



THE GOUGH BUNTING

G65 OVERWINTERING EXPEDITION

ISSUE 3 | FEBRUARY 2020 – APRIL 2020



FROM THE TEAM LEADER

We are already half way through our term here at Gough Island. What would've been a very exciting (more than the usual excitement to overwinter here) year, was abruptly ended by the outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

Since the 26th of February 2020 (also on Dylan's birthday), team G65 became host to the first twelve Gough Island Restoration Project (GIRP) officials. We all became one happy family, as we all were equally excited

about this world renown project.

Unfortunately, as mentioned above, the project came to a sudden halt. This also caused the GIRP officials to be stranded here at Gough. Although, the celebration of Alexis's birthday did manage to keep the spirits high.

It is in times like these, that UBUNTU becomes first nature to South Africans. Team G65 made these international citizens feel at home. The bonds that were already established became

even stronger. On the day that the last GIRP officials left, the overwhelmed silence painted the whole picture.

With the permission of the editor; may I as team-leader of Gough 65, use this podium to convey my heartfelt gratefulness towards each and every team member. Though we are on foreign soil, you were absolutely ambassadors for our country.

I salute you all!

Errol



FROM THE EDITOR

Summer is winding down, and winter is slowly creeping in. As the days are getting shorter, and temperatures getting lower, we finding ourselves progressively adding on more layers of clothes. The base was buzzing with excitement (and a bit of stress) since our new

guests arrived, but regrettably it was short lived. G65 is still going about their duties as per usual. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has affected the entire world, it also meant that GIRP had to be put on hold. A sad event for all involved, but

with all hope, next year it will be underway.

Enjoy the read

Dylan



Inside this issue:

So what does a Meteorological Technician do? 2

So close, yet so far... 3

Living on a tiny rock in the South Atlantic during a global pandemic 4

Going on an adventure – part II 5

Life as a Communication and Electronics Engineer at Gough Base 6

Gough Island Pool Tournament 7

A brief history of Gough Island 8

Cooking life on Gough 8

From the Metkassies 9

G65 QUOTES:

- #AreYouReady
- #OpenAllThrottles
- #MyChomie
- #OfCos
- #442Formation
- #ListenMamela
- #MahBru

SO WHAT DOES A METEOROLOGICAL TECHNICIAN DO?

As a meteorological technician based on Gough Island, it is our job to report on the current weather we observe, as well as maintain the instruments of the automatic weather station (AWS), and perform upper air recordings by releasing radiosondes attached to balloons filled with hydrogen, twice a day.

Being on Gough Island as a meteorological technician definitely has its perks. As there are three of us, we are very flexible in organizing our shifts. We work on a 5-day shift, 5-night shift, and 5 day off period, allowing us ample time to explore the wonders of Gough.

Some noticeable differences on Gough, as compared to back home, is how fast the weather can change. It is possible to experience all four seasons in a single day. Visibility can go from less than 500 meters to several kilometers in a matter of minutes.

Winds can be so frightening (with gusts of up to 80 knots), that you often hope the base does not blow away in the middle of the night. The rainfall on Gough Island is no joke either. We can receive more than 100 mm of rainfall in a single day. With winter coming, we are excited to see what weather phenomena Gough has to offer.



© Dylan Seaton

A few Antarctic Terns took a fancy to some of the weather instruments we have around the base. For a brief period they were either seen resting on top of the Stevenson Screen (top), sunshine chart deck (far left) or inspecting the anemometer (left)



