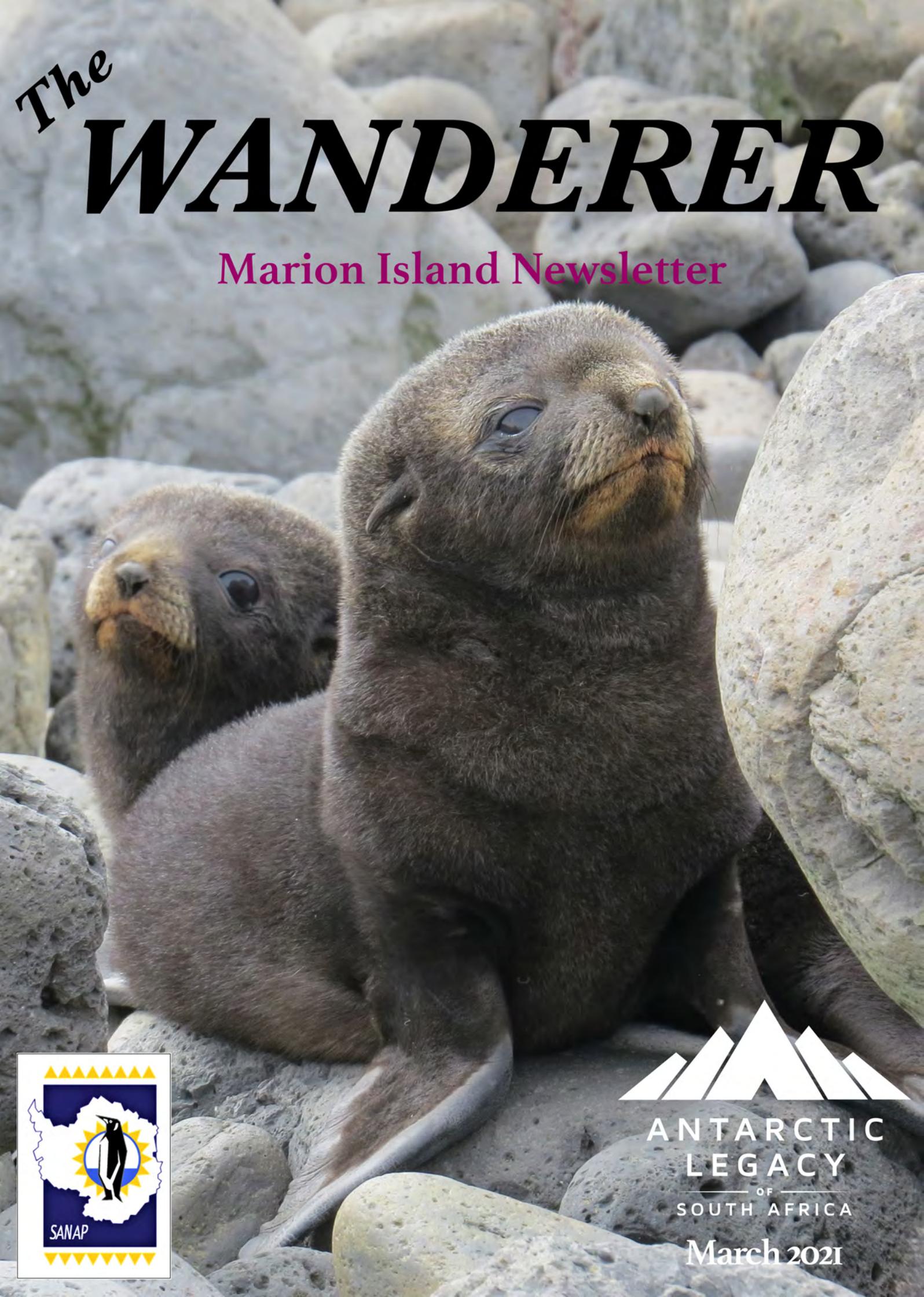


The  
**WANDERER**

Marion Island Newsletter



ANTARCTIC  
LEGACY  
OF  
SOUTH AFRICA

March 2021

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# Letter from Team Leader

Hi, I am Winnie Moodaley AKA “WINZA”. We are now approaching the end of our Marathon. The finishing line that many of us have been waiting for. The time has come once again for hello(s) and goodbye(s), for high spirits and low spirits, as we proceed from one chapter to another chapter. It has indeed been a very long journey and a great experience.

