

# *The* **WANDERER**

*Marion Island Newsletter, June 2021*

**MIDWINTER  
CELEBRATIONS**

**MARION'S KING  
PENGUINS**

**SHARK ON  
BEACH**

**NEW KILLER  
WHALE CALF**

**MEET THE  
TEAM**



forestry, fisheries  
& the environment

Department  
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA







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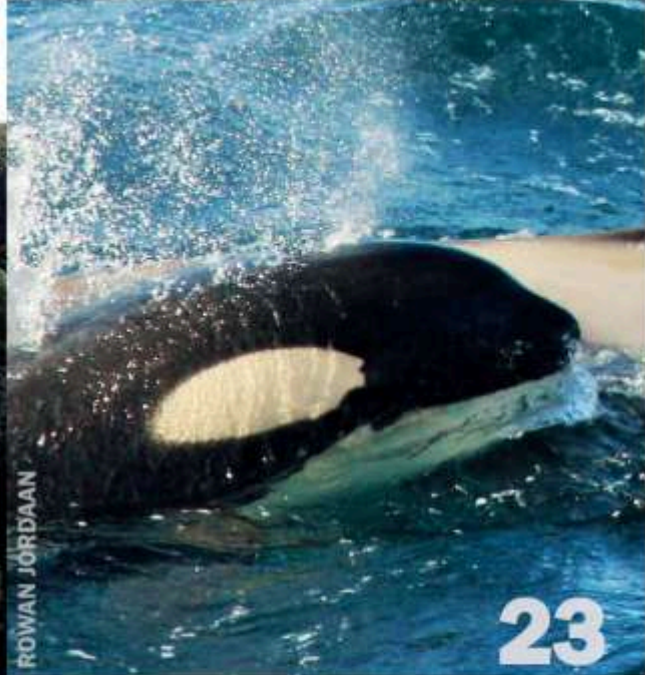


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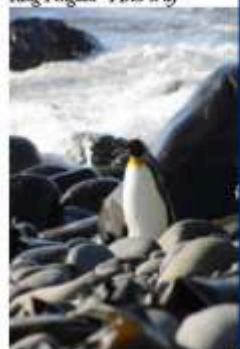
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# The Wanderer

## Letter from the editors



*The Wanderer*; an insight into life and work on Marion Island. This year a dedicated team of unique individuals with their own strengths and backgrounds are set to make this expedition memorable and definitely an exceptional one. The passion for the island and overwhelming energy from the team members makes each and every day a new adventure. The island offers many wonderful moments to experience; the raw power of gusting gales, the warm touch of sunshine breaking through dark clouds, and ever so often an icy snowflake on your cheek. There is so much knowledge and passion for the island's charismatic wildlife among the team members. You can feel the energy and compassion emitted from the science personnel, like a colourful aura outlining their whole being.

The past two months on the island has brought the team closer and we are getting to know one another better every day. We are also getting to know Marion better, with all her various moods. From warm sunny days which light up the cold darker corridors and corners of the base, to wet, rainy weather where the wind rocks you to sleep at night or sweeps you off your feet. We even get to experience some snowy mornings, waking up to frozen puddles of water and droplets of water falling in frozen time.

In this first edition for the M78 team, we'll be introducing the team members and highlighting some memorable moments thus far. We are a strong team of eighteen members from various backgrounds and cultures. This makes us unite as an unwavering oak tree, with roots that grow deep and cannot be moved. We are all looking forward to the months ahead. With the wildlife breeding season looming ahead for the field scientists, the busiest time of the year awaits.



**D.J. VAN WYK**  
EDITOR

**DANIELLE CONRY**  
EDITOR



# The Wanderer

## Letter from the Team Leader



Greetings to all our fans, followers and readers from the 'Marion 78' team leader.

Many thanks to the department of forestry, fisheries and the environment for this amazing and rare opportunity to serve on this beautiful Island.

We are a team of 18 with different backgrounds, religions, cultures and skin colour living and serving on this remote island as one people unified like the colours of the rainbow; we are the small rainbow nation.

The team is doing well, I am impressed with the discipline, unity and contributions made by certain individuals towards building a strong team. We are all looking forward to completing the remaining 10 months together and stronger.

**BUBELE NONGWEJANA**  
**M78 TEAM LEADER**





# MEET THE TEAM

## Tilhonolofatso Steve Tebele



**Tilhonolofatso Steve Tebele** or **Hloni/Stevovo**, is the marine meteorologist assistant (Assistant Metkassie) for the M78 team. He has a Diploma in Marine Sciences as well as a BTech degree in Oceanography. Steve's work on Marion is focused on marine and atmospheric weather observations. Being inside the base is normally boring at most for him, whereas being in the field is what keeps him sane. His work requires him to be at base most of the time, working ten days straight in a row with five days off. In his spare time he enjoys going on round island hikes or assisting the O&C birders at penguin colonies. Apart from getting to know the island, he also enjoys spending his time with friends in the TV lounge watching movies.