© Dylan Seaton

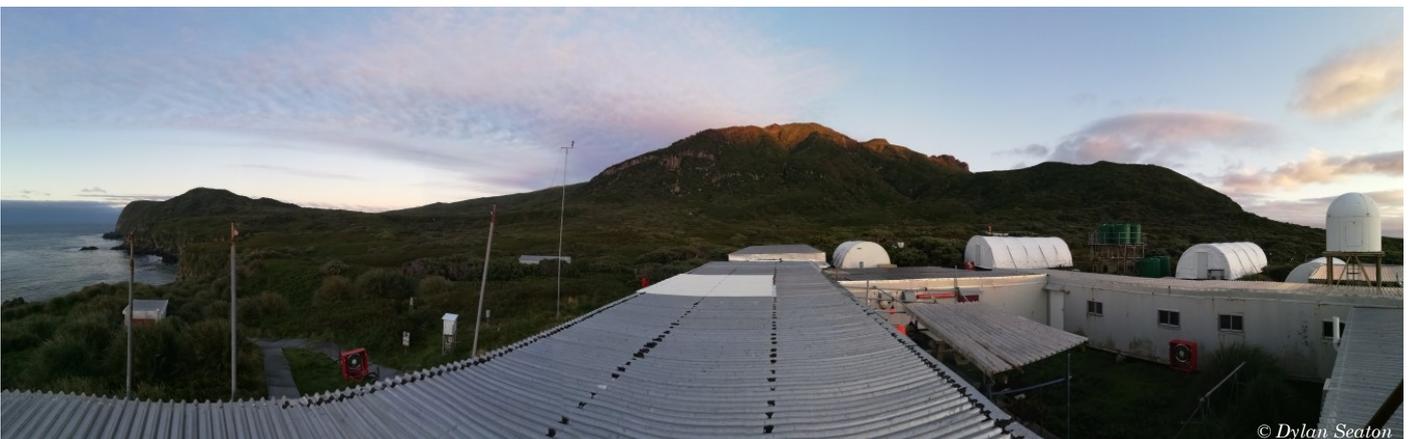


© Dylan Seaton



© Dylan Seaton

Office life isn't too bad either, with a window facing to east, we get to witness magnificent sunrises (top), and with only a short distance to where we do our observations, we also get an amazing view of the mountains to the west of the base (bottom)



© Dylan Seaton

SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR...

An exclusive interview with Richard Switzer (Aviculture Team Leader)

Who are you?

We comprise three small teams, working in coordination. The first is the Construction Team, the second is the Aviculture Team, and the final person is the British doctor. Additionally, there is a whole team of project management and logistical support staff that have been focused on the planning, coordination and implementation of the Gough Island Restoration Project.



What is this projects goal?

The primary goal of the whole project is to restore Gough Island's ecosystem back to a near pristine state. Together with Inaccessible Island, Gough is a World Heritage Site, in part due to its global importance for nesting seabirds and the unique species that are found nowhere else. But we are all aware of the impact that the invasive non-native mice are having on the seabirds, with an estimated 2 million eggs and chicks being lost each year, with the result that many of these seabird populations are declining.

To put it simply, we aim to remove every single mouse from Gough, by spreading bait pellets containing rodenticide all over the island, in a carefully coordinated, technically complex operation. We must be totally successful in achieving this goal – in a project like this 99.9% successful is not enough.

Within this project, we are also mindful about the potential impact that the bait could have on the two native land birds – the *Gough bunting* and the *Gough moorhen*. So, the Aviculture Team is focused on establishing safeguard populations of both species.

Who are the partners?

The Gough Island Restoration Project is led by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), on behalf of Tristan da Cunha. The project is being run

in partnership with; The Administration and Island Council of Tristan da Cunha; the South African Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF); the UK government, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, BirdLife South Africa, BirdLife International and Island Conservation.

What have you been doing here on the island?

Since February, the Construction Team has been building some of the key infrastructure for keeping buntings and moorhens in captivity. The Construction Team will also be building an accommodation tent (for use when the full team arrives), a bathroom tent and, perhaps the biggest challenge of them all, a huge weatherproof tent to act as the helicopter hangar.

What have you found to be the challenges of being on Gough?

So many exciting challenges!... The hike down the muddy Tafelkop path in the rain was certainly one to remember; so was the challenge of making pizza for 22 people, as part of my cooking skivvy.

What have you really enjoyed about being here?

While we will be leaving Gough sad, I have particularly enjoyed seeing all the hard work of the Aviculture and Construction Team come to fruition. We have achieved so much and created a strong foundation for the future of the project. But perhaps most importantly, I have enjoyed the friendship of our work-mates and "house-mates" on the base.



Meanwhile, the Aviculture Team has been preparing all the resources necessary for husbandry and veterinary care of the birds we aim to keep in the safeguard populations. Examples include the construction of bunting cages and moorhen shelters, as well as equipping the veterinary and food prep tents.

So, how has the project been impacted by Coronavirus?

Although our isolation on Gough has meant that the entire team has been safe from Coronavirus, we were expecting to welcome a small number of new team-mates on the Aviculture Team in March. We were also anticipating the arrival of the Baiting Team in late May. Sadly, numerous international travel restrictions have made it impossible for our colleagues (who would have been coming from four continents) to travel to Gough. This has meant that we had to postpone the Project.

What does the future hold?

