



Gough Bunting

February 2009



Welcome to our Monthly Newsletter

This is our Journey.... Enjoy the read...



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The View...

Overhearing a conversation by Dries and Chantal about the importance of 'a view', and the great extent people will go to in order to have just that magic coupled to their residency not to mention the status and higher market value I was sort of pausing over the idea and I suddenly got an urge to experience the upper market of upmarket views...if you get my English?! I wouldn't blame anyone if they have to re read and think something over that came from my writing, for I'm not known firstly as a writer and secondly for my English...will I ever forget the night when I had to address 40 odd people and started off by 'good night everybody' in stead of 'good evening everyone!!.... That brought some laughter and although Afrikaner people were brought up by the idea that an Englishman will never laugh at you when you make a mistake I assume that there will always be the exception on the rule....you are forgiven and I loved that smiles and giggles by the way!

I'm doing it again, losing my point so back to it then. They were going on about just how much the view values, and talking about the extremes of climbing 'Tafelkoppie' once again just to experience the magical view again. Now don't get me wrong, I love hiking and the outdoors, but going up a mountain, did I mention Steep Mountain in a narrow muddy trail filled with burrows from the Shearwater seabirds didn't really appeal to me. See I am way more comfortable with a fishing rod in the hand, admiring the view of the breakers and the seabirds and seals around me. We all know the saying; 'don't scratch if it doesn't itch', but I guess I had to go up and see for myself.



The view from the Summit of Tafelkoppie...

Saturday 7 February 2009 wouldn't only go down for the day when 'Tom van Brits' and Vincent got to the summit of 'Tafelkoppie' and back, but was also Chantal's birthday and also her and Andries engagement!! Congratulations once again Andries and Chantal! Last but not least, a mere 3 weeks later, Tuesday 24 February @ 18H00 Tumi's first born announced her arrival back home in Mafekeng with her very first cry, congratulations Tumi and fiancé, may you be a blessed family!! What a privilege to be the leader of a team with a VIEW!!

P.S.: I made it to the summit of Tafelkoppie with Vincent as my tour guide, and was the view really that good? Yes...it was way better that expected!

by Tom Mc Sherry...



These Abseilors...

Im a sooty and I would like to tell you about these abseilors with their red rope bags and ropes hanging everywhere... you know life on the cliffs here on Gough is not the most comfortable, but there is nothing that compares to the amazing view we have from our nests...

Then suddenly without warning ground starts pouring from above, grass falling on our heads and we see the soles of them gumboots and then we know its time to sit up straight and defend our territories... for then the abseilors are here again with their carabiners clipping open and closed, ropes that invade our space bubbles and they sometimes even come and inspect our nests, as if there is something wrong with it.

Poor old Charlie was a weak chick, and he didn't make it past the brooding stage of the breeding season, and well his nest was empty for quite a couple of weeks, until these abseilors came along, and they totally wrecked his old nest... it was nice and greenish and i think it might have been really comfortable... they took the nest apart, removing all the green vegetation and then they threw the rest of the nest into the ocean... apparently there was something wrong with it. They then spoke and up they went, like a vision in the sky they were gone, I was still ready for if they decided to attack me or if the came to close to my nest again, I had my vomit ready for them and by the looks on their face last time, I know they are not really keen on its smell...

But actually with all the excitement, the snapping into thin air from all the chicks together, almost like a choir, we observe their every move, we have an understanding these absailors and us, they do not come too close and we will not vomit. It is actually a good heart racer for us, getting the blood pumping again, it is just little old bob that enjoys the easy life chilling all day long waiting for his parents to bring the latest seafood platter special from the Mc Fishies.

by Henk Louw...



Sooty Albatross
and Abseilor...



Missing what I love most...

"Blou vis konings" is what I said to Vince and Tom coming from Snoekgat! We're joking for months now about catching a Bluefish, because after 7 months of Snoek, Jacobpewers and Five fingers, you want to catch other species of fish that is a bit difficult.

Tom had some luck of getting one on but was unlucky to get it out. Fishing is one of my favorite hobbies and also for some people on the Island like you could see in the Bunting.