**Favourite Quote:** *"Sometimes we expect more from others than we get, because we'd be willing to do as much for them. Keep giving because it makes you feel good, not because you need them to give back. In the end, it is the giver that gets the biggest gift of all" - Lisa Prosen*

**What do you miss most back home?:** *I honestly miss my baby sister and my niece, as annoying as they can be. Now that I am thousands of kilometers away, I feel like they the only ones that can always uplift my mood. Of course, not leaving out the closest people to my heart (Lil bro, Sister and Mother including my friends).*

**Favourite part of the island:** *Greyheaded, it has an amazing view from the top.*

**Why did you come to the island?:** *Last year I was supposed to go to Gough island, but unfortunately I was left behind due to Covid. However, I feel that I have been blessed that I am on Marion Island. Work, life experiences and exploring are the reasons I am here.*





# Charles Stephen Thomas



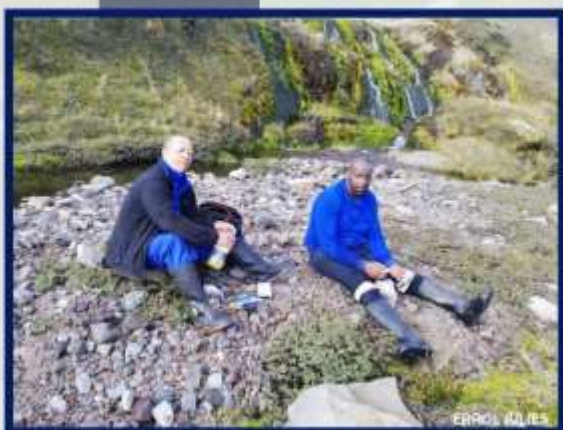
**Charles Stephen Thomas** is from a mining town called Randfontein in the Gauteng province in South Africa. He is employed by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment as the base engineer for Marion Island. He is very excited to be on Marion as he thought the opportunity would never have presented itself. His duties are to maintain and repair the building infrastructure and various equipment on the base. This is his third island expedition under the SANAP program. He was part of the SANAE IV Antarctica team in 2013 and 2015, then the 2016/2017 expedition to Gough island. He was previously working for Africa Power Solutions in Guinea on construction projects, later going into the maintenance field for the GAC mining port in Kamsar.

His days are mostly filled with base checks and repairs, where needed. Charles lives by the ways of Ubuntu: consideration, helpfulness and kindness towards other inhabitants on this planet and the environment. His greatest highlight was surviving on Antarctica for 14 months, followed by his first work opportunity outside South Africa in the UAE.

**What do you miss most back home?:** *Things I can't live without are my small family (grandkids mostly), DSTV (am trying) and fresh fruit and veggies (Spices). I prefer coffee rather than tea, Mars less crowded, I like ice-cream more than candy and Fast n Furious over famous 5 or secret 7. I have a bible at my bedside and my favourite meal is mutton curry with spicy Indian rice.*

**Have you learned anything new?** *What I have learnt about my new environment is that it's not a place to underestimate when walking about. It's a wonderful island but also dangerous if not careful.*

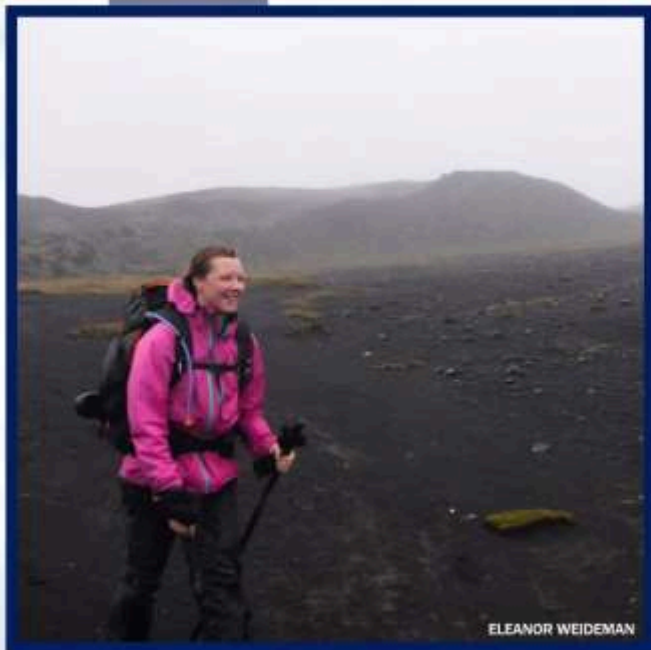
**Favourite part of the island?:** *I like the view at Trypot beach where there are a few seals in a pond. It's a quiet place to just relax and look at the ocean.*





## The Wanderer

# Isabel Micklem



Isabel Micklem, is an O&C Birder (marine ornithologist) for this expedition, an opportunity she has been waiting for since 2013. Her work is mostly focused on the monitoring of seabird species found on Marion Island. The data that she collects on a daily basis is used to inform management and is used for conservation policies.

Since the age of 11 Isabel has wanted to be a marine biologist and realised this dream when she started working with seabirds after her BSc. After going back to studying, and working in the rocky shores for a year, Isabel missed seabirds too much and was given the opportunity of specialising in marine ornithology with her MSc. The work from her thesis was published in her first month of being on Marion Island. What a blessing to be here!