We hope to be back! Coronavirus has been such a disruptive force on the world that it is currently impossible to predict where the project will be, 9 months from now. But what is certain is that millions more seabird eggs and chicks will die on Gough within the next year, due to the impact of the mice; populations of many species will continue to decline. That's why we must get back to Gough and finish what we started.



LIFE ON A TINY ROCK IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

by Michelle Risi



Being on one of the most remote islands in the world during a global pandemic is seemingly one of the best places to be. It is a very strange time for us as we follow the news of an ever-changing world while our days continue to tick over with little change. The COVID-19 pandemic has not affected our day to day island living but it has affected our plans for this year in the biggest way possible! After 18 months of hard work towards this big goal, we (Chris, Alexis and myself) had hoped to be part of the Gough Island Restoration Project, one of most important conservation projects which will restore Gough to a seabird haven free of any invasive mammalian predators. When news broke that the project would be postponed the world seemingly came crashing down around us, it has undoubtedly been a whirlwind of emotions; shock, denial and devastation, but given how swiftly countries have moved into lockdown status to flatten the curve, we are 100% supportive of the difficult decision that had to be made.

In the time prior to the postponement, we had welcomed the first group of the restoration project team members to Gough who were responsible for implementing the initial stages of the project by erecting essential temporary infrastructure. During the brief time that we have spent together, everyone's passion and dedication to the project was extremely evident, a lot of

important tasks were accomplished, and all progress made will undoubtedly put the project in great stead for the time when it goes ahead. It was amazing to see how people from all around the world (UK, US, AUS and RSA) united and bonded. Unfortunately, this time has now come to an end as the restoration team members make their journeys home. For us remaining behind on the island, we are sorry to see their friendly faces go as we prepare for another winter on Gough, which will unfortunately consist of documenting another year of mice impact on Gough's winter breeders. A challenging task, but one that only reinforces our drive of wanting to see this project through.



I did not want to end this piece on a depressing note as we have accomplished so much in a short space of time. Everyone involved has expressed keen interest to come back to Gough when the project goes ahead so we all feel positive about working together again. In difficult times such as these we all have to focus on something positive that keeps us going, and for us, it is certainly working towards a mouse-free Gough Island!



Due to the often-miserable winter weather on Gough we spend quite a bit of time indoors so I thought I would end with some tips for living in isolation which will hopefully make your days of social isolation a little easier:

- *Wake up at the same time every day, and make your bed.*
- *Listen to good podcasts when doing your daily chores, we love No Such Thing as a Fish, Radiolab and Ologies, and if you are interested in learning more about epidemiology during this time try This Podcast Will Kill You.*
- *Try and stay active every day, if you can't go outside, we enjoy doing Yoga with Adriene, a great YouTube channel.*
- *Get creative in the kitchen, nothing beats freshly baked goods.*
- *Try something new (journaling or channeling your creativity).*
- *Playing board games or card games.*
- *Checking in with your friends and family often.*
- *Focus on something that you are grateful for.*

GOING ON AN ADVENTURE—PART II

By Dylan Seaton

Alas, my thirst for adventure has not yet been quenched. I managed to add another location to my bucket list, namely Prion Cave. Despite the muddy and damp darkness, it was very fascinating to see and listen to the Prions. Their chicks are even more interesting, as they look like little fur balls with a beak, but at the same time, it was another shock to see the devastation the mice have caused.



© Dylan Seaton

Macgillivray's Prion inside Prion Cave

I was fortunate once again to take a trip up to Gonydale, only this time, acted as the guide for our one and only team leader, Errol. It was nice to see his excitement as we reached The Hummocks, just before the Gonydale campsite. However, we did not stay long as the weather brought a chilling wind that felt as if your fingers were about to freeze off, so we hurried back to the confines of the warm base.



© Dylan Seaton

A pair of Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses gave us a display on our way to Gonydale



Errol and myself making it to Gonydale, despite the blistering cold winds



© Michelle Jones

Chris, Alexis and myself holding the last three female pups for this session of pup weighing



© Dylan Seaton

Two seal pups posing for the camera

I had the opportunity to join the birders again to help out with the seal pup weighing, which is always fun. We also took the time to explore a lesser known cave just past seal beach, and just took in the sights and sounds for a while before we headed back.

My next trip to Gonydale was with Bubele, and we aimed to conquer The Rowettes, but due to strong winds, low visibility and cold temperatures once again, we could only reach the top of the South Rowett before we had to turn back. An unaccomplished journey, but a fun one nonetheless.



