

-The Wanderer-

Marion Island Newsletter, Issue 6, September 2001



SPRING IS HERE AND MARION IS ALIVE WITH ACTIVITY!!



Elephant seal with pup

During the past few weeks we have witnessed Marion emerging from her winter cocoon.

As you walk from base the first change you notice is the wandering albatross chicks. They have made the transformation from adorable fluffy bundles of joy to an awkward teenage version of grey primary feathers alternating with the more familiar white down. Many are getting curious and are wandering off their nests constantly amusing us with their antics. They have been seen stretching out their wings and flapping them furiously as if they are trying to take off! Not far past the first of the wanderer chicks we find giant petrels, or more affectionately known as GP's, starting to breed. These birds were previously associated with king penguins scattering, pandemonium and panic allowing the GP to single out a penguin meal, but since the onset of spring we have gotten to know a different side to these birds. Many of us have had the privilege of witnessing their intricate mating displays. As we venture over Skua Ridge and on towards Ships Cove we have the pleasure of witnessing many sooty albatross and the occasional grey-headed soaring effortlessly in the sky. The sound of the ocean is broken only by the cry of a sooty albatross. These majestic birds command your respect. The cliffs below them are freckled with

gentoo penguin chicks huddling close together partly for warmth, but mainly due to a "safety in numbers" philosophy.

The slow sluggish bags of blubber that lay around lazily on our beaches up until recently have turned into four tons of beach-master with unexpected speed. Each beach has its own beach master with his harem of females along with their more recent additions to the "ellie seal family" - their gorgeous pups, many of whom have provided numerous Kodak moments for the team. The weaning of these pups in a few weeks will be accompanied by orcas frequenting our shores providing us with the opportunity of witnessing these graceful creatures up close.



Flowering acaena

The night sounds have also made a dramatic change with the return of the whitechinned petrels and at the same time we have had to say good-bye to the greatwings as their chicks venture off into the big blue. Today the first of the macaroni penguins returned at Bullard as if they too had heard spring had arrived. Soon Bullard will make the transformation from the peaceful haven we have known it to be to a rather noisy affair.

These changes remind me that the seasons are passing and all too soon it will be our time to fly away...

Sam

Aldo and SQ1's birthdays, spring. Everything is calling for celebration!

The month of September was full of social activities. Here are some of our highlights:

Marion and Beanie coffee shop

It was SQ1's birthday. As if we were in Pretoria we took her out for coffee, but to our own coffee shop.



Marion and Beanie Coffee Shop

Karaoke Marion 58

We had a stage and lights set up. The sound equipment was checked. Then they arrived, Vaya Con Dios, Britney Spears, Mandoza and the rest. The night provided and ended with a lot of fun.



Round Island thoughts

Tambu and I recently embarked on a round island. Leaving base in stunning weather I was sure that it would be a breeze. The first day was a great challenge as we covered quite a distance. The next day was when it all went a tad pear shaped. The elements were about to put us to the ultimate test. We set off in howling head on wind, rain and occasional snow. One step forward, two steps back. I have never yet had to face such physical hardship in my life. We had a vast distance to cover and I was adamant not to be beaten. It is incredible to be so in touch with nature – it's just you and the elements out there. Only yourself and your own perseverance to rely on. If you don't make it you will surely die. We arrived at Swartkop in the course of the afternoon soaking wet from walking head on into wind driven rain. The next day the wind was kinder to us although the rain wasn't and a wet start was on the cards. We put on our wet clothes and set off into the subzero temperature that were waiting for us outside. We ended up having a wonderful walk. That night we experienced a great storm at Repettos – at one stage I was convinced the hut was going to blow away. I even considered sleeping in my gortex! The next day we were again greeted by unharnessed elements- this time in the form of a blizzard. We saw king penguin chicks huddling together with snow packed on top of them. The first sight of base around lunchtime was very welcome. I will never forget that sense of accomplishment when I realised that I had gotten all the work done and had made it safely back to base.

Walking these distances gives you a great deal of time with only yourself and your thoughts.

What might I take from this journey?

On the uneven path of life do we always know what lies ahead? Do we go out in the sun unprepared for the rain and snow, which inevitably come? And when the rain does fall and the wind blow do we meet it with a heavy heart, or do we meet it smiling and push through to the sun on the other side? Do we allow ourselves the pleasure of sitting out in the snow – feeling it fall softly against our skins... or do we dare not venture out amidst adversity.