She spends much of her time counting the various bird species and visiting the colonies, which requires a lot of walking each day. Isabel has a passion for these birds and their chicks, taking care of them and learning more from them with each encounter. She finds herself outside mostly, rather than sitting at base. She does not need a reason to go outside to experience Marion life first hand. There is always something out there that Marion offers. In her eyes, Marion Island is incredibly beautiful, dangerously wild and absolutely amazing. When she has time to spare, she enjoys helping out the other field scientists with seal weighing or census work.

**Favourite Quote:** *Isaiah 55:11*

**Have you learned anything new?** *I am not alone.*

**Favourite part of the island?:** *The whole east coast.*

**What do you miss most back home?:** *Obviously face to face time with family. But also cucumbers and ground that doesn't try and steal your gumboots with every step!*





## The Wanderer

# Eleanor Weideman



**Eleanor Weideman** is the NMU birder on our team. Her work involves the study of avian scavengers which will aid in the planning for the mouse eradication project in the near future. She has always wanted to come to Marion Island, especially after hearing all the amazing stories from previous Marionites.

Eleanor holds a MSc in Biological Sciences, and her research to date has focused on improving our understanding of land-based sources of plastic pollution, such as rivers and stormwater systems.

Eleanor is very energetic and always smiling, eager to go into the field. Her works keeps her busy

catching various bird species on the island to gather data, tag them and record acoustics from the birds with specialised equipment. She has done a number of round island trips and has experienced all the kinds of weather that Marion has to offer. Now and then she loses track of the path, especially in the mist, and sometimes even ends up near one of the highest peaks! She describes the island as absolutely treacherous, but also so amazingly beautiful and wild.

**Favourite Quote:** *The night is dark and full of terrors.*

**Have you learned anything new?** *I've learnt to avoid Karookop at all costs.*

**Favourite part of the island?:** *Everywhere, except for Karookop.*

**What do you miss most back home?:** *Hard paths where there is no chance of sinking.*





## The Wanderer

# Yinhla Shihlomule



**Yinhla Shihlomule** is one of the M77 team members that stayed behind to join our team for the next year. He is a Marion Island Marine Mammal Program (MIMMP) Sealer under the University of Pretoria. This is his fourth expedition to Marion Island. Yinhla has been calling Marion his home since 2014 and is very fond of the island life. He is very knowledgeable within his field and gladly shares his experiences and knowledge with others.

Understanding the marine world was his passion since childhood. He studied biological sciences with an interest in micro-evolution and marine mammals. He holds an MSc in Zoology.

Yinhla is a very busy man, hardly at base. As it is for the sealers. He spends most of his time walking the island doing what he is passionate about, working with the animals. His work is focused on the various seal species found on Marion, as well as the orcas along the coast. In the field he will collect data for the MIMMP project by censusing the fur seals and elephant seals, tagging new born pups and weighing them each month. Collecting scat (seal faeces) and sorting it in the lab at base is used to collect data on the diets of the seals. Apart from work, he'll spend his time listening to music and reading.

**Why did you come to Marion?:** *To observe changes and collect data on marine mammals that will aid their conservation, for the love of animals.*

**Have you learned anything new?** *Every day I learn something new.*

**Favourite part of the island?:** *Gazella Plains.*

**What do you miss most back home?:** *Apples.*





# Bubele Nongwejana



**Bubele Nongwejana** is the Medical Orderly and the Team Leader for the M78 expedition. He is a steadfast leader with a military background and a leader as a father to his children back home. Bubele is responsible for the care of the team in case of medical illness, trauma, hygiene and their general well-being. He also manages the food stock and logistic stores.

While Bubele spends most of his time at base, he recently ventured out on a round island trip. He keeps himself busy with reading, listening to audiobooks and podcasts, and watching movies.

**How would you describe the island to family and friends?:** *I do not have words to describe this beautiful Island. Mountains covered with snow, beautiful birds on the plains, penguins singing along the ocean with seals and a killer whale passing by the lower heli-pad just to greet us, four seasons in one day; (snow, sun, gusting winds and rain), beautiful rocks and beautiful mountains.*

**Have you learned anything new?** *Yes.*

**Why did you come to the island?:** *To serve.*

**What do you miss most back home?:** *Family.*





# Rodney Matjomane



**Rodney Matjomane** is the diesel technician for the M78 team. A big man, in person and at heart, he has a huge role to fulfil during this expedition by making sure the base is powered. Therefore, he is responsible for the service and maintenance of the diesel generators. Of the three main generators at base, the Scania engine is his favourite. Rodney is also responsible for the maintenance on the bulk water supply and management thereof.

Rodney is currently studying towards a National Diploma in Mechanical Engineering during his spare time, with his subject focus now on Power Machines N6. When he is not out at the Power Shack or Technical workshop, he spends quality time with friends in the kitchen and watching movies and series.

