

The Wanderer

SEPTEMBER 2018

SOOTIES

species of the month

hut of the month

Mixed Pickle

Scoria...

Marion Terrain: Part 5

recording sunshine

what's up with the weather?

CONTENTS



3 LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

12 PICK OF PICS

4 MIXED PICKLE
hut of the month

15 FAVOURITE PIECE OF EQUIPMENT

7 MARION IN NUMBERS
fun facts

16 ISLAND LIFE

experience it up close

8 SOOTIES
experience the natives

17 SUNSHINE RECORDER
what's up with this weather?

9 SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAYS

19 THE TEAM

see what M75 has been up to

11 SCORIA
Marion terrain: Part 5

20 THANK YOU to our SPONSORS

COVER IMAGE:
Grey-headed
Albatross
*Thalassarche
chrysoloma*
- Elsa van Ginkel



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letter from the *editors*



The days are becoming busier than ever before as the breeding season has fully announced its presence. The birders and sealers are taking the hut life to the next level and the winders and botanists are only a few steps behind them. Back at base, the team is still going strong and we are all still enjoying the island life. I hope all our friends and family on the mainland had a brilliant September and I hope that this month's edition will show everyone out there a glimpse of September on Marion.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elsa van Ginkel'.

Elsa van Ginkel
Editor

It is scary how quickly time is passing ... despite the additional hour or three in each day. Base has been getting noticeably quieter as the field assistants have been spending extended periods of time out at the huts. Chicks and pups alike have begun populating the shores of Marion, most notably the elephant seal pups, much cuter than their parents. The weather is improving (on average) and everyone is enjoying a warmer base. We hope you enjoy the September edition of the Wanderer.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Burns'.

James Burns
Co-Editor

Mixed Pickle

Sealer's Beach Cottage

Ons huisie by die see

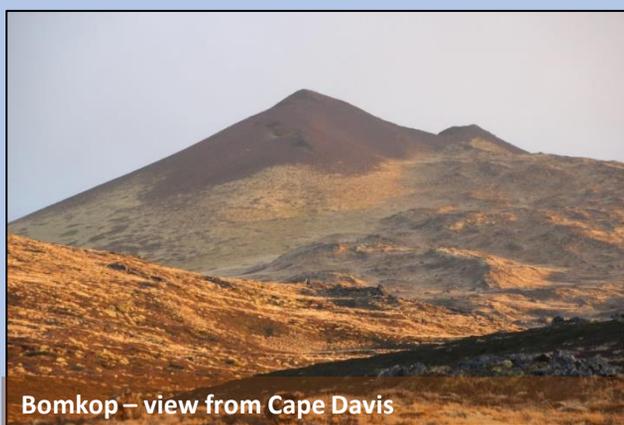
Hut Stop # 3

- Elsa van Ginkel

Hut of the month: Mixed Pickle

Route to Mixed Pickle

We all have different routes, some of which are much easier than others, but for this month's journey – we'll be taking the more inland route... If you view the interior of the island from Cape Davis, to the right of Lou-se-kop - southwest of the hut - the first thing you'll see is Bomkop.



Bomkop – view from Cape Davis

You can't miss it, unless the mist decided to cover its existence. Bomkop is our first marker and we'll be heading slightly towards the left of it. This walk can vary in time, depending on your choice of route as well as Marion's choice of weather. It usually takes between three and a half to five hours.

After you have made your way past Bomkop, it's a long and treacherous walk through black lava of 'hell', which are covered in layers of snow most of the time.



Treacherous black lava/ Oreo cookie-crumble

The next and most prominent marker – Azorellakop - which gives this stretch of route its name, 'AZO'. If you asked any of the field researchers their opinion on AZO... the first reaction will always be a 'sigh' and then a reply...



Azorellakop

Azo – ‘everybody’s favourite thing’.

The decision is yours, whether you want to fight through a jungle of *Azorella*-slopes on the left of this *feared-by-all-kop* or through the dark hills of hard *Oreo-cookie-crumbles*. Both options seem to be equally challenging in their own way. From Azorellakop, you just walk as coastally as is safely possible and hope to see the hut before nightfall or the ghostly veils of mist move in to kill your visibility.



When the hut finally shows his skeleton in the distance, Marion has the tendency to fool you, as always, into thinking it's closer than it actually is.



Spot the hut

But beware! Only once you have passed Triegaardt Bay to the northwest and arrive at Mixed Pickle Cove, can you finally relax and breathe as you reach the door of the hut.

**"Welcome to the Sealers' Beach Cottage –
Ons huisie by die see"**



Mixed Pickle Hut and view from the hut.