The thing that I miss the most on the island is fresh water fishing, "maybe we can put an order in to bring Trout or some sort of fish specie to put into the small rivers on the Island". It's nice to go out with your friend on weekends and just go fishing. For me the outdoors is a big part of my life. A conservationist that speak, I am a bow hunter and love hunting, not for the killing but for the experience to walk and see all the different things in the wild and also the challenge to get as close as possible to the animal so that you can shoot it. 40 Meters is the maximum distance you have to be from an animal to be sure of your shot.



Kabeljou!
Me and Sepie with some Carps!!!



My Biggest Mirror Carp!



The best about everything is that, when you're standing in the open catching fish or at last shot the animal you were hunting for almost 2 weeks, because he is just more clever than you "just for 2 weeks",- to get that feeling of no worries and just have that moment living in your own world, that's what counts.

So hoping to catch a blue fish before our time is over here...



Me and Sepie with a Springbok!



by Paul Visser...



It's Sagina Baby...

Henk and Paul, the two biologists on the island are responsible for research projects on mice, birds and alien vegetation. Gough Island is an international heritage site and as such needs to be protected against intruders. The main focus of the vegetation component is the eradication of the tiny plant *Sagina Procumbens* or Pearl-worts, which invokes a response similar to that of diamond-piles or Chanel no.5 flatulence. I spoke with Henk about the project and its aims. Henk is a Stormers rugby supporter and owns a Western Province jersey.

Sagina is indigenous to temperate regions in the Northern Hemisphere, like the British, but was transported south, probably by ship, like the British. It has been found in and around Cape Town harbor from where it spread via ignorance to Marion Island. Marion for the most part has low mossy vegetation providing the small *Sagina* plants with enough sunlight to flourish. At present Marion Island is infested with the alien and this kind of infestation is what needs to be guarded against on Gough Island.

Coordinated eradication of the plant on Gough Island started around 2002. The project has had various NGO sponsors with the current sponsor being OTEP (Overseas Territories Environment Program), a joint program between the British Commonwealth Office and Department of International Development.

At present *Sagina* is found on Gough Island mainly at Crane Point, ground zero, where the shipping containers used to be unpacked. Henk says *Sagina* can not be smoked and is also found about 400m up and down the coast with the furthest inland having been found at the base, roughly 100m. Coastal regions of Gough are densely covered by Bracken and *Spartina* tussocks that are not ideal for the growth of *Sagina* in terms of sunlight. However, further up the mountain slopes the low mossy ground cover provides a perfect habitat. Thus far Henk and Paul's delicately tuned *Sagina* sense has not yet picked up any sign of the plant on the mountains.

Henk says the diminutive seeds may be spread by flightless Moorhens or wind or flightless Moorhens with wind and can not be smoked. The seeds are tiny, probably too small to eat for most birds with the exception of the flight-enabled Bunting, that may take it up the moun-





tain. I suggested they eradicate the Bunting and Henk replied, "Idiot!".

The eradication process for sagina involves herbicide and controlled burning. Two types of herbicide are used, Glyphogan and Outpace Flowable, Henk says neither is drinkable, not even with Coke. Outpace stays active in the soil preventing further germination.

Research components of the project involves taking soil samples, counting the seeds in each sample and then extrapolating the data in order to determine approximate Sagina density in specific areas. Germination tests are also carried out using salt and fresh water in the laboratory. Thus far no germination has taken place in the brine tests. Henk says in future the different eradication methods will be tested exclusively in certain areas to determine their effectiveness and if he sees me with a Bunting he will carry out a preemptive strike with extreme prejudice according to his supreme duty as EOGISA (Environmental Officer of Gough Island and Surrounding Areas) and spread the vicious rumor that I secretly support Bulls rugby and own a copy of "Liefeling" performed by the inimitable Gé Korsten.

For our part, to prevent the spread of Sagina seeds, each team member thoroughly washes his/her boots after returning from the field. Henk has checked the area where we wash boots and has not found any Sagina.

In my opinion this is a colossal undertaking. Containment rather than eradication may be more attainable. However this does not make the work less important. On the upside, barring further volcanic eruptions, it is estimated that Gough Island will erode and disappear in approximately 50 000 years, which will solve the problem. [Dries]





The Bunting

Gough Island is widely recognised as having one of the most diverse bird colonies in the world, including four endangered species. One of these is the Gough Bunting (*Rowettia goughensis*).