Taking a cold and wet lunch break on top of South Rowett, despite not being able to see the view it was still an awesome experience



© Dylan Seaton

Two curious Gough Buntings investigating a travelers boots near the Gonydale hut



© Dylan Seaton

A pair of Tristan Albatrosses entertaining us as departed from Gonydale, on our way back to base

Once again, good weather permitted me to take another trip up to Gonydale on my off day, and this time I managed to make it across the Rowettes. To see part of the island from a different view is fascinating, I got to view Albatross Plain more clearly, as well as Tarn Moss and Edinburgh Peak (although the top of the peak was covered with clouds). I also had the opportunity to see my first Tristan Albatross chick, which was pretty awesome. Soon I will attempt to cross Windy Ridge and hopefully make it to Waterfall Camp.



A quick selfie on top of the North Rowett, with Hags Tooth in the background, before the clouds rolled in and heading back to the Gonydale hut

LIFE AS A COMMUNICATION & ELECTRONICS ENGINEER AT GOUGH BASE

By Errol Julies

What do you do every day for a whole year at such a small base?

The above question was directed to me numerous times already. Well, to answer that in a normal message would not nearly give meaning to it.

As the Communications and Electronics Engineer at any of the SANAP bases, there are obviously responsibilities towards this position. These formal responsibilities and criteria are available when these vacancies are advertised.

Although resources are very limited, one has to be able to “McGyver” where possible. Except for the specialized skills and McGyver tricks, one would need to be flexible. Flexibility in the sense of to be able to be a valuable team member, learn new things, share your experience with other team members and etc. To be a part of any overwintering team has much more “perks” than just a salary every month. Let me share my “perks” until now, with you.

As one of my responsibilities is to maintain the HF communication system, I had to upgrade the antenna, as it became damaged. The mast is very high. Our electrician, with years of experience in high mast operations, became my wingman and thus made sure I do it safely.

© Thendo Sihkwari



Thabiso and myself on top of the 30 meter mast performing regular maintenance on the antenna



An image just to paint a picture of the height of the communications mast that we had to scale



I also learned something new about FLASH-BAND, and how to properly seal a roof-leak, which are common occurrences here at the base due to the strong rains.

I have also tried to be as adventurous as possible, and tried to explore as much as possible. I have taken several opportunities with the experienced research team, and some other team mates, to hike with them up to the mountains.



I am still enjoying the life of a Gough Island fisherman, and I already have found a new fishing companion, Alexis. I even learned how to manufacture my own fishing lures.



Along with a few of the other team mates, I also had the opportunity to assist in Seal pup weighing at Tumbledown. Never in my wildest dreams would I thought about that.



The above however, is only my “perks” from being here as a team member. It all depends on individual attitude. Imagine this as a common attitude. And I leave you with one piece of advice.



“No war could be won against such a force, whether its problems or a global disease”

GOUGH ISLAND POOL TOURNAMENT

By Thendo Sikhwari



© Dylan Seaton

On Gough Island, we often have to entertain ourselves, with only the 10 team members. Therefore, we decided to start a Pool Table League to build comradery, develop our pool skills and just have some overall fun within the base.

The tournament commenced on January 28, with the official opening game between Bubele and Gilbert aka 'Papa G'. Th match ended with Papa G winning and managing to take a 3 point victory.



© Thendo Sikhwari

The winner of a match would accumulate 3 points if his/her opponent remains with balls on the table. However, if the player wins the game with a 'White-wash-rule', the player accumulates 4 points. The team members tried to practice each day before the game, in order to get the upper hand on their opponent. But probably the most entertaining were the entrances each player made, in order to intimidate their opponents. Some of the most exciting entrances were seen throughout the tournament, often being more entertaining than the matches themselves.

The tournament spirit was very high from game one up until the last game. The last official match was on February 28 between Dylan and Siya, and after a total of 21 games played by all players, the results were in.



© Thendo Sikhwari

Our one and only electrician, Mr. Thabiso Maphumulo took the victory with 16 points on 6 games.



© Thendo Sikhwari

Thabiso was rewarded with a Championship Pool certificate and he was praised publicly so that others can learn to recognize and celebrate the small success surrounding the bigger victories. Congratulations Thabiso Maphumulo for the Pool Table Victory!!!

