





## The Chaos begins...

Six months ago we were warned breeding season is going to be the busiest time of your life. Leading up to August we were busy, but not working to death...

Halfway through August our breeding season began. The sub-adults, yearlings and under-yearlings, which have been keeping us busy up to now, slowly started leaving. At first the big boys came out. Adult male elephant seal bulls that weigh in excess of 3 tons. Needless to say we were blinded by their awesomeness! Each sealer believing the bull they saw today was bigger than the other sealers' sighting. Then the beaches were empty (aside from the huge bulls occupying some beaches), slowly being replaced by balloon-shaped pregnant ellie-moms. Then the females multiplied exponentially. There was 1, then there were 2, now Goney is home to Frankenstein (the beachmaster) and 35 cows! On King Penguin main Moses (the beachmaster) is king and rules over 38 cows – and they say more females are supposed to come!



On Friday the 18th of September our very first elephant seal pup (now known as Spud) was sighted on Trypot. Martin was also surprised by a newborn on Ship's Cove. We were told that their faces resemble that of a baby gorilla's, but never did we realise how accurate this description would be. They are truly the cutest pups you can imagine with fluffy black fur. You can not imagine that in

just 23 days these bags of bones wean and weigh approximately 160 kg's and within a few years a couple of tons! Since the arrival of the pups, we have been tagging them with little white plastic tags (a.k.a. supersmall) to later identify mother-pup relationships. This is a daunting task and involves one sealer coaxing the mother

away, teasing it, putting his life at risk while the other runs in behind and tags the pup.

The mother, all the while, being blissfully unaware - or sometimes being very aware of a nervous sealer canoodling with her pup.

This then turns into a mad dash to safety for the sealer with the applicator. Of course, during your dash for safety there are other cows to dodge and a beachmaster, which is keeping his beady eye on you.





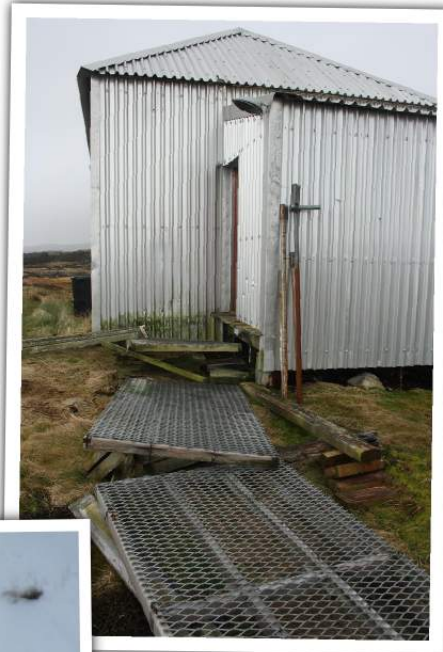
Censusing our ellies is becoming increasingly difficult with the harems being more tightly packed. However, we are now becoming more familiar with all the different tag colours from the different cohorts. Just to explain: every year the pups born in that year is tagged with a different colour of tags, each carrying a unique number. From that we can identify individuals and the year the ellie was born in. Some of the older animals' number has completely worn off and even identifying some of the colours can be tricky due to fading and discolouration over the years. A harem of 35 cows can take up to 2 hours. This has however not dampened our sealer spirits but only heightened it!



Three weeks ago the catwalk outside the mammal lab collapsed and blew away in the 70 knot winds we had. With some extra effort put in, the catwalk is now better than ever! Two feet deep snow made walking over Karookop twice in one day a tough one but Derek & Mia rose to challenge and demolished Karookop quickly! Snow balls were flung at each other at the top to keep spirits high. One of the beaches we climb down to census via a ladder, Sealer's cave, was completely snowed over. We couldn't even see the ladder. Inevitably we could only census from the top (sorry Marthan & Nico!), luckily there were no ellies. Our weeks now involve 100 – 130 km's of hiking, carrying only a sealer's sized pack in up to 70 knot winds (yes Martin actually did that one day). So there you have a description of a week in a sealer's life: lots of walking, dangerous but exciting work, packed with adrenalin.

Let the October chaos begin – we are ready for it!

- Derek van der Merwe & Mia Wege





## Marion Island Chef of the Day!

Marion as it's known for its endless parties and its great people A little has been mentioned about the Chef of the day, or the Best cook if u Might put it, apparently once every two week each member Prepares a nice meal for the team mates at base, and that has taught me a lot since I don't come from a big family, for some of us we only cook once a week at home but here it's a different story, you have to prepare a big meal for at least 17people including yourself since the team has grown with another 3 new teammates recently.

