

the  
**Bunting**

**SAWS  
DATA**

Gough's weather  
stats

Gough's long distance flier

**Great Shearwater**

**Social  
pics**

Island fun

The seals of Gough Island

**Pup-Weighing**

**Meet the  
Team**

Connection to the mainland

**Edinburgh**

Get to know us



# Content

(This newsletter is designed to be viewed in **side-by-side** view. Please set your viewer accordingly)

4. *Letters from the editors and the team leader*

6. *Meet the team*

10. *Pup-weighing*

14. *The Edinburgh*

18. *The Great Shearwater*

24. *Weather Data*

26. *Social Pics*



ROELF DALING

One gets to see many Great Shearwaters as they return to Gough for the breeding season.

# *From the editors*

*Roelf Daling & James Burns*

**G**reetings from the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean! Gough Island is pretty much as far from anywhere as you can get and this isolation has allowed it to become an absolute paradise. Apart from an abundance of wildlife, flourishing vegetation and breathtaking landscapes, Gough is also home to the overwintering expedition teams which man the research station, collecting meteorological data for the South African Weather Service and conducting fieldwork for the British Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

We are privileged to be part of the 67th overwintering expedition to Gough Island and in this first edition of our island newsletter, the Gough Bunting, we are excited to introduce ourselves and give a small taste of what we have been getting up to in the past three months since our arrival. Much more has happened in this time than we will be showing in the following pages but nevertheless, we hope you enjoy it and get some small sense of what goes on in this incredible place!     - James

**W**hat a crazy year it's been. Gough has seen an incredible amount of visitors this past year. Starting with the arrival of the first GIRP voyage, and several more to follow. Now, after a whole eradication, a fresh team and a new year, we are releasing this first Bunting Newsletter for 2022.

It's been fun getting back into designing and layout. Especially with this new program I had to learn called Scribus. It's the industry standard for open-source layout software and I highly recommend it. (Please see if you can set your PDF viewer to show the pages side by side, like a magazine).

I dedicate this issue to Dylan Seaton, the previous editor of the Bunting. Thanks for two years of editorial work. I now see the time it takes. But - it's still nothing in comparison to the time you put into helping the aviculture team during the Gough Island Restoration Project. Enjoy this issue my friend.     - Roelf

---

# *From the team leader*

*Sandile Nkeke*

**I** can't withhold my gratitude to the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment for the wonderful opportunity to serve on this amazing remote island. It is not only an opportunity to serve, but an adventure to explore the wonders of creation/the Creator and my field of profession.

We the team of ten members (nine at first), from different backgrounds and cultures serving on this island for the next remaining 11 months, agreed into marriage for as long as we are on this remote island united. I believe it's only the true definition of love at heart that can make it possible for stranded individuals for such a long period remain together.

"Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith; hope; and patience never fail(bears all things....endures all things)."

# The 67th Gough Island Expedition Shirt



Logo designed by Jan Solms

Shirt made by ILOVESCEEENPRINTING (cpt)

Produced by Roelf Daling and James Burns

# MEET THE TEAM



**NAME** Sandile Nkebe

**HOMETOWN** Ngqeleni (small town near Mthatha), Hluleka location, Eastern Cape

**POSITION** Medical orderly & Team Leader

**DUTIES** Manage food and logistics store, responsible to take care of the team in case of any medical emergencies and all other medical related issues, general well-being of the team and hygiene.

**HOBBIES** Reading, watching movies, fishing, occasionally go out to see the island..

**LEAST FAV. VEGETABLE** Brussels sprouts definitely

**GOUGH IN 7 WORDS** The place is naturally amazing and healthy



**NAME** Tshililo Kharivha “Chillies”

**HOMETOWN** Kutama area in Venda, Limpopo province of South Africa

**POSITION** Meteorological technician (Metkassie)

**DUTIES** I am responsible for surface and upper air meteorological observations: observing and reporting on the cloud types and their heights, swells direction, period and height, conducting sea surface temperature measurement, horizontal visibility, significant weather conditions such as rainfall amount and intensity, launching of weather balloon for upper air ascent observation, data integrity management from AWS, and the maintenance of SAWS weather sensors and instruments.