**How would you describe the island to family and friends?:** *Prison in the middle of nowhere.*

**Have you learned anything new?** *Teamwork.*

**Why did you come to the island?:** *To be exposed to new challenges.*

**What do you miss most back home?:** *My one and only daughter, Oarabile!*

**Favourite Quote:** *Psalm 121:4 "The protector of Israel never dozes or sleeps."*

**Favourite part of the island:** *Workshop and generator room is the most peaceful place of the island.*





## The Wanderer

# Frikkie van der Vyver



**Frikkie van der Vyver** is a registered professional biologist with 15 years' experience in conservation, ecotourism, ichthyology, fisheries science, marine mammal research and stranding response. Having previously overwintered as part of M70 and M77, this is his third expedition working as a mammologist for the Marion Island Marine Mammal Programme (MIMMP), a globally important long-term monitoring and research programme currently in its 39th year. (visit [www.marionseals.com](http://www.marionseals.com) for more info)

"Just as covid-19 started raising havoc and negatively impacting research programmes all over the world, an exciting opportunity to return to

Marion couldn't have come at a better time."

As part of a special team of biologists and film makers, he arrived in September 2020, onboard the high latitude expedition sailing vessel *Pelagic Australis*, to help restart marine mammal fieldwork projects on the island. After a very successful trip, he was fortunate to stay on for M78 with his partner Danielle Conry.

"A long-time dream come true for us, we are making the most of this unique opportunity we have been given to share the remarkable experience of living and working in one of South Africa's most remote wilderness areas. From killer whales to frightening gales, you can follow our island experience on our personal Facebook page, Wild Ocean Wanderers."

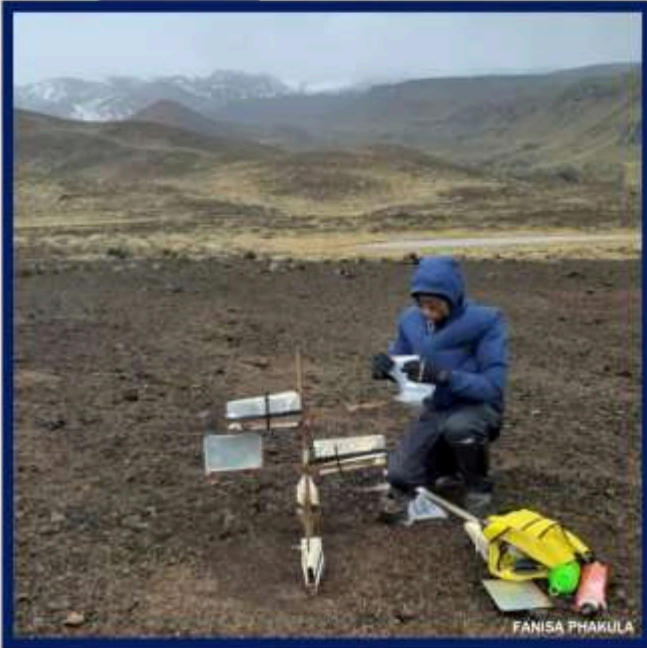
Apart from missing his family, fresh fruit and wood braais, Frikkie also counts himself extremely lucky to spend more time working in this unique 'covid-free' environment while others back home are faced living with the pandemic.

**Favourite Sealers Quote:** "Dis nog fokkol."





# Zenande Kabase



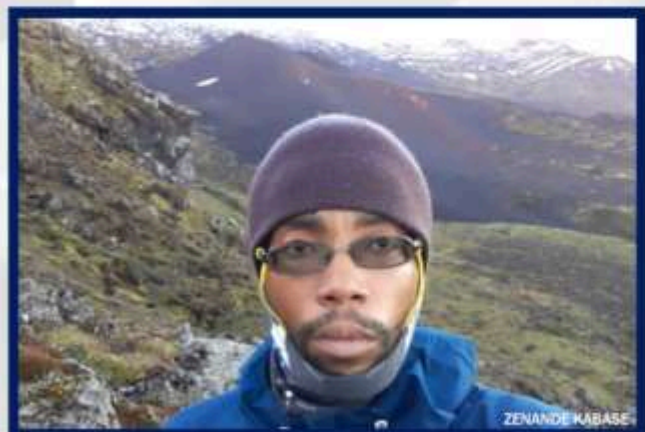
**Zenande Kabase** (a.k.a. Zee or Mr Geo). is the M78 Sub-Antarctic Landscape-Climate Interactions (SaLCi) Field Assistant or the Geomorphologist. Born in Qonce, Eastern Cape, he grew up and matriculated in Embalenhle, Mpumalanga. He graduated and is busy studying at the University of Fort Hare. Zenande is a first time Islander and a simple, quiet person. If you don't find him in the field visiting and sampling his Geo sites, going on a Round Island downloading data from or servicing wind stations, being blown around by and facing gale force winds and harsh weather conditions, slipping and tripping on grey and black lava rocks while walking on the tough terrain, avoiding mires, getting lost and finding his way again or admiring

the beautiful scenery as he walks on elevated mountains or near-coastal paths, he safe at base reading, working, cooking, in the gym or resting.