The Hut

This is the hut nearest to the ocean and the sea view is magnificent. 'Mixed Pickle... funny name you got there?' The name of this hut originated at the end of 1951, when Robert 'Bob' Rand - the first recognised biologist on Marion – found an old hut, possibly still from the seal hunting days. It was stocked with some bottles of food including 'mixed pickles'.



Mixed Pickle Cove

Water

The river supplying the water for Mixed Pickle can be found just west of the hut.

Hut recipe:



Chocolate Hut Flapjacks

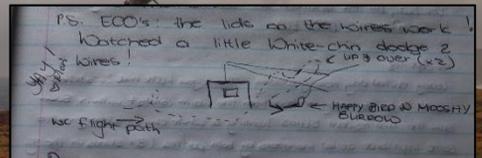
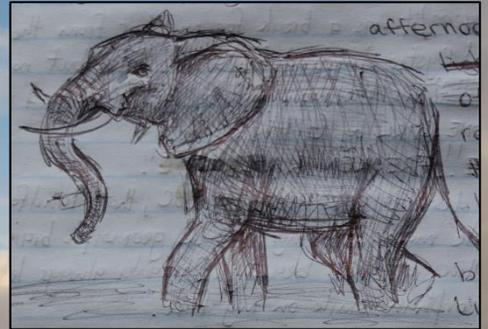
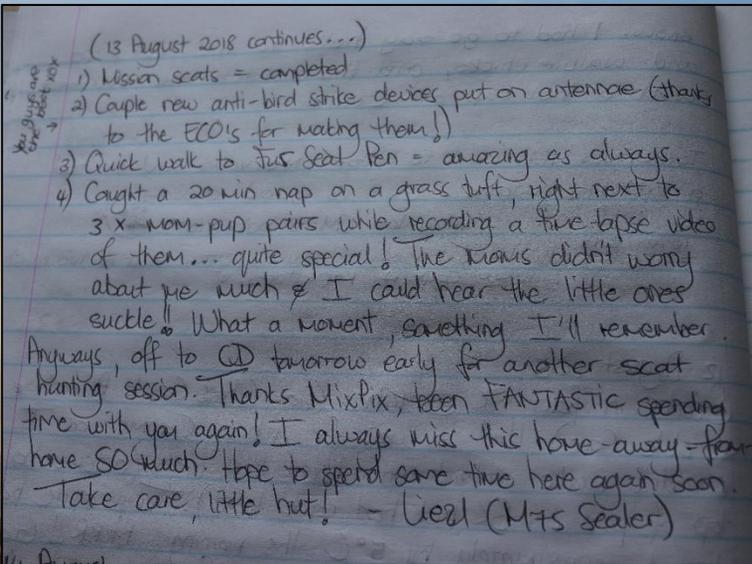
Ingredients:

- 1 cup of flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cold water
- 8 tsps chocolate Nesquik
- pinch of salt
- cooking oil

Methods:

1. Mix all ingredients (except oil) until it forms a thick paste.
2. Add oil to a hot pan and pour the flapjack mix into the pan, turn the flapjack every few seconds until golden brown.

Hut entry



Work within the Mixed Pickle area:

- **Winders:** We have four stations situated between Mixed Pickle and Swartkops.
- **Birders:** The birders have a long list of activities in the area, such as bird counts, night birding, deploying GPS devices, etc.
- **Sealers:** The sealers also have a very busy schedule which often brings them to Mixed Pickle.



Crozet shags



Coastal station at Kampkoppie



Seal pup

Fun Facts...