So here under is our Team leader Kholekile, leading us and paving the way Preparing supper for us, I wish I can call him

"The Baker's man" The food taste very good every time and for some of us it has left us in the dark, because if u used to be size 32 you are now size 38 and the other team mates Will say "hey buddy it looks like your clothes are shrinking" Then your response To that will be No! "Its not that I've put up some extra layer of fat", It's the fact that we utilize the dry room instead of a washing line My sincere gratitude to Deat for taking us to the Extra cooking lessons at Cape Town. "Wallah its Supper time M66."



From Mpho Arise and shine!



## Reducing the Sun

The Sun will keep on rising, everything is gonna be all right. As a young boy I've learned that the Sun is the source of energy. As a Meteorologist I've discovered that the Sun does not only bring life to our ecosystem, but I've learned that everyday there's a different reduction of sunshine, which simply means that if we luckily have 100% of sun shine today it's not guaranteed that tomorrow is going to be the same.

To find out more about that Marion Island is the place to be. Our averages per month of 82.6 hours of sunshine but with a daily average of 3.6 hours per day or 0.0 since most of the days are overcast 8/8 meaning fraction of the sky covered by clouds. So another interesting factor is that this month on the 22 September it was Equinox day. This happened all around the globe since during equinox the Sun rise directly from the east and set directly at the west, even our day and night hours are almost equal.

On the 22nd of September 2009, at approximately 11.18pm (23:18) SAST the Sun crossed over the Celestial Equator on its way towards the southern hemisphere. On this day the sun rose exactly east and set exactly West as Observed theoretically, as the term "equinox" implies, the period of darkness and light should be the same on this day.

In the northern hemisphere, this day is known as the "Autumnal Equinox" indicating the arrival of autumn in northern climes. Similarly the equinox in March is known as the "Vernal Equinox" implying the arrival of spring in order to move away from the the northern hemisphere approach, I will rather explain equinoxes as March and September equinoxes.

From: Mpho, Arise and shine



## Field notes from Marion

On Marion we often find ourselves in situations where we have to make or fix things when we run out of supplies or when equipment breaks on the island. We inevitably find things left behind by others who have been here



before us and we try to make a plan. Here, Mia and I are making a new journal since Mia has already filled her first diary. This got me thinking about how much Marion's field workers use handwritten notes in our endeavours. Little hardcover notebooks used in the field for recording data and a journal for keeping our thoughts and ideas of life here. We all depend on good, solid little notebooks and an old fashioned pencil, to record observations and make sketches as scientists, naturalists and explorers have been doing for hundreds of years. These little books frequently take a bashing from the rain, snow, mires or from squashing into our backpacks for an evening's writing in the field huts.

The field notebook is where you collect the "raw data". It rides in your pocket along with a pencil. No matter what your scientific interest, probably your most important tool is going to be your notebook. It's a piece of scientific equipment that doesn't cost a lot of money. Carefully handwritten notes are used to make

more permanent data records when we get out of the field and back to the base. Six months on the island and our notebooks have developed personalities, anatomically moulded from life in a pocket, a little warped from the rain and a subsequent visit to the clothes drying room, with some smudges and corrections here and there.

-Delia



## *Marionitus Explorus*

Six months ago, fifteen respectable looking people left Cape Town. Not really knowing what lay in store for them, the picture soon became quite clear on arrival. The members from M65 were a dead give away as to what would eventually happen to us, the new team.

Marion has a strange way of bringing out the explorer in all of us. Slowly but surely we all begin to change into new, more hardcore versions of ourselves. This new species, or *M. Explorus* as it is called looks different to the original species from which it originally evolved. It tends to be physically stronger as well as extremely hairy. These adaptations make it easier to bear some of the harsh conditions Marion has to offer. Six months in and the difference is already visible. In another 7 months, who knows what we may all look like. Men tend to be affected by these changes more than the women of the Island, who can hide the differences more easily. Only a few sightings of the illusive *M. Explorus* have been recorded. Below are a few snap shots that were taken in the wild that is Marion!



Please be advised, viewer discretion is recommended for sensitive viewers. The people displayed have changed radically from their original state. I am the only one who has not changed appreciably, hence there is no before picture featured!!

James Wilshere  
Gogga lab  
M66



**Sponsor of the Month:**





## Marion 66: Now in HDTV

That's right, from the 24th of September a camera crew from Urban Brew Studios has joined us on the Island. They'll be staying with us for 6 months until hand-over, and will be filming wildlife & the science behind it. Sorry for you guys who were expecting to see Big Brother: Marion Island.