My, my, my, Marion! It’s an island of beauty and wonder and every moment spent here, it has been a memorable one. On some days you get four seasons in less than few hours. Isn’t that amazing!

M77 just like every team, we’ve had our fair share of “minor” challenges. This team has truly been amazing and I don’t get to thank them enough for all the effort they put in everything that is needed to be done as a team.

*Far Right: Stephanus, Siya, Aphiwe, Nkoane, Winnie, Pat, Khuliso & AJ in July. Celebrating birthdays are important for morale*



*Right: Tom, AJ, Leandri, Winnie, Yinhla & Katie head out for a walk*

Soon we will be bidding farewell to three amazing individuals. Yes! You guessed it! (Plimsol crew). It will be very sad indeed to see them leave, as they formed part of the Marion family and contributed to the team in so many ways. Their smiles, kindness and the extra exuberance they brought to the team will be missed indeed. M77 we are one of the fortunate team to have the Film Crew with us, All the way from the UK. As I have said previously that we have forged a certain camaraderie that only comes from a place like this. (The Island of beauty)

The last lap of the Marathon is always difficult and exciting at the same time. A place like this is for the brave and strong hearted. And I can proudly say M77 consist of brave men and women. The field assistants together with the plimsol crew have survived every harsh weather condition the island has thrown at them. I salute you! One of the sealers once said “Marion is like a love hate relationship” sometimes you love her and sometimes you hate her” and it is true indeed. One thing I will miss the most it’s a snow. Watching over the mountains covered with snow, that! It’s breath taking!

So I am as always grateful for the opportunities afforded to me, and trust placed in me by those who believe in me.



*Far Left: Killer whale slices through water  
Right: King penguins stand to attention*

# Field Notes

*Thando Cebekhulu - Birder*



Since the start of his expedition in September, Thando has completed at least one round island walk along the entire coastline every month. His work is to monitor and count all the breeding birds on the island - no small feat!



**Above:** Gentoo penguins moult  
**Left:** Thando holds a prion whilst night birding - an important way to monitor the species that are present on Marion Island. Shine a big light into the sky and record the birds that pass over, since they are drawn towards the light.



**Left Top to bottom:**

- Thando on a Round Island
- King penguins incubating
- Giant petrel breeding colony
- Boot Rock, as seen from north west of Marion Island



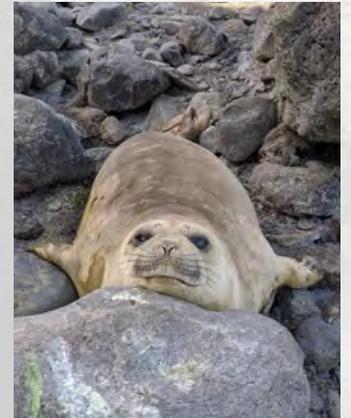
**Above:** Ringing a kelp gull chick. Thando rings many of the birds on the island.

**Left:** Antarctic tern chicks are well camouflaged and tricky to locate



Every corner of Marion Island is different and, since the new year, many of the people living here have embraced the wind, rain and pain to explore, work and see it all. The total walk from hut to hut is a journey of more than 70km (and much more for those following the coastline all the way).

# Round Island Adventures



**Top:** Yinhla, Leandri & Frikkie - Yinhla & Frikkie have to census seals on all beaches nearly every week; Macaroni Penguin stands above the King Penguins on Kildalkey; Dani & Leandri at Grey-headed Ridge

**Mid:** Grey-headed Albatross chick; Thando walks down Stoney Ridge - he carries out Round Island trips all around the coast every month to check penguins, Elephant Seal weaner

**Bottom:** Leandri watches a Killer Whale; Dani in one of the huts; Stephanus, Dani & Leandri - Stephanus joined Dani & Leandri on one of their many Round Island trips



Ruth & Nkoane finally spot base after 6 days of walking



Siya looks down over Black Haglett



Khuliso crosses one of many rivers



Aphiwe visits any hut that has coms issues to fix radios. Here he is in typical misty weather!



