hospital can offer. To travel back to South Africa will involve another 5 days at least from Gough.

So even if you have the best medical insurance. It will do you no good.

Then of course you can fear for the safety of your beloved ones and belongings as well as maybe your pets that you had to leave behind in a country where it seems that crime does pay and hijackings, murders and rape is in the order of the day. Just consider yourself in a situation where you get bad news from home but there is nothing you can do about the situation until you get home in ten months time. That is why the support that your family and good friends can give you is so important to us Islanders. Even just an e-mail or phone call now and then to reassure us that everything is fine at home is all we need to get through the day.

Luckily we do not have to fear bad people and criminals and reckless drivers on the island which makes life a lot easier and safer. And I think we are way too far out to worry about pirates. Some people even have a fear for mice and that can be a problem at Gough because there are mice aplenty. They say that one girl was so afraid of mice that one day squeezed 5 litres of water out of the poor creature after it ran up her skirt.

You could experience the fear of rejection. Will you be accepted by the team and live up to their expectations and standards? Also you might fear for being rejected by a special loved one at home because they might not be able to handle the separation for more than a year.

Fear of competency might also be a problem when you start asking yourself. Did I have enough training? Do I have the experience required to be able to handle the vast diversity of tasks which will be required of me on the Island. Here you cannot quickly run to your neighbour for help or phone the help desk. You just have to battle with the problem until it is fixed. Sometimes when teammates leave the base for prolonged field work in the treacherous mountains you may fear that they will not return and you would then have to go on a search and rescue mission.

At the end of your overwintering year you may start to fear the possibility of not finding a job back in S.A.

And of course I get a special type of fear this time of the month which is called graphophobia. I just looked that up on the internet (what a great luxury to have access to that). I am a technical guy and was not born to be a writer. I never got high marks at school for my essays.

Luckily I do not fear ghosts and spirits and Tokkelosjes and the like because I do not believe in them. So sorry to inform you but Islanders do have fears. But is it not fear that keep human beings alive. The best practice is to transform your fears into safe working practices and then at least you stand a greater chance to get through the year intact.

So for all aspiring Islanders I cannot tell you not to fear for fear can be a good thing. Just make sure that you take all the necessary precautions and have a good support group at home. And then I can only thank those people at home who I can trust to look after my belongings and with whose support this trip would not have been possible.

But I love being an Islander and to quote some popular slogans: " NO FEAR"&" JUST DO IT"

Until next month

Leo.



THE GOFF'S

Hello boys and girls are you ready for some more of the Goff's. Today we'll be reading about their life on Goff, that magical island in the middle of the lake. The Goff's lived in a large house on Goff that sways in the wind, and rocks them to sleep every night. Each of the Goff's had their own room with double bunks, so they were never bored, they could sleep on top or at the bottom. Cooking was done in a large kitchen and the Goff's would take turns cooking, and dinner would be enjoyed together in the dining room. The house also has a movie room filled with so many movies that they would forget what they had watched weeks before, this room is Tall and Short's favourite room.

Grandad, Techie and Redcross's favourite room is the Games room, there they could enjoy herbal drinks, talk about the real world and play games. After too many herbal drinks, the house would sway much more in the wind and their rooms moved further away, but they always laughed, even when the walls would suddenly bump into them.

Princess and Zoom had a special room they called the Lab, many hours were spent in there with Princess's notebooks that she called data. Princess also kept her shiny bracelets and samples of stuff she collected on her walks there. Princess was a real clever Goff with a PhD from the Real World, so she was really clever.

Sometimes the Goff's would get visitors from Tristania, another island on the lake and then the house would be filled with excitement. The boss of Tristania, his wife and two friends came to visit them; they were welcomed with a herbal drink and a special feast and then a special tour of the house and the island. The Goff's are proud of their island home and enjoyed showing it to the Tristianians.