#Amatorokisi



© Thendo Sikhwari

Gough 65 Pool Tournament Log



Players	Matches	Balls	Points
Thabiso	6	10	16
Thendo	6	3	12
Bubele	6	5	9
Papa G	6	-1	9
Siyasanga	6	-2	6
Errol	6	-4	6
Dylan	6	-7	6

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GOUGH ISLAND

It occurred me from the first two issues that some people may not know much about Gough Island, or the Gough Base its self. Allow me to give you a brief history of both.

Located at 40° 18' S and 9° 56' W, Gough is a volcanic island, part of the United Kingdom Dependent Territory of Tristan da Cuna. The island has an area of 65 km², and the highest point being 910 m (Edinburgh Peak).

Gough Island was first discovered in 1505 by Gonçalo Alvarez. However, the island was not accurately mapped or well known to other explorers at the time, until it was rediscovered in 1732 by Charles Gough.

Gough Island is home to a unique variety of plant and animal life, attracting the attention of many researchers. Also, because of its position, Gough Island serves as an early warning for experienced weather conditions in South Africa, signifying the Islands importance for weather monitoring.

The first research base on Gough Island was established in 1955, on the eastern side of the Island, in an area known as The Glen. The base was then relocated in 1963 to Transvaal Bay, where it sits currently.



COOKING LIFE ON GOUGH

By Thabiso Maphumulo



In August of 2019, before we set off for Gough Island, the G65 team went to various training workshops, one of which was a cooking class in Cape Town. The main objective of this cooking class was to equip the team members with skills and prepare them to cook for the rest of the team when we all reached the base.

Despite the training only being a few days, it was very valuable and useful. Over the first few months, the team

was still familiarizing themselves with preparing food for 10 people, as it was not easy. As time went on, the team members were applying the skills they gained during the cooking training, with the help of using the cooking recipe book provided by our trainer 'Cooking with Kelly'.

Today, many team members can comfortably call themselves 'extravaganza experts' in cooking, and arguably the best chefs you can get on Gough Island. We don't go to the shop and buy

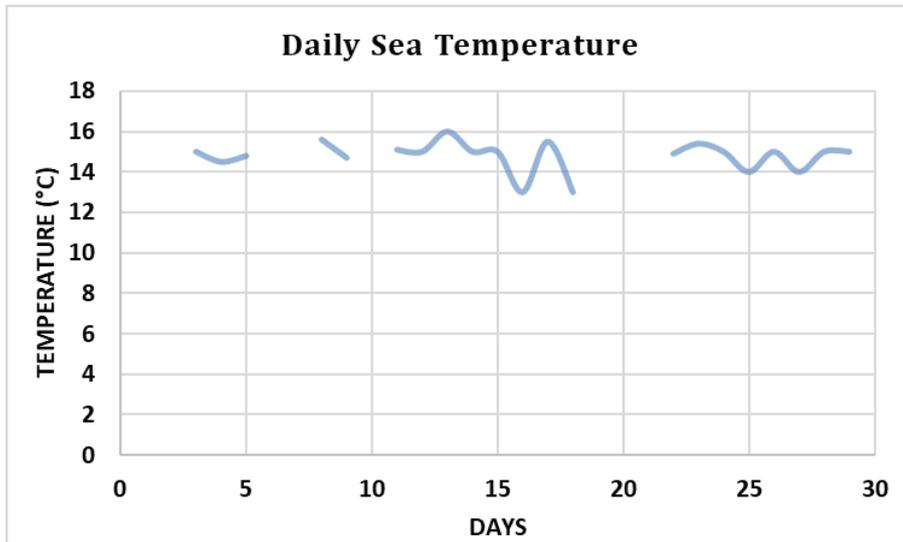


fast food, no that's not our thing. We prepare our delicious food from scratch. All thanks to DEFF for the valuable cooking training they provided for us, and for all the ingredients.



FROM THE METKASSIES

	Average	Maximum	Minimum	Average Max	Average Min
Temperature	13.0 °C	19.2 °C	3.2 °C	17.4 °C	7.2 °C
Pressure	1004.9 hPa	1020.0 hPa	980.3 hPa	1015.8 hPa	987.4 hPa
Humidity	79%	94%	48%	-	-



Max Wind Gust	129.2 km.h ⁻¹
Total Rainfall	410.8 mm
Highest in 24 Hours	81.2 mm
Total days with rain	24 days
Total days > 1 mm	23 days
Total Sunshine	104.2 hours

Disclaimer: This data is used for internal purposes and is owned by South African Weather Service.