**Above:** The hut at Swartkop. Albatross dot the landscape here. **Below:** Ruth at top of Azorellakop



Nkoane looks out over the waves before walking the toffee lava from Rooks



**Above:** Khuliso checks out a Wandering Albatross  
**Right:** Siya at La Grange



# UNDERSTANDING WEATHER

***Nkoane Mathabatha  
(Senior Met Tech)***

The history of Marion Island dates back to 1663 when it was accidentally discovered by the Dutch ship Maerseveen. However, they did not land on to the island. The island is named after French Captain Marion Du Fresne, who came across two small islands, Marion Island and Prince Edward Island, 19km apart, while looking for Antarctica in 1772. Four years later Captain Cook saw the islands but no landing was achieved due to bad weather. The first recorded landing on Marion Island was in 1803 by a group of sealers who found signs of earlier occupation. Well, not our sealers who do scientific research! These sealers' main focus was business, elephant seal blubber for oil and fur seal pups' skin for its soft fur.



Nkoane changes sunshine chart

South Africa took possession of the two islands in early 1947 and annexed them under the command of Lieutenant-Commander John Fairburn. The first expedition to Marion Island was in 1948, a meteorological team led by Allan B. Crawford, who was also part of the first expedition including meteorology to Gough Island. Meteorologists have remained part of the expedition teams since then. As such, Marion Island has a long history of weather observation and climate data collection which is used in climate research to better understand weather and make predictions/forecasts for saving lives and property. Marion Island is generally windy, wet, cold and cloudy with only about 29% sunshine per year. Being in the “roaring forties” latitudes, Marion Island is characterized by gale force winds. Wind chill makes it really cold which is why we need to wear or carry protective gear when we venture out into the field. You really can experience all four seasons in one day.

The average annual temperature is about 5°C with a mean maximum and minimum of 8.1°C and 2.8°C respectively. However, temperatures as low as -6°C occur frequently throughout the year. When temperatures drop below 0°C, frozen precipitation such as snow, snow pellets and ice pellets is commonplace. Apparent temperatures drop even lower, especially in winter, to around -10°C with puddles of water and even the sides of the abundant lakes here on Marion completely frozen. The annual rainfall is estimated to be ±2 500 mm, spread fairly evenly throughout the year unlike Gough Island where a week may pass once or twice without rain in summer or Cape Town with more rainfall in winter than in summer or some provinces more inland with more rainfall in summer and dry in winter.

The amount of rainfall has decreased over the years.

This is my fourth expedition here on Marion Island and I don't remember a full week without rain or any form of precipitation, and that I find fascinating and I think makes Marion one of the perfect places to study the weather.

**For more information: [www.sanap.ac.za](http://www.sanap.ac.za).**



Nkoane measures sea temperature, a daily task for Met Techs

# Treasure in the Trash

***Yinhla Shihlomule  
(Sealer)***

## Scat Analysis

Scat collection and sorting is part of sealers duties on the island. We collect scats (poop) on two fur seal species from different beaches where the species are known not to coexist. Mixed Pickle and Cape Davis beaches are occupied by Subantarctic fur seal and Watertunnel is for Antarctic fur seal. These are the places where we collect scats every month for scientific research. The poop gives us an idea of what the seals feed on while at sea. So, in the field we collect scats and put it in a plastic. Take it back to base and put it in freezer. At the right time (which can be anytime when one is free), we defrost the scats and wash it in a sieve with warm water. The digested debris will wash off while the important, otoliths and other undigested materials remain inside the sieve. The treasure from scats is dried then sorted for diet analysis of the species.



*Nice fresh scat still intact.  
This brings joy and delight to a  
sealer's eyes and liking.*

# WEATHER

According to the  
**METKASSIES**

<b>MAX WIND GUSTS</b>	<b>162km/h (Jan)</b>
<b>TOTAL RAINFALL</b>	<b>334.6mm (Jan-Feb)</b>
<b>HIGHEST IN 24 HOURS</b>	<b>28mm (Jan)</b>
<b>TOTAL DAYS WITH RAIN</b>	<b>47 (Jan-Feb)</b>
<b>TOTAL DAYS &gt; 1mm</b>	<b>36 (Jan-Feb)</b>
<b>TOTAL SUNSHINE</b>	<b>306 hours (Jan-Feb)</b>