Once a month the Goff's would talk to their spiritual and emotional advisor called Mellie on the telephone. Mellie is nice, but Techie thinks she needs to enjoy an herbal drink more often. The Goff's look forward to Mellie's calls; because she always makes them feel better Mellie is really special.

The Goff's wake up early in the morning to enjoy the sunrise and get ready for their busy days, there's always something to be done around the house or on their island paradise.

Well boys and girls that's it for now, next time we'll read about what the Goff's do every day.

Marius

From the lab - Sylvain and Karen

February is already the end of the summer, but the Gough wildlife is still animated. Several breeding monitoring is over like those of Giant Petrels and Rockhopper Penguins, some are ongoing (Yellow-nosed Albatrosses) or have just started (Tristan Albatrosses), making the shortest month of the year still busy.

The headline for this month is certainly the fieldtrip to the north, the remotest place on this remote island. The goal was the annual count of the Tristan Albatross nests at the scale of the whole island which requires quite good weather conditions for a few days. After one unsuccessful attempt at the end of January, we encountered finally such a steady weather in mid-February. The first day, we reached Waterfall camp after a long walk along the astonishing ridges in the middle of the island (South Peak, Mount Rowett, Windy Ridge) offering amazing views on the plains and the east coast. Windy Ridge was not windy and Edinburgh Peak was cloudless, both of them illuminated by the golden light of the sunset. The day after we undertook a walk along some of the most beautiful sceneries of the island: the flat and marshy stretches of Tarn Moss; the uncommon rocky outcrop of Barren Dome which is one of the rare hard ground allowing an easy walk; the sharp edges of Sea Hen Crag; the rounded summits of Triple Peak from where we gazed at the South Atlantic Ocean 700 m below with spectacular and variously shaped sea stacks as Round Island, Cone Island and Lot's Wife; the expanse of Giant Petrel Valley and West Point; and the slopes of Expedition and Edinburgh peaks.



Edinburgh peak



Mount Rowett & Albatross Plain

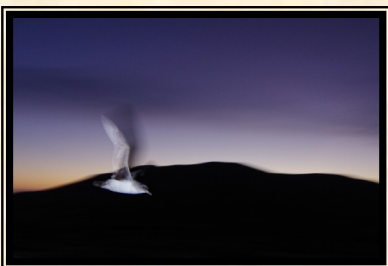


Sea stacks see from Triple peak

These amazing places made us forget the time and we started our return to Waterfall camp less than two hours before sunset, so we had to reach the camp using headlamps and GPS... The last day, we returned to the base through the base line edging Spire Crag and through Low Hump from where we recovered the known way to go back from the Giant Petrel study colony.

This day, the weather changed for the worse, getting windy and misty and impeding us from finishing the Tristan albatross count. However, overall we counted more than 1200 nests, which is not so bad but not the highest number recorded for the species.

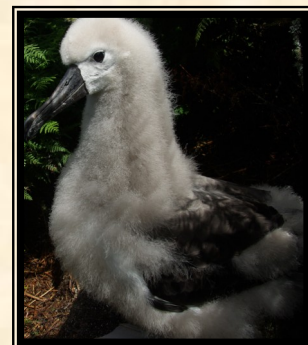
We finished marking 198 nests of Tristan Albatross at Gonydale/ Hummocks and Tafelkop. We already checked them 2-5 times allowing us to identify most of the partners. Eggs will hatch in March and the sensitive period will start as chicks are susceptible to be attacked by mice. During our walks to Gonydale, our monitoring and our nights spent there, we heard and saw our first Grey Petrels. Surprisingly for a burrowing petrel, this species is quite diurnal so we observed them flying above the colony during the day. We also heard their rattling calls (quite similar to the sound produced by an old car struggling to start) from burrows during the day and at night. We also have pursued the monitoring of Yellow-nosed albatrosses which chicks are growing fast now with most feathers already growing. Fledging should start in March. We began a diet study for this and the other two albatross species, collecting stomach contents as well as down and feathers for stable isotope analyses. Stable isotope ratios (carbon and nitrogen) reflect the trophic level of the species (its place in the food chain) and allow to infer its diet.