Do we appreciate the solid *Cotula* covered ground under our feet while it lasts knowing that it won't, but making the most of it while it does? Imagine our life's journey was on *Cotula*. We would never be challenged and never learn. Wisdom is borne through tough times and surviving them. And even though the ground may be shaky and the wind blows there is still beauty around us if we stop to look. When we come across a seal pup or an albatross chick, do we walk on, or do we stop for a moment to take it in.

Do we follow the GPS and do we know where we are at all times? Do we decide what knowledge and skills we require along the way? And do we take care in selecting our travelling companions – those that touch our lives with love? Do we sit comfortably inside waiting for things to happen... or do we venture out and take a look over Skua Ridge? Do we take the well-worn paths or, instead, take the less travelled route with more mires and lava to negotiate, but those, which offer more challenge and a greater adventure. Do we take many zigs and zags learning something new at every turn? Do we watch the sunset and let it fill us up? When we look, do we see and when we touch do we feel?



Dark mantled sooty albatross

When we hear do we listen? For if we do the blessings we receive are immeasurable.

We do not know tranquillity until we experience an orca breaking the surface of the ocean yet only metres away we witness the cruelty of nature as a giant petrel swoops down and takes a penguin chick. How will we know peace, without hostility?

When the ground turns to mires and the flat land to black lava and hills to seemingly unscaleable mountains... what then? Do we give up and sit beside the path in tears and hope for the return of the Agulhas? Or do we push on, no matter what, to reach our objective with strong legs and a strong heart? And at the top do we lay down on the soft *Blechnum* and go to sleep... or do we scan the horizon looking for a new adventure? Do we seek still more friends to accompany us on the next journey, to show them wonders previously hidden to them? Are we truly alive? Are we making the most of every moment? Or are we letting life pass us by?

Sam

So, what do we miss most from home?

A frequently asked question from our mainland friends, “So, after six months on an island what do you miss most from home and life in South Africa?”

I decided to ask this very question to my teammates and find out. The results were interesting. Some couldn’t stop talking while explaining in vivid detail those little things dearly missed. Others sat thinking seriously for a while just to shake their heads not able to think about anything they miss.

Here are the results. Oh, there was one rule, you were not allowed to name specific people or pets.

David said, while checking his weather data, “So far so good.” With a serious facial expression and deep in thought he said: “I’ll tell you later, or wait there is something. Driving and what goes with it you know.”

SQ1 was busy sending mail: “Suid-Afrikaanse sand en grond, erdwurms, Ha-ha-ha... Ek weet ek mag nie perde sê nie maar dis wat ek die meeste mis. Die vryheid as ek perd ry met die wind wat deur my hare waai.”

Beneke at the kitchen table: “Options, your choices are limited on an island. Ek is ok, al te lank op die eilande om goed te mis”... bla bla bla... ‘n Fiets, wind in my hare, nie omdat die wind waai nie maar omdat ek vinnig beweeg. Kan nie sê ek mis Kentucky nie, of ja miskien, maar nie omdat ek Kentucky mis nie maar die opsie om dit te eet”...njaff njaff njaff... This conversation went on for about a half an hour. We’ve got a very talkative base commander!

Sarette was deep in thought, but it didn’t take her long before she made up her mind, “Ek mis underwater hokkie. En take aways. Wel, dit aangesien ek nie diere of mense mag noem nie.”

Segale, our party animal team member, couldn’t stop talking; getting all excited just thinking of home. His list in short, “I miss cell phones, women, people, action, nightclubs and the night life...”

Phaff, with his ever-present content smile: “No Makenklas, there’s nothing I can really think off.”

Aldo: (full of smiles) “Ek mis niks, ek het ‘n lekker *home en continental life* net hier.”

SQ2 spoke without thinking too much and was very specific, “Ek mis ‘n fiets en ek mis die kerk.”

Erika, our sun and ‘bosveld’ girl, knew exactly what she missed from home: “Ek mis die bos baie en die son. Ek mis om na die sterre te kyk sonder om koud te kry. Om te draf op vaste grond en om tennis te speel.” Adapting to your environment is something you can’t tell Erika anything about. Often you will find her dressed like an Eskimo on the sundeck.

watching stars. She visits the gym on a regular basis, making up for the lack of running and tennis.

Sam, our birder is frequently found looking after her beloved birds in the strong winds. Her reply was, "Sunshine, warm water. Just the whole sunshine effort, you know. Fun in the sun! I miss healthy eating, salads, veggies and especially avocado."