**HOBBIES** On my leisure time I take walks around the island, listen to music, watch movies, and play puzzle games with other team members.

**LEAST FAV. VEGETABLE** Broccoli

**GOUGH IN 7 WORDS** This place is well saturated and greenish”



**NAME** Peter Chuku

**HOMETOWN** Nigeria

**POSITION** Electronic and Communications Engineer. I also serve as the deputy team leader.

**DUTIES** Network management, Satellite communication, Electronic repairs and servicing, VOIP, Satellite communication and Radio communication

**HOBBIES** Watching movies and cooking

**LEAST FAV. VEGETABLE** Brussels sprouts

**GOUGH IN 7 WORDS** This Island is an embodiment of beauty.



**NAME** Kim Stevens

**HOMETOWN** Hilton (KZN)

**POSITION** RSPB Senior Field Assistant

**DUTIES** Our fieldwork comprises the long-term monitoring of several seabird populations, invasive plant control and fur seal pup weighing. And now that the Gough Island Restoration Programme has been completed we will also be monitoring the island for any signs of mice.

**HOBBIES** Looming, painting, playing guitar, photography and sewing

**LEAST FAV. VEGETABLE** Tinned asparagus wouldn't be my first choice... But I will eat it!

**GOUGH IN 7 WORDS** An epic, wild, wet, emerald, bird-filled paradise!



**NAME** Nkosi Madama

**HOMETOWN** Cofimvaba, near Queenstown in the Eastern Cape

**POSITION** Electrician

**DUTIES** Keep generator, lighting and electrical systems in working order. Diagnose problems and then repair/replace defective parts. Make periodic inspection for the electrical services (120v, 240v and 480v three phase) including wiring, panels, breakers, contractors, relays and controls. Perform electrical maintenance and repair work, install/replace fixtures, switches and wiring...

**HOBBIES** Going to the gym

**LEAST FAV. VEGETABLE** Onions

**GOUGH IN 7 WORDS** Gough Island is such an amazing place.



**NAME** James Burns

**HOMETOWN** I'm from Stellenbosch but am living in Pringle Bay.

**POSITION** Metkassie.

**DUTIES** I observe and report present weather conditions, capture data using the automatic weather station, do quality control of the data. We also launch weather balloons for atmospheric soundings.

**HOBBIES** I enjoy reading, puzzling, watching series/ movies, helping with fieldwork and being outside.

**LEAST FAV. VEGETABLE** Artichokes.

**GOUGH IN 7 WORDS** Abundant and thriving paradise. I love it!



**NAME** Selvin van Wyk

**HOMETOWN** Concordia, Springbok, Namaqualand.

**POSITION** Diesel Mechanic.

**DUTIES** Service and maintain the generators and do general maintenance around base.

**HOBBIES** Swimming and fishing.

**LEAST FAV. VEGETABLE** Brussels sprouts

**GOUGH IN 7 WORDS** Incredible to be apart of and explore.



**NAME** Vonica Perold

**HOMETOWN** I grew up in Durbanville in the Western Cape but was living in Muizenberg before I came to Gough Island.

**POSITION** Field assistant for the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds).

**DUTIES** I am part of a three person field team and our responsibilities include the long-term monitoring of seabirds, vegetation, invertebrates and invasive species. We also formed part of the Gough Island mice eradication programme, and will continue the post-baiting monitoring phase throughout our stay.

**HOBBIES** I enjoy reading, cooking, loom knitting and building puzzles.

**LEAST FAV. VEGETABLE** Brinjals

**GOUGH IN 7 WORDS** A beautifully lush, alive and humbling wilderness.





NAME	<b>Karabo Mokwena</b>
HOMETOWN	Pretoria
POSITION	Senior Met Tech
DUTIES	Daily observations, monthly data Quality checking and compiling.
HOBBIES	DJ-ing, working out, dressing up.
LEAST FAV. VEGETABLE	Brussels sprouts
GOUGH IN 7 WORDS	Gough's an island with very few girls.