Grey Petrel in flight



Grey Petrel in a burrow



Yellowed-nosed Albatross Chick

Tafelkop, a trip not soon to be forgotten

It is not always that you find weather suitable for walking here on the island and Brendan, one of the met crew invited me to go with him up Tafelkoppie. Being that I have not been out in a long while I decided here is my chance and I was planning to go sooner or later. We set off at a brisk pace lead by Brendan, and me trying to keep close on his heels. I gym basically everyday here on the Island, but compared to walking in the thick and wet terrain that we sat out in was way beyond what I expected. I was up to my waist in grass and sometimes up to my thighs in the mud. I think for every ten steps I took I fell at least two times all the way up the side of Tafelkoppie and I think if someone kept score I might have set up a new record. Luckily you do not fall hard, the grass is so thick you do not even touch the ground. After the fall you just give a little chuckle and off you go again.

For my first time I found it very difficult but what I got to see in return was worth the sweat and effort. I got to see my first Tristan Albatross up close and just being told it is a big bird and seeing it yourself is definitely two very different things. The funny thing about them is they do not even seem to mind you walking past there and coming in closer to take some pictures, they are fascinating. Also the view from up there is just magnificent and the sky was almost clear so we could see very far. I was so excited when I finally got up there I did a hand stand or in reality I just wanted to give my legs some rest and was too afraid that if I sat down I would not get up again.



The way down I enjoyed more than going up, you can just sit down and slide most of the way. At least this way you do not fall down so often being you are already down on the ground, but you do get wet and dirty. It was a lot of fun walking up there and I really enjoyed it.

Gerard

Summer's gone

It is 05:45 and the *Great Shearwaters* are still flying around making their weird sound but it's also time for a metkasia to start work. To see the thermometers clearly one needs a head lamp as it is still darkish. All these are sings that summer is saying goodbye to us, no more summer for *Gough 57* on this beautiful island. The thought is a bit unwelcomed but one cannot do anything about the situation except adapt and move on.

As you already know, we made it to the *Glen* on our second attempt with *Brendan* joining in. It was without doubt a grueling experience but one that I'm happy to have gone through. That morning *Brendan* and I left the base just after 05:00 in the morning to join *Karen* and *Sylvain* at *Gonydale*. It took us two hours to get there, already wet from the water on the vegetation after it stopped raining sometime earlier that morning. The journey began at 08:00 and I remember my legs shaking when I got to *Michael's col* after climbing without taking a break. Going down the ridge seemed easy until we got to the *Phyllica* trees and the fern. At some point it seemed like we were not going to find a way down to the river and we couldn't conceal our excitement when we finally did, not knowing how difficult it was going to be. There are so many waterfalls making it difficult if not impossible to follow the river, forcing us to cross from one side to the other on several occasions. As we got closer to our destination, we were hopping on rocks, which was much easier and seeing the first rock hopper and a minute later a fur seal enjoying a swim in fresh water we knew that we've made it to the *Glen*.





We took a stroll to the beach where we found a lot of fur seals, some rock hopper penguins and only four elephant seals (two bulls, one female and a pup). We also found what we hoped for, the remnants of the old Gough house and the sealers' cave. Skuas and Giant Petrels were also there, relaxed as food was abundant, several dead fur seals lying around. We walked along the beach, took pictures before following the river back to where we could find a good camping site. Once we did, we set camp and Karen and Sylvain went to count the Rockies at a colony that was close to our camp site. We later had our ideal meal, pasta and tuna with tomato paste and this time without cheese as we forgot to take one but we all enjoyed our meal with no regret.