	<b>MAXIMUM</b>	<b>MINIMUM</b>
<b>TEMPERATURE</b>	<b>18.6°C (Jan)</b>	<b>0.7°C (Jan)</b>
<b>PRESSURE</b>	<b>1016.5 (Feb)</b>	<b>976.2 (Jan)</b>
<b>HUMIDITY</b>	<b>100 (Jan-Feb)</b>	<b>38 (Feb)</b>



# My Time in Science

***Katie Wardle - Camera Assist Film Crew***

**So I was asked to write about a special time I've had at Marion. The problem is I've had so many, and 80% of these moments have been with the scientists or just seeing an orca! So I thought I would write about my top four science moments, in no particular order.**

My first trip out volunteering with the scientists was back in October to help Thando weigh macaroni penguins at Bullard Beach. You could smell and hear the beach before you even got over Stony Ridge. Every macaroni colony I have seen here has been incredibly impressive, with every square inch of rock covered by a macaroni from the top of the hill right down to the sea. This bay was beautiful with a little waterfall bridge type structure halfway up the penguin highway. We set up a little work station on the rocks near the water's edge and put plastic trousers (oilies) on to protect us from all the poop. Thando was amazing at catching penguins, he could scoop two into his arms in seconds. He was measuring and weighing the penguins but I couldn't find much of a correlation between the beak length and width, they both were quite random (a bit like their temperament). I fell in love with the little guys, though, their individual characters amused me - especially the way they reacted to us and each other. I think they might be my favourite penguin I've seen. They are so feisty and curious.

One of my favourite moments on the island was at Kildalkey with Dani and Leandri who showed us an amazing spot to film sooty albatross chicks. After guidance from them, I slowly edged down the cliff and sat opposite this beautiful fluffy chick. It was perfect for filming, as it was framed by a gorgeous overhang of fern. The chick was calm and preened and waited for its parents, who arrived quickly one after another - the first landing nearly on top of the chick and the second nearly on top of me! They both courted together over the chick, all of which I was capturing on camera. It was so special to be able to capture the memory through my footage. I got to a point that I stopped filming and just took it in. It was incredible to see the beautiful birds going on with their lives in front of me, unbothered and letting me into their world for this little moment in time. I was probably anthropomorphising them beyond belief in my head, but they had such characterful faces and eyes and I really felt the love they had for their chick and each other. I wanted to capture this whole moment in my mind forever so began taking in my surroundings, looking down at the sea to king penguins and fur seals porpoising down below me, giant petrels and skuas flying above and then back to the chick and parents. I actually began to cry, it suddenly became real then that I was here on this magical island, having these crazy experiences, it wasn't just a dream that I was going to awake from. I never wanted to leave that cliff edge or Marion, it really captured my heart.



Sooty albatross chick

Earlier this month, I filmed Thando weighing macaroni chicks. I had not been back to Bullard Beach since our first trip and it was awesome to see it again, this time with little fluff-ball chicks everywhere. We were lucky the weather held up, despite looming dark clouds, and successfully filmed Thando working his magic with the penguins. Once again, I was awestruck as to how swiftly he handled these birds. I walked back along the coast with Dani, Leandri and Yinhla. After surviving fields of mires, we came face to face with a huge elephant seal - the biggest I'd ever seen, a true beach master! It was



Macaroni Penguins

amazing to get so close to one, thanks to having expert Yinhla with us and a lack of testosterone during moulting season! Soon, we reached a large cove that was almost a full circle, which makes me want to study the geology of this island whilst simultaneously swimming in the crystal clear water. Yinhla removed a giant oil drum from the beach and, at the top of this cove was a cat trap. I've loved learning about the history of the island from the era of the sealers to the early days of science. A lot of the structures on Marion are so obscure, it's hard to believe they are natural, and I would have walked past the cat trap not knowing any better as it blended in so well with the surrounding environment. Following the coast, we arrived at Archways, where it was the wandering albatross that impressed me the most. I will never get used to this species; their size, character, dancing, calls and souring transfixed me. There was so much activity happening around me I didn't know which way to look. We were headed for Macaroni Bay with large cliff faces, sooty albatross, and coastline stretching as far as the eye can see, plus lakes and mountains the moment you turn around. This place is beautiful.