Riaan Laubscher is a freelance Wildlife cameraman who spends lots of time in the bush. When he does come back to civilization calls Johannesburg home although he is originally from Paarl. He's worked for the BBC, Discovery channel, National Geographics Channel & lots of other big companies. He also says he likes to cook. Hmm!



Marianne is a documentary editor for Urban Brew. She has worked for Urban Brew for 3 years and has travelled right through Africa on assignment for them. She's from Ladybrandt, originally, but currently in Jo'burg. For the last year she edited a documentary series on Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic Islands.



Innocent is the right-hand man for the crew, being a fieldreporter. He is also an old islander, having been part of Marion 64. He is a conservationist and has worked for Addo Elephant National park. He is from Kosibay.

Welcome you Guys. I hope you brought some nice recipes.

See you on TV!

-Johan Hoffman





## Project Marion

After six days on the research vessel, *Africana*, I laid eyes on Prince Edward Island and shortly thereafter, Marion. I envisaged a green haven in the middle of the ocean, but all I saw was a white blob.

"I hope those are clouds," I remarked to Captain Mike Viljoen, the master of the *Africana*.

"That's snow," he answered drily.

This is not how I imagined my home for the next seven months. I always thought Marion was lush and green. It certainly looked like that on Google Earth.

As we approached the hoist crane I saw one of the islanders holding a placard saying "Welcome Home."

Our biggest fear, as outsiders coming to join a tightly knit group of islanders, was how we were going to be welcomed and whether we'd fit in. Well, we were welcomed like long lost family. Everybody was friendly, happy to see us and very helpful. They all jumped in and immediately started helping us offload our equipment. About two tons of it!

We settled in quickly and effortlessly, and adapted to the island lifestyle within days. And then... We started enjoying ourselves. And started working.

The island's extreme weather makes it extremely difficult to film. Video cameras aren't very fond of water and protecting the camera a huge priority. Walking on the island, not that we've done much so far, is another obstacle to overcome. The mires are soft and squishy, and spotting the holes not easy for an island rookie. So, sinking in waist-deep was to be expected at some stage, but still came as a big wet surprise. Innocent grabbed the camera from me to prevent it getting wet, while Marianne recorded the whole debacle on the second camera. Needless to say, I felt quite sheepish, but found it amusing too.



Three of us (Riaan – Cameraman, Marianne – 2nd Camera/Editor and Innocent –Field Reporter/Guide) were sent to Marion Island to film two 26-part series for SABC 2. Project Marion will be about life on the island – everything from people, research, seals, orcas, birds to the weather and is aimed at an audience from age 16 to 60 and beyond. The first episode will be aired on 26 October 2009, 17H00 on SABC 2 and thereafter for the following 25 weeks, every Monday in the same timeslot. The second series is aimed at a younger audience and will be aired every Friday for 26 weeks. The title and timeslot will be decided soon. So, keep your eyes peeled and spread the word!

Riaan Laubscher





## Climate Stats: MONTH YEAR



### Pressure

Maximum	1030.1 hPa
Average Maximum	1009.0 hPa
Average	1002.4 hPa
Average Minimum	995.5 hPa
Minimum	982.2 hPa



### Temperature

Maximum	9.2 °C
Average Maximum	5.8 °C
Average	3.3 °C
Average Minimum	0.7 °C
Minimum	-4.9 °C



### Humidity

Maximum	99 %
Average	79 %
Minimum	49 %



### Wind

Maximum Gust	38.6 m/s (138.96 km/h)
--------------	---------------------------



### Rainfall

Total	118.2 mm
Highest in 24 hours	19.8 mm
Total days without rain	4 days
Total days >1mm	17 days



### Sunshine

Total	105.5 hours
-------	-------------

## Marion 66 team members:

Asanda Phiri – Field Assistant (Gogga)

Ben Dilley – Field Assistant (Birder)

Delia Davies – Field Assistant (Birder)

Derek van der Merwe – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Dianah Mabizela – Meteorologist (snr)

James Wilshire – Field Assistant (Gogga)

Johan Hoffman – Radio Tech (deputy leader)

Kholekile Cita – Medic (team leader)

Mark White – Diesel Mechanic

Marlene van Onselen – Field Assistant (Birder)

Martin Postma – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Mia Wege – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Mpho Koalepe – Meteorologist

Nangaadzishumi Nefehere – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Nkoane Mathabatha – Meteorologist

Innocent - Field Assistant (Camera crew)

Marianne - 2nd Camera

Riaan - 1st Camera

## Sponsors:



FAMILY WINES

Thank you guys for giving us a little bit of home to take along to the unknown.