NAME	<b>Roelf Johannes Daling</b>
HOMETOWN	Pretoria, been living in Cape Town
POSITION	All-rounder for the RSPB
DUTIES	My main duty is to help collect long-term scientific data in the field. Secondly I assist with the implementation and maintenance of anything technical, from IT to construction.
HOBBIES	Photography and printing, Kombucha Brewing, Bread Baking, Hiking, Linux and Electronics
LEAST FAV. VEGETABLE	Mass-produced frozen cauliflowers
GOUGH IN 7 WORDS	The whole universe on a small island





To get close to the pups you must first make your way past feisty bulls



# *Pup Weighing*

Fur Seal Pup Weighing at the Tristan da Cunha Islands (2009–2021)

Marthán N. Bester

Mammal Research Institute, Department of Zoology & Entomology, University of Pretoria, Private Bag X20, Hatfield 0028, Pretoria, South Africa

**T**revor Glass, Head of TdC (Tristan da Cunha) Conservation Department, invited me to establish a formal Subantarctic fur seal (SAFS) research programme at the TdC Islands. This included, amongst others, fur seal pup weighing, at both TdC which is situated north of the Subtropical Convergence, and Gough Island (GI) which lies south of the Subtropical Convergence in somewhat cooler waters, as well as at Marion Island (MI) in the cold waters of the Subantarctic Frontal Zone (SFZ), Southern Indian Ocean. Considering climate changes of

which ocean warming trends are particularly pronounced over the last 50+ years, the above comparison is likely to help explain some of the fur seal population changes in the TdCI marine ecosystem.

During the breeding season (late November to early January) females give birth to single pups in harems controlled by territorial males. Pups remain on shore for 10–11 months, suckled by females that return during visits to shore (average two days) after feeding trips to sea (lasting an average seven days, but longer in winter). Weighing pups at regular intervals,



ROELF DALING

between birth and weaning, allows measuring their growth rates which should reflect the foraging success of their mothers during their foraging trips. Furthermore, we could compare the dynamics of the smallest (incipient) population of SAFS in the world at TdC, with that of the largest population of SAFS in the world at 380 km distant GI. The SAFS population at GI has possibly recovered to pre-exploitation levels and numbers some 300,000 animals with an estimated 60,000 pups born which is about 80% of the world population.

Using data spanning over 2 decades, we assessed both seasonal and annual variation in growth rates and weaning mass of SAFS pups. The weaning weights of pups in the very small population at TdC were significantly higher ( 17.5 kg) than recorded at the very large population at GI ( 10.1 kg). This observation supports the hypothesis that the poor growth of pups at GI is linked to a relative lack of prey within the foraging range of the very large numbers of lactating females there. While MI pups grew at an average rate of between 0.040 and 0.067 kg/day early in lactation, the mean



ROELF DALING

Each time 50 male and 50 female pups are weighed.

growth rate at GI (approximately 0.030 kg/day) was significantly lower than the growth rate at MI. Notwithstanding substantial inter-annual variability, we found support for a negative trend in weaning mass at both populations, suggesting a rise in limiting factors that is hypothesized to relate to concurrent local population size increases.

The continued assessment of the SAFS at-sea foraging areas and diet which impact pup growth (that can easily be monitored), is needed as an ongoing contribution to the TdC Blue Belt Program (<https://www.tristandc.com/wildlife/bluebelt.php>). This information will support the most intelligent management of

the TdCI marine resources.

**Acknowledgements:** Tristan administrators, Sean Burns and Alex Mitham, in consort with the Island Council and Chief Islanders, were supportive throughout. Trevor Glass initiated the seal research programme and together with South African DFFE provided logistics. The RSPB, in particular Andy Schofield, made huge contributions to the seal research effort. The many expeditioners to Gough Island, who volunteered to help in the execution of this project, made it all possible.