So there you have it. A couple of not too serious aspects missed from home. As Sam says: "What a pathetic price to pay!"

Wilna

The Life History Project

The insect lab is the most visited laboratory on Marion though a lot of people might think working with insects is a boring job. One of the biggest attractions is coffee made in a lab with a 'surround sound' view (we once had to melt ice because the water pipes were frozen solid), the cutest Collembola babies in the world and looking at insects that have survived Sarette's freezing experiments. The Life History project deals with the effect that climate change has on indigenous and introduced insects on Marion Island.

The introduction of alien insects combined with an increase in global temperature could pose a problem to indigenous insect populations and ecosystem functioning. There is evidence that introduced insects (with shorter life spans) could have a competitive advantage over indigenous insects (with longer life spans).



Coffee time in the insect lab

Erika's work focuses on the breeding of Collembola and other insects at five different temperatures. This means looking after them better than most babies, as Prof. Chown said. Keep in mind that these insects weigh as little as ten millionths of a gram, which makes weighing them every fourteen days an adventure. Daily observations are done to note down trends of moulting, reproduction, mortality and

activity. This obviously involves a microscope and patience. The springtails (Collembola) have stolen Erika's heart. Some resemble Martians and others teddy bears. Their eggs look like miniature pearls. It is amazing to see the eyes of the developing embryos inside these eggs. Most Collembola are characterised by a springtail (furca), which allows them to jump many times higher than their own body height.



Marion weevil

Sarette's work investigates the temperature tolerance of insects, Collembola and mites. Her experiments mostly involve the running of one or both water baths in the laboratory, noting the temperature at which insects (acclimated at five temperatures) freeze. Some are hardy enough to only freeze at -25°C . Other experiments (lethal temperature experiments) determine the survival rate of insects after a one-hour exposure to a set temperature. Another type of experiment determines the temperature (minimum and maximum) at which insects become uncoordinated due to heat or cold stress. Ten individuals are needed for every experiment and sometimes up to 41 experiments are performed on one day. Sampling thus forms an integral part of her study, and she spends many hours crawling around pootering (sucking them into little tubes) insects. Even Liezl, our medic, has taken a liking into spending hours in the field, sucking up tiny insects, while Beneke runs around with a digital camera, constantly enquiring about which species he is now photographing.

It is also this project's responsibility to search for undocumented alien insects/mites/isopods. On one of our sampling expeditions to Boulders Beach, Liezl enquired about a large 'insect', which turned out to

be a possible introduction – a woodlouse (terrestrial isopod). Subsequently two more specimens were found.

Both Sarette and Erika worked with large animals (including tourists) before; working on such tiny insects has opened a new world to them. Erika has related Collembola feeding on yeast 'ball' to lions feeding on a carcass. Most people coming to Marion Island experience mires, killer whales, albies and seals. We have the privilege to appreciate that, and so much more.

Sarette & Erika

Marion Waters

Vanaand het 'n ster verskiet, maar
dit was nie dieselfe as ooit tevore nie

Die wit skuim was met tye tien meter breed aan die vlak kant
aan die diep kant was die skynsel van die maan
en teen die rots waarop ek gesit het, het die deining vas gerol
teen die ander rotse het dit geklim - die branders het gebreek en
gespat en gejuig
Die wind was liggies en sag teen my, net hier-en-daar gestreel
die skerpioen het rustig by die maan gaan lê, met Antanres
so helder soos kan kom
en Venus het rooi en helder gegloei, asof
dit iets het om uit te deel
die suiderkruis was reg bo my - 'n vaste koers

Daar was soveel energie oral om, dat ek nie geweet het
waar om te kyk nie, maar ...
ek het op die regte oomblik gekyk:
'n entjie bo die wit branders op die strand, het die wolke 'n gaatjie in die lug gelos en
daardeur het 'n ster geval
ek was alleen buite en het dit gevang - met my hele hart

Anders as ander kere het ek nie gewens nie - dit was nie nodig nie:
die ster het gesê hy wil hê ek moet dit weer waag om so te sit en die skoonheid in te drink, want daar gaan iemand by my wees wat die oomblik deel;
vir my alleen sal twee sulke skouspelagtige wonder aande te veel wees om alleen te absorbeer
onder vriespunt was ek nog nooit so warm nie

Erika

This is poem was written while I was sitting alone at the crane point one night. Looking up at a clear sky

filled with stars, I couldn't help myself falling in love again with the stars and waves.