Marion in numbers

- Charlotte Heijnis

- 1 Non-seabirds, non-migratory species: The Lesser or Black-faced Sheathbill (“Paddy”) which is the only sub-endemic bird species.
There is also only one perennial river – “Softplume”.
- 2 ‘Types’ of lava flow: Older ($\pm 276,000 - 100,000$ years) grey lava which has been glaciated and is regarded as Pleistocene and the younger ($\pm 15,000$ years) black lava from the Holocene. The younger lava flows are associated with the Island’s distinctive red scoria cones.
Also the number of degrees of latitude it is located above the Polar Front, making it the most temperate of the sub-Antarctic islands.
- 3 Seal species breeding on Marion: Elephant seal (*Mirounga leonina*), Sub-Antarctic fur seal (*Arctocephalus tropicalis*) and Antarctic fur seal (*Arctocephalus gazella*).
- 4 Management zones: 1. Service zone, 2. Natural Zone, 3. Wilderness Zone and 4. Limited access zones - the study colonies. Prince Edward Island is the 5th – a restricted zone.
Also the approximate difference in temperature between summer and winter.
- 5 Suspected number of glaciations that Marion underwent during the Quaternary period (Prince Edward has none). Marion underwent at least three glaciations in the past 300,000 years.
Also the number of cats introduced to Marion in 1949 to control the mice population.
- 6 °C - Approximate average annual temperature.
Also, Marion Island and its baby brother, Prince Edward, lie with five other islands/island groups (South Georgia, Macquarie, Heard and McDonald, Kerguelen, and the Crozets) within a few degrees of the Antarctic Convergence. These islands are classed as the sub-Antarctic region.
- 7 Vegetation types (habitats): Salt spray complex; Biotic; Stream banks, springs, flushes & drainage areas; Polar desert ($120\text{km}^2/290\text{km}^2$ total area); Mires; Lowland slopes; Feldmark and Aquatic.
- 8 Maximum number of nights continuous stay permitted on Prince Edward Island (once every four years max).
- 9 Field huts sleeping four: eight coastal (clockwise from base: Kildalkey, Watertunnel, Grey-headed, Rooks, Swartkops, Mixed Pickle, Cape Davis and Repetto’s) and one inland @ 750m above sea level (Katedraal). Prince Edward has no permanent structures.
- 10 People are allowed on Prince Edward Island in a four year period.

Experience the Natives

species of the month...

Sooty albatross

- Sean Morar

The sooty albatross (*Phoebastria fusca*) is a species that breeds on sub Antarctic islands around the world. One of these lovely little islands is our slice of paradise – Marion. The light mantled albatross is a fellow member of the *Phoebastria* genus and tend to intermingle with the ‘Sooties’, often breeding in similar areas and showing similar behavioral traits. Though both have arrived back in force, we have actually spent the better part of the past 6 months without seeing a single one. Our theories ranged from their poor navigation to a conspiracy in which sooty albatross do not in fact exist at all. We have since accepted that these strange creatures do exist and spend the winter trawling the southern oceans. They circle the lower part of the globe, flying past the southern ends of South America, Australia and everything in-between. At first we started to notice a strange sound, similar to that emitted by baby fur seals, up on the slopes and cliff faces.



Their beautiful face and horrible voice are overshadowed by their choice of real estate. For all those who work on them, this poses the biggest problem. These birds choose to nest and roost on some of the hardest to reach areas on this island.



Nest site close to the Rooks hut

Being the great scientists we are, we soon realized that seal pups probably couldn't climb quite that well. It was then decided that these must be the ghosts of sheep brought here during the sealing days. Both of these assessments were incorrect as you'd probably guess but they do paint a picture of the absolutely absurd sound emitted by such a majestic looking creature.



Slopes and cliffs of the Rooks Peninsula

Usually on slopes and cliffs vegetated by untrustworthy flora, often providing either no footing or a false promise of stability. Regardless, the sooty and light mantled albatross have returned and begun mating. This provides us with the rare and exciting challenge of monitoring their breeding success and hopefully following this year's generation of chicks from hatching right through to fledging when they will step off the cliffs and begin their own adventures traversing the world's oceans.



AT
"VEELS
GELUK...
LIEZL"



Liezl's Birthday - (surprise at the field hut ... and...AMAZING RACE!)

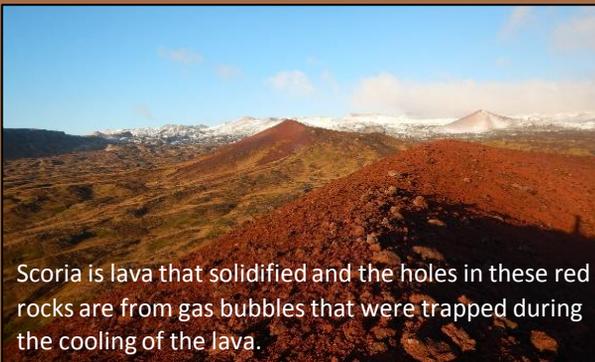
Scoria...

- Marike Louw

Marion Terrain: Part 5

You're crawling over fist-sized red volcanic stones. It's agony for your hands and knees, but standing upright would result in being flung across the island by a gale, possibly to the neighbouring island of Prince Edwards. Baffled gulls announce their bewilderment at the humanoid blue speck slowly ascending one of the many volcanic cones (there are more than 130!) that add such majestic curves to the Marion horizons.

"Why am I doing this?" you start to wonder as tears streak your face in attractive horizontal lines. But the answer becomes vividly and breathtakingly clear with your final push to reach the summit.



What a feast of sights is rewarded to the weary but daring adventurer! Utterly untamed, wholly pristine, gloriously and magically wild - no artist or photographer could ever capture or replicate what you are seeing and you beg your mind to etch the scenes permanently into your memory. For the billionth time you are seized with gratitude as your admiring gaze sweeps across beauty upon beauty.