It's always early nights in the field and this one wasn't different. Come tomorrow morning we had our breakfast, Milo with biscuits, filled our water bottles with fresh water and added some energy drink, packed our stuff and headed back. The trip back was easier, I guess it was because we knew where we were going. We rested for some time at the last river crossing, had some biscuits and sweets before climbing the ridge. We got to Gonydale, had lunch and still had plenty of time to come back to the base. We got to the base with enough time to have a warm bath, feeling happy to have lived a dream.

I know the Glen story is old news but I just felt like sharing the experience. February wasn't dull either even though I was becoming frustrated when realizing I might spend the whole month bored in the base but things just worked out quite well. One Sunday afternoon Sunette and Marius were going fishing and I thought why not tag along, just to get out of the house. I wasn't keen on fishing which is kind of unusual for someone who grew up fishing a lot. The thing is here it's done differently.

. I grew up fishing in a river or a dam on occasions and here we have the ocean. The last time I tried fishing here was about five years ago and I found it difficult using the big fishing rods and the long line. At home we use reeds as our fishing rods and small hooks. I thought I'll just take pictures and it will be better than watching a movie in the house or sleeping in the afternoon and become restless at night but Brendan talked me in to trying hand line fishing. I wasn't keen but said to myself; why not give it a try? I was given a hand line and Sunette even put on my first bait for me. I found hand line fishing really interesting as one can actually feel when the fish bites. I caught my first fish at Gough but minutes later somehow lost my line and I wasn't going sit and take pictures and forget about all the fun, so, I decided to rush to the store to get myself another line. When unwinding it, I kept thinking; but this line seems really short, it doesn't even look like it will touch the water but continued anyway. With the same short line I caught my first and biggest five finger, not that it was a very big fish though. After that nothing much was happening and later on Sunette caught the line I had lost and I was happy to have a comfortably long enough line but nothing materialized and we later had to call it a day and what a day it was. I know some may think but it was Sunday, a day for church, a day for worship. I thought the same but I wasn't going to miss the opportunity, especially since all the days seem the same here.

The next day Brendan had to go weigh some fur seal pups and since I was still off I went with him. It was a rainy day, I had doubts but he wasn't going to let it stop him, so off we went. He did all the weighing while I wrote down the data for him but I at least caught a few. The last time we did this, my arms were complaining after weighing, I think only four pups and they were still very small. Having weighed all 100 in one day, I suppose that makes Brendan a sealer and as for me, I'll just be the pencil and paper man.

Looking forward to more adventures on Gough Aventura!

So long!!!

Nkoane



Up till now

Often we find ourselves in situations where out of nowhere we have a stark realisation of something. And the day I woke up to write this I had that exact thought. Feeling a bit shocked and overwhelmed at the realisation that we have been here 6 months and are pretty much half way through our stay here on Gough was something that got me thinking.

What have I done with this time, what do I still want to do with this time, and am I happy with what I have achieved during this time.

And to answer the last question first, I can quite honestly say, YES!

It all ties in with the questions that precede it. What have I done, and what do I want to do?!



What have I done that has made my stay up till now something that I am proud of, and has made it memorable. There have been all the hikes and the nights spent out in the tent, working with the birds, getting involved with the rest of my island family and learning from them. Time spent with the penguins and seals, as well as time spent with my own thoughts. There has been opportunity to read, learn, study and to grow. Up till now it has been a remarkable experience. It has been such a holistic positive experience. But what about I still want to do? How can I still be satisfied with that? Easily, by having thought it through and prepared for it. I know the things that I would like to do and have put plans in place which will allow that to happen. So now when these opportunities arise, I am ready and can go for it. As for those moments that are still there to be determined by me, I know what I need to do and have been able to plan them out. Now it's just a matter of seeing it through, and upon reaching that point, making sure I can comfortably say, up till now I have made the most of this opportunity. But this past month has seen much activity. As you will no doubt have read up till now. This month saw the second round of seal weighing taking place. Nkoane and I made our way down to Tumble Down to weigh 100 seal pups.