The Gough Bunting is endemic to Gough island and was classified as critically endangered by the IUCN (*International Union for Conservation of Nature*). Recent surveys of breeding territories in 2007 suggest a population of just 400 – 500 pairs.

Habitat

Most common in tussock-grassland, wet heath and among scrub up to 800 m, occurring at lower densities in fern-bush and peat-bogs.

Biology

To date, few observations of the breeding behaviour of this species have been made. Nests are built on the ground amongst or under vegetation, but mostly on steep slopes or cliffs, and clutches usually consisting of two eggs appear to be laid around September and October. Adult plumage is not reached for at least three years, but sexual maturity and activity may not necessarily correlate.

The diet consists primarily of invertebrates (80% of foraging time), but also of fruit, grass seeds, and scavenged birds and broken eggs.



Gough Bunting...

Photo: Paul Visser



Gough Bunting Egg

Threats

This bird's occurrence in a restricted habitat of one very small island makes it extremely vulnerable to natural disasters, especially to the accidental introduction of non-native predators. Indeed, the introduced house mouse poses the greatest present threat through competition and predation. Buntings are found at low density in lowland areas where mice are abundant, and experiments with 'dummy' eggs imply that mouse predation on their nests is very high. Thus, researchers think the bird may have been forced by these mice from the best nesting sites into less suitable upland regions. Over



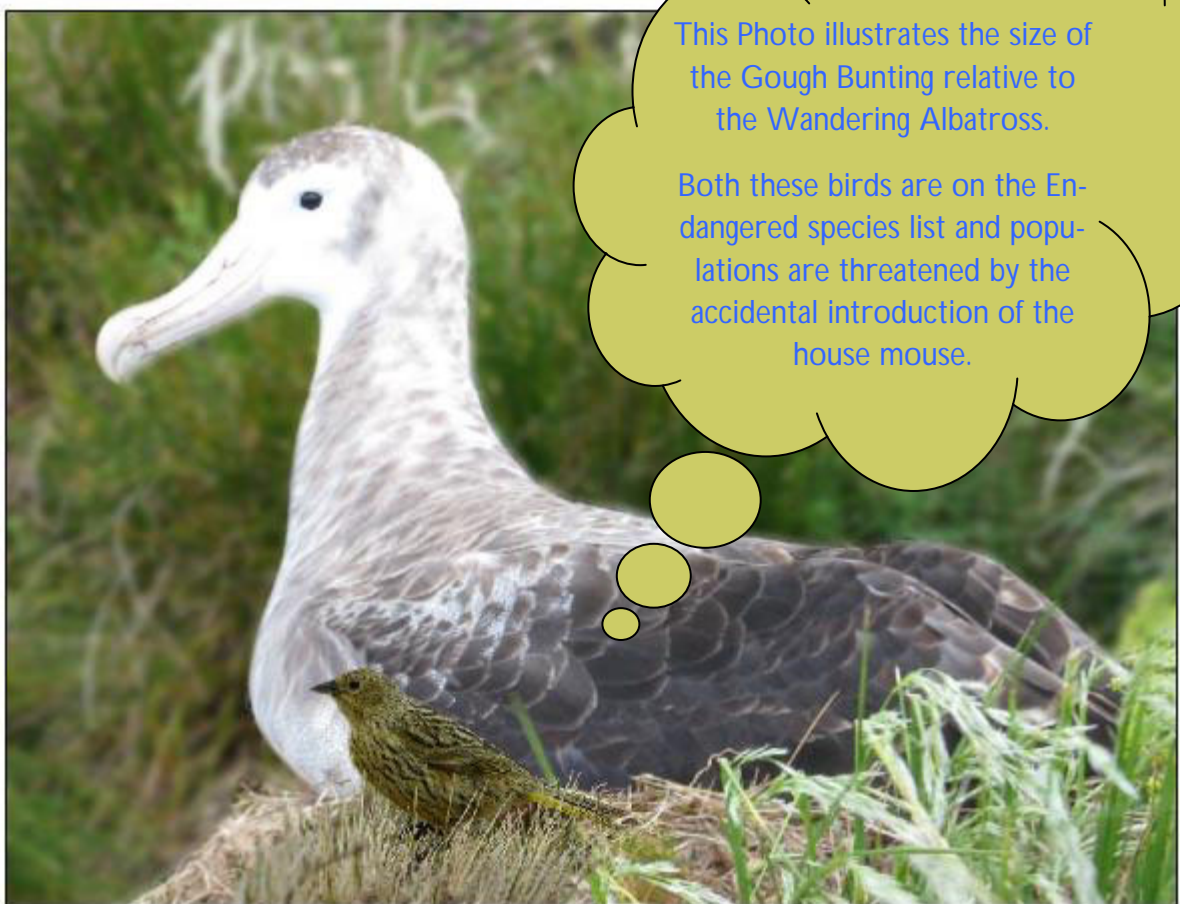
the last 15 years, the proportion of juveniles in the population has declined from 50% to 20%, this appears to indicate that there are now too few young surviving to reproductive age to sustain the population.