The scoria hills themselves are fascinating, and when you are not crawling - fighting the wind, it is easy to appreciate their numerous different shapes. Many scoria hills do not end in a pointy summit as you might suspect as you begin your ascent. Instead, upon reaching the highest point you are privy to a crater filled with water: a crater lake. Sometimes you'll ascent one hill thinking you're aiming for the highest point, and then find that there are numerous cones that make up the hill and visiting each one rewards a different view.



While no fieldworker's work strictly takes place at the summit of these hills (although the *Inyangas* have vegetation surveys close to the top and the geomorphologist works at some hills), one cannot help but take a little detour to explore.



PICK OF PICS

Sooty Albatross
Phoebastria fusca

On the Nest...



In flight...



Grey-headed Albatross
Thalassarche chrysostoma

On the Nest...



In flight...



Father's watching eye



Elephant Seals
Mirounga leonina

Sleeping beauty



Protective mom...



My favourite piece of equipment...

It is my favourite stick that hooks all the birds - the crook. It may be long and a little bit heavy to carry out in the field but it really gets the job done! And I look like Gandalf! Well, maybe more like Radagast the Brown.

- Stephan (M75 Birder/Hybrid)



Sunshine Recorder

We work with a wide range of equipment every day as we do our meteorological observations. Of all these, my favourite is probably the *sunshine recorder*. At the end of each day we collect and replace a sunshine chart onto which the day's sunlight hours have been burnt. This device magnifies the sun's rays through a glass marble onto a marked "timeline" as the sun traverses the sky: simple yet effective! Turn to the article further on to read more...

- James (M75 Metkassie)





Liezl Pretorius

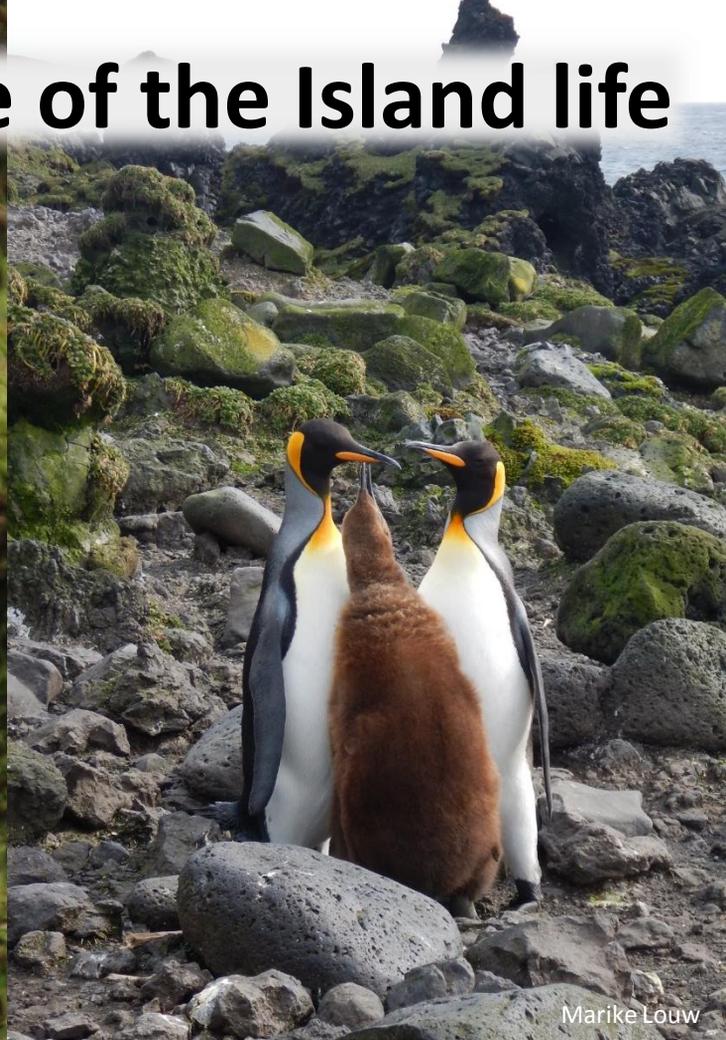


Elsa van Ginkel



Elsa van Ginkel

Taste of the Island life



Marike Louw



Liezl Pretorius



Welly Qwabe

What's up with this Weather?

... the sunshine recorder...