*"This is an indescribably beautiful-challenging place that words cannot fully portray. I do not have a favourite place on the island as I see something new every time I go out. It will always be a privilege for me to be here considering how the pandemic almost closed this opportunity for some of us. It is true that just because something is delayed it does not mean you are denied from having it."*

*"I am learning and unlearning, building myself and growing stronger daily in all personal aspects. As we continue through the year with the experiences that we will gain, it's important to always remember where we come from and look forward to where we are going."*

**Favourite quote (among many) that will keep him going through this year:** "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."





## The Wanderer

# Sanele Mkhonza



**Sanele Mkhonza** is the Environmental Control Officer (ECO) for this year's expedition. This is his second time on Marion Island, previously also coming as a ECO in 2016. The ECOs play a crucial role on the teams every year. They are responsible for conservation management. Sanele is responsible for the control of alien eradication; vegetation and vertebrates/invertebrates. Their main focus is to reduce or minimise the impact humans have on the environment of Marion Island.

Apart from his work on a daily bases and a round island trip every so often, he enjoys spending time gaming, watching movies and quality time with friends. Sanele enjoys it very much to dance at

parties, making it so much more lively and always brings a good laugh.

**What is your favourite quote?:**

**Quote:** "People are awesome" - Sydney Tshilingalinga

**Verse:** 1 Thessalonians 5:11

**Why did you come to Marion Island?:** *Just to come see the island again and running away from the republic.*

**Favourite part of the island?:** *The union and coming together of different people from different backgrounds, beliefs, religions and schools of thought to be family, co-workers, lovers and friends. Its magic, its mind blowing.*

**How would you describe the island to family and friends?:** *It's a place you haven't seen or can't imagine and pictures do not do it justice.*





## The Wanderer

# Sydney Tshilingalinga



**Sydney Tshilingalinga** is the Assistant Environmental Control Officer for this year on Marion Island. His work entails the implementation of the Alien Eradication Plan for Plants and Invertebrates, environmental compliance monitoring and auditing, as well as the implementation of biosecurity measures and promoting general environmental awareness.

This is his second year on marion Island, previously being here as a sealer in 2016. With prior experience on the island, he is well equipped with knowledge of the vegetation, routes and where the crucial areas lie.

Sydney is on point with his work and prioritises the environment. In his spare time, he keeps himself busy with movies and video games. Doing a round island in three days is no obstacle for Sydney. His work requires him to walk the island for environmental monitoring and to collect data on the vegetation along the regularly used hiking paths.

**What is your favourite quote?:** *"Don't let yesterday take up too much of today" - Will Rogers*

**Why did you come to Marion Island?:** *The reason I came to the island was to gain more experience in the field of Environmental Science and Nature conservation.*

**Favourite part of the island?:** *Sealer's cove where I get to do my work while enjoying the beauty of mother nature.*

**How would you describe the island to family and friends?:** *A magical place where money doesn't have any value.*





## The Wanderer

# Sizwe Khoza



**Sizwe Khoza** is the Communications Engineer for the team. Our radio voice and host, with a warm "Gooooood Morning..."

*Well!! I am not accustomed to writing a biography about myself. And I will give it my best shot to try and write so you can have a glimpse of the experience and challenges and triumphs that I have had thus far on Marion Island. My name is Sizwe Herman KHOZA and my team mates call me "M79 - team leader" because of having to eat meat, especially after midnight, and remember I am still part of M78 Overwintering Team here in Marion Island.*

*My duties here in the base as a Communications Engineer includes equipment maintenance, operation and fault-findings off all communication equipment*

*and services which includes, but is not limited to, the following: Satellite communication, Radio & IT installation and maintenance. Excluding my job responsibilities since we are a team consisting of 18 members and with a rich cultural diversity and different backgrounds, I assist the team in all their respective duties here on Marion Island and we try to compromise to work as one unit to achieve desired results as one complete team.*

*I have an overwhelming desire to discover almost everything about Marion Island. On the 24th June 2021, Mr. Thando Cebekhulu and I went up the snowy mountain called KatedraalKrans as I had duties up there. I couldn't believe that we had to climb for almost 3 hours and the adverse weather conditions when we reached our destination were not pleasing at all. However, the experience of me being there changed me for the better and I started to realize how important little things are. Being on the island as isolated as this one, I miss family and friends and being home hearing all taxis screeching tyres and honking.*

*The island is a very peaceful place. I remember one morning waking to a beautiful snow covered island and I thought to myself - "wow Sizwe, look at what you have signed up for". And the feeling was great in the sense that I have never experienced this kind of environment.*

*Let me go around the Island further so I can be able to share my experience with you in the next newsletter. Until then Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi WA Barakatuh*

*(Peace be unto you and so may the mercy of God and His blessings).*





## The Wanderer

# Danielle Conry



**Danielle Conry (Dani)** joined the 78th overwintering expedition to Marion Island as a killer whaler/sealer for the Marion Island Marine Mammal Programme (MIMMP) and holds an MSc in Zoology. With a background in marine mammal research as a volunteer, student and biologist over the last 15 years, and an intense passion for killer whales, this is her dream job.

*"I am so immensely grateful for the opportunity to spend a year in this wild and special place to work on not only killer whales, but also southern elephant seals, subantarctic fur seals and antarctic fur seals. Over and above this, I get to experience life on a subantarctic island with all its incredible wildlife and dramatic weather and landscapes with my partner, Frikkie van der Vyver."*

This is not an opportunity that came easily. Since first hearing of this position at the end of her undergraduate studies at UCT, she has applied at every opportunity over the last 10 years. Then, on the verge of giving up, success!