Conservation

Gough Island is both a Nature Reserve and World Heritage Site, and while this provides good protection from human disturbance, it does not offer the Gough bunting any protection from the mouse predation that is driving it towards extinction. A study of the mice conducted by The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and funded by the UK government's Overseas Territories Environment Programme has shown that their eradication from the island is feasible and with proper funding every effort will go to protect this Island and the rich biodiversity it hosts.

Sources:

- IUCN Red List (December, 2008) <http://www.iucnredlist.org>
- BirdLife International (December, 2008) <http://www.birdlife.org>
- Zoological Museum Amsterdam (December, 2008) <http://ip30.eti.uva.nl/zma3d/detail.php?id=414&sort=taxon&type=family>
- <http://www.arkive.org/gough-bunting/rowettia-goughensis/info.html>



This Photo illustrates the size of the Gough Bunting relative to the Wandering Albatross.

Both these birds are on the Endangered species list and populations are threatened by the accidental introduction of the house mouse.



Art and Entertainment...

Arts and Crafts

This month produce a few interesting crafts...

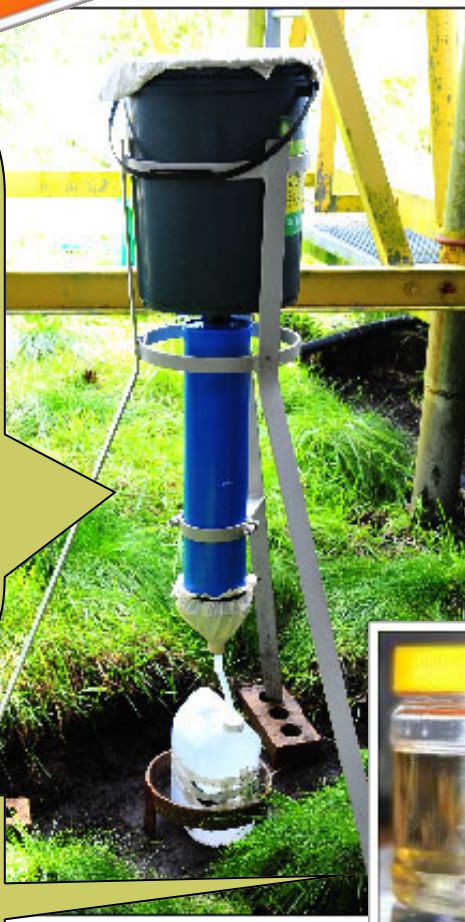
Spoons, to catch that illusive Bluefish! Made by Vincent for Chantal's Birthday



Water Purifier.

This Water purifier was designed and built by Vincent and Andries for Chantal's Birthday.

It catches rainwater and filters it through a very sophisticated system to ultimately produce clean, sweet drinking water.



Before and After...



Clay Figurine, made by Tom for Chantal's Birthday. Tom now has quite a few of these. I think in the next issue we should exhibit this quaint collection.

Clay Figurines of the Team, made by Tom





Photo Competition

January's Winning Photo:



This photo was taken of Arch rock, from Crane Point. This Rock used to be connected to the main island with an Arch, hence the name. This arch however, eroded and broke off a few years ago, leaving behind this rock island.