Full moon over the ocean

Quote of the month:

When I was a kid, a year was six times longer than it is today. When I was a boy, a year was three times longer than it is today. On Marion a year seems shorter than one boring Sunday in South Africa.

Tambu

Liewe Ma

Hoe gaan dit met Ma met my gaan dit goed. Ons doen nou weer 'n annir sport hier Ma. Dis soos spiesgooi maar met sikke klein spiesies en hille het vlerkies agteraan. Dan gooi mens dit na 'n bord wat teen die mier vas is en daar is nommirkies op. Ons speel teen SANAE en dan noem ons dit 'n dart game. Ek dink hille bord het annir nommirkies op want hille kry baie meer pinte as ons. Dalk het hille nog nommerkies langs die bord en op die vloer want as ons daar nommirkies gehad het sou ons ver gewen het Ma.

Die een mysie ontwikkel nogsteeds skyfies in die donker kamer. Daai skyfies sonder die sout en asyn Ma weet mos nog. Maar daar het annir dag iets snaaks gebeur. Die geemikalie het spontaan gereageer met die rooiwyn en toe ryl dit die first developer en die kalir developer om en toe is dit nag op die skyfies en dis yntlik in die dag geneem Ma. Ma ek en die donkirkamirmysie het daar bo in die berge na die president en die ouhir president gesoek maar ek weet darim nie of hille daar sal bly nie want dis maar pritty koud en gevaarlik. Tog staan daar op die kaart Staats President Swart en Jan Smuts met sikke nommirs by soos posbis nommirs Ma.

Hier gebeur nou baie annir dinge ok Ma. Die elifint seals kry kleinkies en mens noem hille paps. Hille is seekir ook soos boetie hille se babakie te vroeg gebore want hille velle is nog te groot. Ons sien nou baie kielir whyls en toe het ek nog 'n belangrike ding geleer Ma. Die pot benodig meer as een pap per dag. Dis nie so snaaks as wat dit klink nie Ma. Dit bedoel

net dat die whyls in 'n pot swem soos wat jaglyperds in 'n trop sal wees. En hille moet meer as een elifint seal pap vang om genoeg te eet.

So af en toe as ons nie werk nie Ma dan hou ons partykies en ons het selfs ok gekerriehoukie. Dit het yntlik niks met kerrie of hout te doen nie Ma want al wat mens doen is om annirs aan te trek as wat jy gewoonlik aantrek en dan maak jy of jy iemand annirs is en dan sing jy. Dis baie maklik Ma. Op die ou einde was ons sommir ok die Kelly Family al het ons soos die Britiney Spearse, Via Condios, Gotliep Grootappel, en Mandoza gelyk. Dan moet Ma ons koffie shop sien. Marion en Beanie. Dit is nou die Big Brother van The Mug and Bean.

Ma die Rok hoppirs en die Makirounies is terug. Dit beteeke dis rerig nou lente al is dit nie rerig nie. Maar Ma moenie worrie nie want dis nie die Rok hoppirs waarteen die skoolhoof die mysies gewaarsku het nie. Hierdie is pikkewyne en hille het haarstyle en die Makirounies ok Ma. Hille hare lyk ampir soos die makirounie wat Ma maak net sonder die kaas en die mins en die brandsils. Dan moet Ma assiblieftog net weer vir Ouma verdyklik dat ons nie pos hier kan kry nie. Ek dink dis omdat die posman selfs vir boetie se brak geskrik het en 'n ongelik met sy fiets gehaat het. Die robbe hier is kwaihir as daai brak. Rerig Ma die posman sal dit nie maak nie. So ons kan net e-myl kry want dit kom gelukkig met die kompietirnetwerkkoeneksjin.

Groetnis Kleinsus

Kleinsus tells Mom about our dart game against SANAE. Also about slides that came out black again, that some of the elephant seal pups were born and the maccies and rockhopper penguins are returning for summer.

Weather statistics for the month:

Average Pressure	1006.5hPa
Highest Pressure	1026.7hPa
Lowest Pressure	985.5hPa
Average temperature	4.5°C
Highest temperature	11.6°C
Lowest temperature	-1.9°C
Strongest Wind	138.8km/h
Sunshine hours for the month	124.6h
Total rainfall	230.0mm

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Thank you! Marion would not have been the same without your support!