Her application for the 77th overwintering expedition was successful! Unfortunately, the unthinkable happened as Covid-19 struck the world and their expedition came to a grinding halt. With no prior training, she could not join Frikkie and the others on the special voyage to Marion in order to resume the scientific data collection. But thankfully, after a difficult year of waiting and avoiding Covid, she joined Frikkie on Marion for M78. Since arriving, she has enjoyed getting to know Marion's killer whales while sitting on her little rock in the southern ocean at Kill Point, and has been finding her feet with the seal work.

*"There are still days that I look around at the landscape and wildlife in absolute awe of the fact that I am finally here. While I do miss family and friends (and warm, sunny days on the beach) I know this is where I am meant to be."*

You can follow their work and adventures on Marion by following the Marion Island Marine Mammal Programme Facebook page, as well as their personal page, Wild Ocean Wanderers.

**Favourite quote currently:** *Don't be pushed around by the fears in your mind. Be led by the dreams in your heart.*





## The Wanderer

# Thando Cebekhulu



**Thando Cebekhulu**, nick named Jomo Sono, is one of the Seabird Field Assistants for the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment under the Oceans and Coasts branch. He holds a BSc Honours degree in Behavioural Ecology of small mammals. He is one of the team members from M77 that stayed behind and previously, he was part of M74 as well.

His work constitutes the monitoring and censusing of breeding seabird colonies, from burrowing to surface nesting birds, with a focus on the four types of penguins that are found on the island. Their project focuses on the breeding success, foraging efforts, population dynamics, distribution and the diets of the penguins.

Thando enjoys spending time in the movie house watching movies, documentaries and series when he is not in the field.

**What is your favourite quote?:** *"Stop acting as if life is a rehearsal. Live this day as if it were your last. The past is over and gone. The future is not guaranteed."* - Wayne Dyer

**What do you miss most back home?:** *I miss traffic lights, cars, trains, trees, malls, KFC, eggs etc.*

**How would you describe the island to family and friends?:** *I have tried, they do not understand. So I have stopped trying to explain.*

**Favourite place on the island:** *Toffee lava.*

**Why did you come to the island?:** *For both work experience and also to experience this piece of paradise.*





# Nivek Ghazi



**Nivek Ghazi** is the Island's M78 overwintering astrophysicist. He is currently a MSc student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where he works on measuring radio waves emitted by the first stars that were born in the Universe and the Milky Way with two telescopes here on Marion.

All of this means he needs to keep these telescopes in their best working condition in order to receive incredibly weak signals.

Most of his time at base is spent analysing the collected data for strange signals that may effect these telescopes negatively, while in the field he is either copying data, charging batteries or

tightening small electrical and mechanical connections that were rattled loose by the wind.

Thus far, his favourite part of the Island has to be the interior, with crazy windy weather that seems to be always twice as high than what is predicted and the snowy mountain caps which are always covered no matter how sunny or wet it gets. While Marion is a lot of fun, he does miss not having an unlimited supply of snacks.

*"I'm starting to run out of Oreo's, with 11 months still to go."*





## The Wanderer

# Fanisa Phakula



**Fanisa Alicia Phakula Farai** is one of the meteorologists (Assistant Metkassie) here on Marion Island. Her work entails the collecting of raw weather data on a daily basis. She assists and actively participates in the operation of the surface meteorological and atmospheric research projects assigned by their marine section. Performing surface meteorological observations, maintenance and verification of equipment at their remote station forms part of her work. Fanisa is full of joy and energy, always with a friendly big smile. She enjoys spending her off time making beads, reading novels, drawing and drafting projects, as well as spending some quality time with friends filled with laughter here on Marion.

*"I am a hardworking and smart lady who is very capable of doing what I believe in. I also believe that there is always light at the end of the tunnel."*

**What is your favourite quote?:** *"Something better is possible if you are willing to work for it and fight for it. If we work hard enough and believe in ourselves then we can be whatever we dream of, regardless of the limitations that others may place on us" - MICHEL OBAMA*

**Favourite Verse:** *"Young people, it is wonderful to be young, enjoy every minute of it. Do everything you want to do; take all in. But remember that you must give account to God for everything you do. So refuse to worry and keep your body healthy but remember that youth, with a whole life before you is meaningless" ECCLESIASTES 11:9-10*

**How would you describe the island?:** *An island in a "middle of nowhere" place where one discovers themselves, their soul, spirit, capabilities, and strengths. It is a beautiful natural environment, one of its kind with unique weather conditions.*





## The Wanderer

# Siyasanga Mpehle



**Siyasanga (Siya) Mpehle** is the senior meteorologist (Senior Metkassie) here on Marion Island and the Deputy Team Leader for the M78 team. She manages and coordinates the surface meteorological research project assigned by the Marine Section of the South African Weather Services (SAWS). Siya has daily duties to perform surface meteorological observations, maintenance and verification of all SAWS instrumentation.