The Photo was taken by Chantal. It was done after sunset, leaving the shutter open for 30 seconds, creating the smooth effect of the water.

Please vote for your favourite photo:

Phone: 021 405 9470
Email: gough@sanap.ac.za



February photos:

1



2



3



4



5





Weather

Pressure

Ave. Max Pressure	1015.4 hPa
Ave. Min Pressure	1004.2 hPa
Ave. Pressure	1011.4 hPa
Max Pressure	1019.4 hPa
Min Pressure	996.6 hPa

Temperature

Ave. Max Temp	19.9 °C
Ave. Min Temp	13.4 °C
Ave. Temp	16.6 °C
Max Temp	25.9 °C
Min Temp	9.7 °C

Humidity

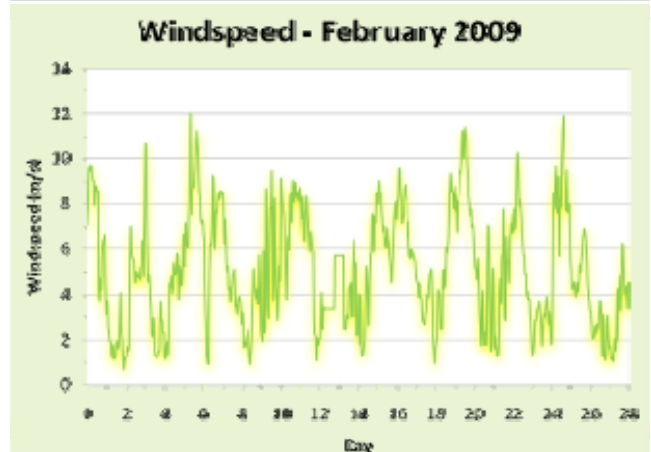
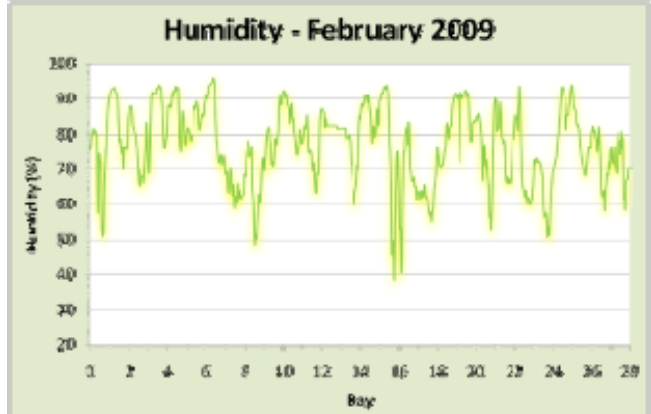
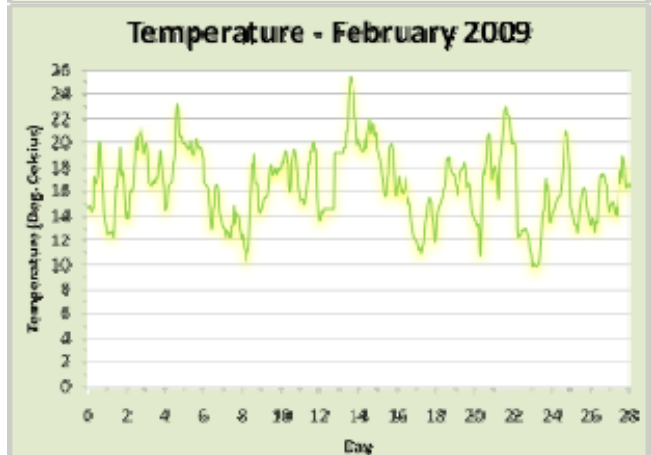
Ave Humidity	76 %
Max Humidity	94 %
Min Humidity	26 %

Wind

Max Wind Gust	27.1 m/s or 97.5 km/h
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Rainfall

Total Rainfall	104.8 mm
Highest in 24 Hours	33.4 mm
Total days with rain	14 days
Total days >1mm	8 days
Total Sunshine	188.3 hours





Sponsors



I can do this all day, every day, especially on a rainy day!!



Sponsor of the Month