**Far right:**  
Thando, Siya & Leandri weigh macaroni chicks  
**Right:**  
Katie & Tom film Frikkie & Yinhla



A less soppy moment was at Trypot. We had an awesome filming trip where Winnie, AJ, Leandri and Yinhla joined us. Yinhla used the time to do some seal surveying and taught us how to hold the fur seal pups for weighing. Just like the macaroni penguins, these pups had completely different personalities. The first was a large pup who was calm and friendly (as fur seals go). The second was half the size, wriggly and feisty. I found this one much harder to handle and naturally brought the seal closer to me to keep it from harm when I was losing balance, leading to a little kiss on the face. Unfortunately, I have no scar to remind me of the little bugger but it is an experience I never imagined would be possible.

The job of a wildlife camera person is purely to observe and record the wildlife in front of us, so the opportunities I have had on Marion to get close and help with studies that will help to protect and preserve these species is priceless. I have always been so interested in conservation and often regret that I never studied science, so I can't thank everyone here enough for letting me into their world, teaching me the names, stories and work being done on all the animals. Marion feels like a lost land in the middle of nowhere and the discoveries being made here make me so excited for the future.

# Field Notes

**Danielle Z. Keys - (M75/7 MAPRU Birder)**



*R: Weighing a Wanderer*



Arguably the most challenging work this year, the Wandering Albatross incubation round island took place between January 14 – 23. Every single bird seen sitting on a nest was checked for a ring, egg, scored, and its location was marked. It was amazing to put all the points together and find out exactly how many Wanderers we have breeding on Marion this year. Thank you to all those who assisted, the Birders could not have done it without you!

*Wanderer Round Island task force. (L-R: Stephanus, Nkoane, Ruth, Dani, Leandri, Khuliso, Thando)*

Up before sunrise to make sure we caught a change-over, MAPRU is at it again, deploying and retrieving GPS loggers and cameras on King Penguins. This time we even put out some devices at Kildalkey Bay to see if the birds from different colonies are going to the same places. We have already retrieved our Million dollar bird (with a hydrophone, GPS, and camera attached) and hope to get some more interesting data soon.



*Right:  
King Penguin  
Deployment  
Cam GPS*

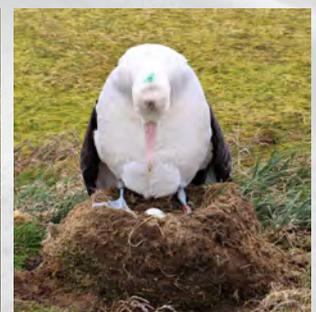


*Left:  
Breakfast with  
Kings  
Leandri & Dani*

It's almost that time of year again, where the majestic Wandering Albatrosses' chicks start to hatch. The monitoring colonies were set up between December-January and now we already know which parents are breeding. This year, MAPRU is interested in the incubation and brood phase and known aged birds from Goney Plains will be tracked in both. Body mass is also a good indicator of body condition, so the birds are weighed before each deployment. Our heaviest boy so far is a whopping 12.07 kg! We cover their faces to minimize stress, but overall, these birds are gentle giants and are "wonderful" to work with.



*Top Right: Stephanus on his first Round Island assisting with the Wanderer RI and retrieving GLS devices  
Far Right: Deployed Wanderer looking at her egg before she starts incubating again*



*Right: Leandri holding a Wandering Albatross with a GPS*

# THE M77 WEANER

*Leandri de Kock (M77 Winder/  
Plant Ecologist/Weaner)*



*Leandri maintains wind station near Katadraal*

**People ask me why I've come to Marion Island, such an isolated, wild and cold place. Well it's an easy answer. It's because of my thirst for knowledge. This time not in a textbook kind of way, but rather in a very practical manner. Most importantly, I have come to broaden my scientific knowledge and understanding. Fortunately, with that as my first priority, I have been able to satisfy my hunger for adventure, awaken new passions and have broadened my interests in science and life. There is a lot of scientific activity happening on the island, and I have been able to experience some of the important science in the past few months. In this piece, I'll tell you about the work I do and some of the other scientific activities that I have been part of.**

As a winder, I have to maintain and download data from the various wind stations that are located all over the island. This gives me the opportunity to go around the island on a monthly basis to check up on the stations and fix what needs fixing. Due to no science taking place on the island since May 2020, the wind stations were left on their own with the hope that they'll survive through winter with no maintenance. I am happy to report that all the wind stations are still up and running despite the covid problems. But I must say, that first round island was quite stressful to see what the damage to the stations had been. Going around the island so often is fun and I have not taken the same route twice. The work absolutely settles my hunger for adventure as I get to explore many areas often, something other field assistants can't do too often. The wind data is extremely important as a lot of the activities on the island is driven by the wind. And by having a more accurate picture of the wind on different sections of the island, it could improve weather predictions for the island and provide insight into the decisions animals make of where to build nests or which areas to avoid. Wind is also a very big mood determinator for us field assistants.