Was a good time, despite the rain coming down steadily the entire time we were there. There were incidents of large bulls threatening to charge us as we invaded their territory, as well as few moments where the young pups almost managed to get their teeth into our hands as we reached out to grab them.



The walk back to the base also had its challenges as the rain had seen the water level of the river rise substantially since we first crossed that morning. This meant we were going from wading through ankle deep water to waist deep water in just a few hours.

I also had the opportunity to lead Boy up Tafelkop this month. His first hike and his first time seeing the impressive Tristan Albatross. Despite having done this walk several times already, it was definitely worth doing again for the privilege of being able to see the look of amazement that creeps across ones face when seeing this great bird for the first time.

Happy birthday must also go out to Karen who celebrated her birthday in true island style on the 22nd February. HAPPY BIRTHDAY KAREN.

Great time was had by all as we spent the evening enjoying pizza, cake and great company, all the while dressed like hippies.

Well, that gives a little taste of what happened this past month, and I hope you continue to enjoy our account of life on Gough Island.

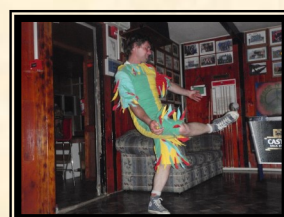
If anyone is interested in reading a bit more about Island life and what it is I seem to get up to, then feel free to take a look at the blog I am writing. It is basically a weekly journal of all that happens out here on Gough. Even if you don't read it, I'm sure the photos alone will be worth taking a look through.

Follow <http://islandlife-brendunne.blogspot.com/> and you can read all about my experience up till now.

Till next month...

God bless

Brendan



Happy B-day Karen

It was a night to remember dressed up and had some great fun. I think being a hippy must have been groovy.



CLIMATE STATS: February 2012

Ave. Max Pressure	1010.3hPa
Ave. Min Pressure	1002.8hPa
Ave. Pressure	1006.4hPa
Max Pressure	1023.3hPa
Min Pressure	987.8hPa
Ave. Max Temp	18.9°C
Ave. Min Temp	12.0°C
Ave. Temp	15.4°C
Max Temp	24.4°C
Min Temp	7.5°C
Ave Humidity	80%
Max Humidity	95%
Min Humidity	42%
Max Wind Gust	30.8 m/s or 110.9 km/h
Total Rainfall	183.8 mm
Highest in 24 Hours	44.8 mm
Total days with rain	19 days
Total days >1mm	14 days
Total Sunshine	181.3 hours

Looking at the statistical records, January and February are evidently the warmest months on Gough Island. From the period 1964-1993, maximum temperature reached 26.4°C in January and 25.7°C in February. Rainfall during this period shows January reaching 323mm and February 290mm. From 1993-2001 February had the highest max temp at 23.0°C, with January lower at 21.5 than March at 22.2°C and December at 22.5°C. With rainfall February had the lowest at 187mm whereas January reached 204mm. Looking at this year's stats, we found that January had a max temp of 22.7°C with February reaching 24.4°C, making February the warmest this summer. However, with rainfall, February did much better at 183.8mm, which is higher than all the months since Gough 57 officially took over in October last year. In comparison, February had the highest rainfall in 24hrs at 44.8mm than January at 36.8mm. On the other hand, January had more days with rain at a total of 25 days whereas February had 19 but February had a total of 14 days with more than 1mm of rainfall, two days more than January. Surprisingly January had more sunshine hours at a total of 205.5hrs with February reaching a total of 181.3hrs.. Maximum wind gust reached 144.7km/h in January and 110.9km/h in February. It still rains all year round here on Gough but looking back the stats show a decline in the amount of rainfall as the years pass by. The period 1964-1993 saw the highest at 600mm in a month with the lowest being 290mm in February.

The answers to these changes lie in continuous gathering and analysis of meteorological data.

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