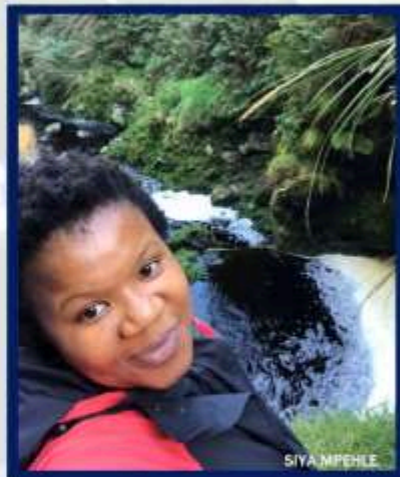
Siya is a strong, independent woman with a clear mindset. She always brings good company. On Siya's off time, she finds herself in the kitchen cooking something delicious or listening to music, and reading books.

**What is your favourite quote?:** *"Project to the universe positive energy so that you can attract positivity" - Nandipha Mpehle*

**Favourite part of the island:** *So far I love all the places that I've been to on the island. The tranquility of the island is out of this world and it's a good place for meditation.*

**How would you describe the island?:** *For me the island is one of the best places to be at, as there is no traffic congestions and load shedding. It's cold most of the time, however I love it.*

**Why did you come to the island?:** *After being on an island expedition before, one needs to move to the next island. So while I was on Gough Island, I told myself that I should come to Marion Island as well. I just love the landscapes and tranquility of islands. A bonus point for me is that it's COVID-19 free.*





# The Wanderer

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## D.J. van Wyk



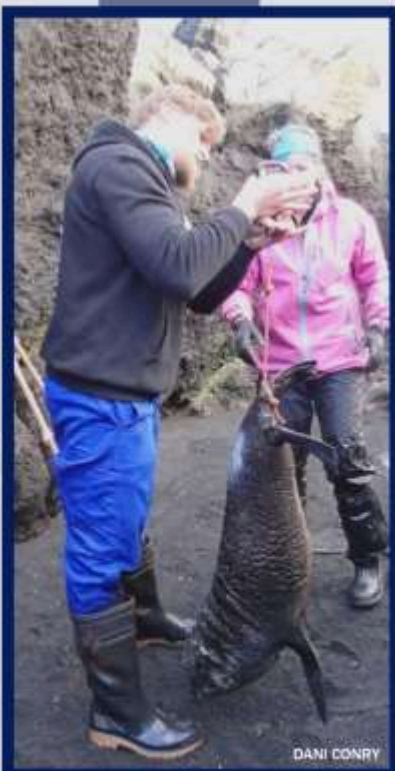
**Dirk Jacobus van Wyk, preferably D.J.,** is the electronics engineer for the South African National Space Agency (SANSA) in the Space Science Division. He has a MEng degree in electrical engineering and a partial MSc degree in satellite systems engineering. This is his first expedition to Marion Island.

On Marion Island, he is responsible for data collection, monitoring and management. He is responsible for the ongoing operation of the various space weather observation instruments, upgrades on these systems and the maintenance of external projects on Marion.

D.J. spends most of his time in the office busy with his work, occasionally getting the opportunity to go out with the field assistants to experience their work, the animals and the island. With some spare time, D.J. is in the gym or reading a book, and watching anime.

The island truly does have a impact on a person, and D.J. knew from the start of this journey that it will be so much more than expected. He quickly became fond of the island, even prior to arriving. Now experiencing the island first hand, is absolutely a God given blessing.

Proverbs 14:33 "Wisdom rests silently in the heart of one who has understanding, but what is in the heart of shortsighted fools is made known."





# *Killer Whaler Diaries*

## Meet Marion Island's new killer whale calf!

Dani Conry

Meet Covi! The latest addition to Marion Island's killer whale population!

Covi was first identified swimming next to mom Supernova during the takeover period. After a difficult year due to the global covid pandemic, it was decided that the new calf should be named Covi to represent this unique period in time. As of yet, Covi's gender is still unknown but hopefully this will be revealed with time.

Covi and Supernova have not been sighted again since takeover and with killer whale sightings decreasing in winter it may be likely that they will only be seen again towards summer time. We look forward to the next sighting of this cutie!



ROWAN JORDAAN



# King Penguins of Marion

Isabel Micklem

As the Oceans and Coast birders hired for the Marion 78 expedition we have to go around counting many of the birds breeding around the island including (but not limited to) various albatross species, giant petrels and the four penguin species: King, Gentoo, Rockhopper and Macaroni penguins. When a king penguin colony easily reaches thousands of chicks this is quite a task, but luckily the chicks are fluffballs and distinct from their parents. How many do you see below?



ISABEL MICKLEM

Kildalkey bay's King penguin colony.

Normally king penguins are silvery black on their back with orange "earphones" and some orange under their chin. Last year the media went crazy when a yellow king penguin was photographed at South Georgia by Yves Adams. In chatting with a few Marionites, they mentioned that a few yellow king penguins have been seen on Marion over the years. Seeing strange phenomena in nature often invokes this marvel and so was my reaction when I saw a blonde king penguin chick.