One of my favourite moments on this island so far has been when I was able to help with some of the elephant seal work. Elephant seals have a special place in my heart and I couldn't wait to finally see them for myself. I will never forget the day I got to help with census, tagging and weighing of elephant seal weaners. I also joined the sealers for a south census stint and gosh, it was filled with adrenaline, excitement and pure happiness. The southern coastline is spectacular. I got chased by angry fur seal bulls, elephant seal beachmasters and even confused yearlings. I also fell into streams when trying to keep up with the sealers. This is a long-term project that gathers a lot of data about southern elephant seals. This has sparked an interest into the behavioural side of science and the need to further my elephant seal studies.

Lastly, the studies on the seabirds here are fascinating. I have helped ring chicks, count many birds, weighed penguins, burrowed for nests and even put GPS's onto birds. My passion for birds have been renewed and to finally get some important field experience working with these beautiful species is a dream come true. Many of these projects have also been long-term and extremely important because of the dangers seabird face and how vulnerable many of them are. It is very special to be able to follow the life cycles of the birds from when the seabirds arrive on the island to breed until the chicks fledge and leave for the Southern Ocean. I am writing this piece as I am sitting at Funk Bay, overlooking the ocean, waiting for a King Penguin pair to do a changeover of their chick. What a day in the office!

I have learnt so much from all these experiences so far. It has definitely broaden my horizons so much more than a textbook will ever do. I think my experiences on Marion will open up many doors and I am excited to see what will happen. I feel so privileged to have been able to work with so many different species and aspects of science on Marion. I am so proud to say that I have made contributions to important science activities on Marion Island.

# OTHER NEWS

## Getting Outside

I have been involved in some fieldwork helping Thando Cebekhulu with Rockhopper Penguin adult weigh and diet samples. I really enjoyed working with these small but beautiful penguins. I have gotten to understand some of the biological research especially the diet sampling. My favourite animal on the island is the albatross because of the beauty and their calmness; my least favourite are the seals both elephant and fur seals I am really not comfortable around them. During my time on the island I have visited a few places my most favourite place was Macaroni Bay, looks very beautiful when you walking along the coast.

*Phethokuhle Hlongwane - Base Engineer*

*Below: Pat checks out a wandering albatross on a nest*



*Top: Pat helps weigh rockhopper penguins*

*Above: Pat & Thando explore the coast*

## Ingredients:

500g self-raising flour,  
1 tablespoon baking powder  
1 teaspoon salt, 1 tablespoon oil  
2 tablespoons sugar, water

## Method:

Mix dry ingredients well and then add water to the mixture to form dough, not dry but more on the wet side. When mixed, line a pot with oil and spoon in the dough into five portions (around the pot and one in the middle, like a flower shape). Put the pot with the dough in into another one containing boiling water over the stove and let it cook through. Enjoy alone or as an accompaniment to your favourite meal!

## RECIPE FROM THE HUT: Mpho's Self-Raising Pot Bread

***“It’s not what you look at that matters,  
it’s what you see.”***

Henry David Thoreau



**Coming next issue:**

- Take Over is coming... the end of a year on Marion
- Weather updates
- More insights into the experience of the newest team member, no-longer a weaner, Leandri
- News from the field as birders and sealers wrap up their hectic schedule
- And, of course, more recipes, photos, stories and fun!



**HUTBOOK HIGHLIGHT:**

*“To be holding\* a king chick after so many months of filming them so intensively was a little emotionally overwhelming. With less than two months to go here on Marion, every moment feels even more precious... I’m trying not to cry as I write about it again because that chick, the scientists’ work and, indeed, all the kings is the reason we are here. And for that, and everything it represents, I am truly grateful.”*

*Ruth, Director Film Crew M77*

*(\*under supervision whilst assisting birder)*