- James Burns

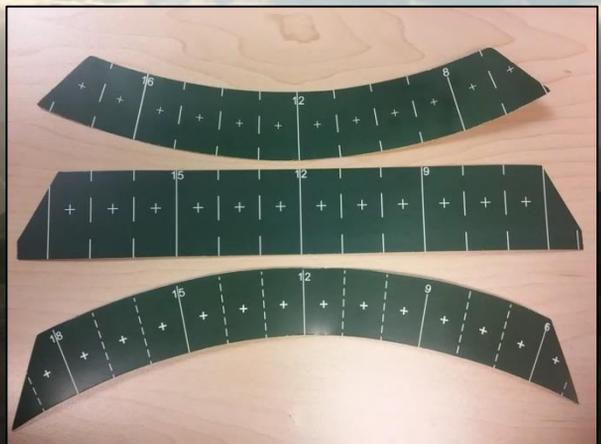
Spring has arrived ... hasn't it? We celebrated Spring day on September 1st so it should be well into the new season! Once again, this month has shown us that Marion does not adhere to expected seasonal fluctuations as we are treated daily to a cocktail of seasons flashing by in no particular order. Heavy rains or pleasant sunshine, snow showers or clear blue skies, heavy swells or wind still days; September has seen it all, although none of these excessively. The sky is no longer pitch black at 5h30 when the met technician on duty wakes up to begin day-shift and the blinds in the office stay open until well after night-shift commences. Temperatures still range from below zero to balmy highs of around 9 or 10 degrees but the wind chill brings this down considerably.



A very short distance from the base along the catwalks, the sunshine recorder is positioned out in the open where there are no buildings or objects overshadowing it. It is fixed on a pole, approximately 1.5m off the ground, and orientated to face North (because we are in the Southern hemisphere). The recorder is also tilted on circular axis according to our latitude coordinate (roughly 46 degrees South). The device is purely mechanical, i.e. no electricity required, and has a genius yet simple design.



In the previous editions of the Wanderer, we have discussed the launching of weather balloons and measuring sea surface temperatures and this month we will be looking at the sunshine recorder; a personal favourite. Using this device, we are able to determine how many hours in the day we get unobstructed sunlight.



ABOVE: The three different sunshine charts. Winter (top), spring/autumn (middle) and summer (bottom)

What's up with this Weather?

The key component is a big glass marble, secured above a series of curved slots. Into these slots fit one of three differently shaped charts depending on the season; the arc of the sun is much lower across the sky in winter as opposed to summer (we switched to the Spring/Autumn shape for this month). As the sun moves across the sky, the marble acts as a magnifying glass and the light from the sun refracts in the glass sphere to burn a line through the chart and basically marks the time. At the end of each day, the chart is replaced (and secured using a screw ... the wind, you know) with a new one for the following day and the amount of sunshine recorded is entered using our weather service software.

One of the first duties of the technician on night-shift is to replace the sunshine chart whether there has been any sun that day or not (the chart is often rather soggy after a day of continuous rain or drizzle and needs to be left to dry near the heater in the office). So far this year it has been possible to replace the chart at around 17h30 before we need to do our first observation but now, because the sun is setting so much later, we have to wait until 18h00 - 18h30 before it is dark enough (unless it's overcast with no prospects of clearing up). It's a nice stroll, or brisk trot, out to the site and the fresh air is great. If we're lucky, there are a pair or two of skuas sitting nearby waiting to say hello.



SAWS MONTHLY WEATHER STATS – August 2018

TEMP	MIN	MAX	AVERAGE	AVERAGE LOW	AVERAGE HIGH
	-2.4°C	12.2°C	3.8°C	1.0°C	6.6°C
PRESSURE	MIN	MAX	AVERAGE	HUMIDITY	AVERAGE
	973.3hPa	1034.2hPa	1003.7hPa		84%
RAIN	TOTAL	DAYS WITH RAIN (>1mm)		MAX IN 24 HOURS	
	152.6mm	22 (17)		23.0mm (13 th August)	
WIND	MAX	DIRECTION	SUNSHINE	TOTAL	
	115km/h	S		79.2 HOURS	

Thank you to our sponsors!!!



Rain, sun, ice pellets, snow, sleet, wind, more wind and then some more wind ... hiking around Marion is not for the faint-hearted and is not, under any circumstances what-so-ever, good for the moisture content and general feel of one's epidermis. Enter left stage our wonderful sponsored AfriEarth products. After a long day of walking through the multiple seasons with associated elements which Lady Marion throws our way, there is nothing so soothing after a hut bath (basin of hot water from the kettle next to the heater) than liberally applying AfriEarth's soothing, hydrating body lotion. It feels wonderful, smells gorgeous and comes in perfect hiking-sized bottles. Even the Skua wanted some! Thank you AfriEarth!