ISABEL MICKLEM

This blonde chick is seen at Kildalkey bay among the King penguin colony.

Naturally, we are curious as to whether the lighter coloured chick fluff will result in a yellow adult. Only time will tell.



# Vulnerable shark species washes up

Frikkie van der Vyver



A giant petrel feeding on the carcass of the second stranded porbeagle shark at Marion Island (11 May 2021).

On 11 May 2021, while busy with a routine southern elephant seal census round, I came across a fresh carcass stranded on one of the island's northern beaches. I photographically recorded and identified it as a porbeagle (*Lamna nasus*), one of only five shark species known to occur in the Southern Ocean. The sighting is only the second documented record of this species stranding at Marion Island. The first incident was recorded in 2014, strangely also by myself... As very little is known about this top predator in the region, such incidental sightings can provide a valuable opportunity to collect information on the species' occurrence and its biology in the vicinity of the relatively recently established Prince Edward Islands Marine Protected Area (MPA).

The porbeagle is a large pelagic Lamnid shark found near many sub-Antarctic islands. It also occurs in the cold temperate waters of the northern hemisphere and, due to the absence of porbeagles in tropical seas, it is presumed that two discrete breeding populations occur. Porbeagles are relatively slow growing and late maturing, long-lived and bear only small numbers of young. Therefore, they have a low rate of population increase exacerbated by a tendency for fisheries to capture large immature specimens long before they reach maturity. The species is currently classified as vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation (IUCN) Red List due to its vulnerability to over-exploitation. Despite the lack of information on the status of porbeagle shark populations in the Southern Ocean, they have formed a high value catch component in certain longline fisheries, and their highly valued meat and fins have entered international trade. Since the mid-1980s, porbeagles have been caught as a bycatch in both legal and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) patagonian toothfish fisheries in sub-Antarctic waters off Îles Kerguelen, Îles Crozet and Macquarie Island. However, longline swordfish and tuna fleets have presumably taken the most significant bycatch of porbeagles in the Southern Ocean.



# The Wanderer

Although studies on porbeagles in the northern hemisphere are well documented, very little information is available on the biology of southern hemisphere stocks. A feeding study on porbeagles off the Îles Kerguelen indicate that they feed in the entire water column on intermediate to higher levels of the food chain, primarily on a diversity of fishes and squids (they do not feed on marine mammals). With regards to the Prince Edward Islands, almost nothing is known about the biology of sharks or cephalopods and no directed studies have yet focused on these important groups. For cephalopods, only the species composition has been studied through the diet analysis of top predators such as seabirds and fur seals breeding on Marion. Other studies have focussed on the trophic ecology of the Patagonian toothfish. The first incidental stranding of a porbeagle shark on Marion Island back in 2014, therefore provided a unique opportunity to investigate its stomach content in an attempt to learn more about their prey species in this region.

The clubhook squid (*Onykia ingens*) specimen that was found in the shark's stomach matched the classification of porbeagles as pelagic and demersal predators and added to the cephalopod prey species list of the relatively recently established Prince Edward Islands MPA.

Due to the fresh state of the most recent carcass, it would have been very interesting to collect and

identify additional prey samples, especially as this specimen was a fully grown (~2 m) adult female. Unfortunately, the carcass had already been damaged by the time I found it. Giant petrels are formidable scavengers. With their powerful long and slender necks they managed to pierce through gill slits and the genital opening to remove all the organs, including the stomach.

All that I could do was collect a standard set of measurements, photographs, and external samples for future genetic and stable isotope analysis. Interestingly, as with the previous carcass, there was no fishing line or hooks present in the mouth and no evidence of external damage caused by fishing gear on the rest of its body. There is also no evidence of a substantial porbeagle bycatch in the legal South African Patagonian toothfish fishery operating in the vicinity of the Prince Edward Islands MPA. Although porbeagle sharks are occasionally hooked, they are released alive and there is only one record of a porbeagle shark being landed near the Prince Edward Islands prior 2015: a 200 kg individual caught at a depth of 807–1118 m on 8 October 2000.



A partially digested clubhook squid found in the stomach of the first stranded porbeagle shark on Marion Island (26 March 2014).



# The Wanderer

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There are no restrictions or penalties for catching these sharks, so there is no incentive for South African toothfish fisherman to under report shark by catch. In addition, the fishery has been subjected to 100% observer coverage since its inception.

There is little known about the natural predators of porbeagle sharks, but killer whales might take this species. Killer whales associated to Marion Island are known to take Patagonian toothfish off longlines, but no observational evidence or other records exists of them eating porbeagle sharks. Although a few minor skin afflictions were visible on the bodies of both stranded sharks, these were more consistent with damage caused by scavengers and abrasion during the stranding process. Nonetheless, such prey cannot be discounted from the diet of killer whales at Marion Island.

Elsewhere in places like the Farallon Islands (US), and more recently in South Africa, certain individuals have been observed preying on a variety of shark species. Perhaps someday a lucky biologist will witness such a predation attempt at Marion...





# MIDWINTER FESTIVITIES!

*Midwinter Greetings from Marion Island  
21 June 2021*







The Wanderer

# THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