#### Sources:

- BESTER, M.N. 2020. Seal Research at the Tristan da Cunha Islands (2009–2019). Report to Administrator & Island Council, TdCI. 17 pp.
- OOSTHUIZEN WC, DE BRUYN PJN, WEGE M, BESTER MN (2016) Geographic variation in Subantarctic fur seal pup growth: linkages with environmental variability and population density. *Journal of Mammalogy* 97(2):347–360.



ROELF DALING

This time of the year the island transforms with new life. Flourishing plants and thriving seabirds.



# THE EDINBURGH

Gough's link to the mainland



ROELF DALING



The Edinburgh passing in front of the base in the afternoon sun.



The captain of the Edinburgh – Captain Clarence – is one of the kindest souls you will meet.

**A**t some 40°S and 9°E, in the middle of the South Atlantic, you wouldn't be mistaken in assuming that Gough is one of the most remote islands in the world. Approximately halfway between South Africa and South America, we are pretty isolated from civilization.

After the SA Agulhas II has dropped us off with all of our food and supplies for the year, we can't be certain that we'll be seeing another human being until the end of our overwintering expedition.

We are not, however, alone in our isolation. Tristan da Cunha, a permanently settled British island is a day or two's cruise north of Gough and they rely on a more regular supply of fresh food and produce to supplement their own agriculture and fishing industries. In addition to the Agulhas, there are numerous commercial, scientific and fishing vessels which visit Tristan and a few are licensed to fish in the abundant

waters surrounding the islands in this part of the world.

Among these vessels is the Edinburgh, managed and crewed by the South African fishing company, Ovenstone. Built in 1970, this vessel shows little signs of slowing down after over 50 years of adventure. In addition to regular fishing, the Edinburgh does a lot of cray-fishing, very often along the coast of Gough.

For those of us who hadn't been here before G67, it was quite a surprise and novelty waking up to a strange ship cruising past our front door. During early morning shifts, the metkassie on duty quickly becomes accustomed to hearing the radio chatter between the Edinburgh and the smaller power boats she launches to set, check and retrieve crayfish traps.

The Edinburgh is quite a lot smaller than the Agulhas but has nonetheless proved herself to





The team  
enjoying their  
first "Kreef  
Braai"

be a very accomplished voyager. Her most frequent destinations significantly include Cape Town and Tristan, doing this journey a handful of times each year. This is significant because, while not of primary importance, she has made many stop offs at Gough over the years for deliveries. It is always exciting when we make an exchange with the Edinburgh, as this often involves a box or two of fresh crayfish tails. It is also quite a nice connection we have to home and many of the islanders are grateful for the opportunity to order forgotten or desired items to literally be shipped out to us. It is important to remember that any couriership that the Edinburgh does is only convenience based; they will not go out of their way to drop off or pick up a parcel. Through semi-regular communications with the Captain Clarence, we can get a rough voyage schedule and plan accordingly to coordinate parcels from Cape Town.

But in the meantime, while we wait for the next shipment (and hopefully some more crayfish), we are enjoying the peace and the only things we look for on the horizon are whale spouts and sunrises. — James

"quite a surprise and novelty waking up to a strange ship"



the  
**GREAT**  
SHEARWATER

An astonishing bird that travels vast distances — it's call sounds like a crying baby and they nest underground. Their population size on Gough is estimated to be around 1 million pairs.





ROELF DALING

## "Great Shearwaters breed almost exclusively on Gough and the Tristan Island group"

Anyone who has been on Gough will be well acquainted with the Great Shearwaters, mostly because of the wailing baby-like calls that kept them awake (and confused) during their first night on Island. Usually by morning, after asking around about the strange sounds, you will be told about these fascinating birds, and your mind put at ease.

Great Shearwaters breeds almost exclusively on Gough and the Tristan Island group (Nightingale and Inaccessible), except for a small isolated population in the Falklands. They spend their non-breeding months (May-August) in the North Atlantic Ocean and return south to their breeding grounds from August. They arrive in large rafts in September which are easily spotted from base. When dusk falls, the sky fills with the sights and sounds of birds making their way to their burrows which is something to behold. Observing their landings are both mesmerizing and entertaining and has become a popular post-dinner team activity.

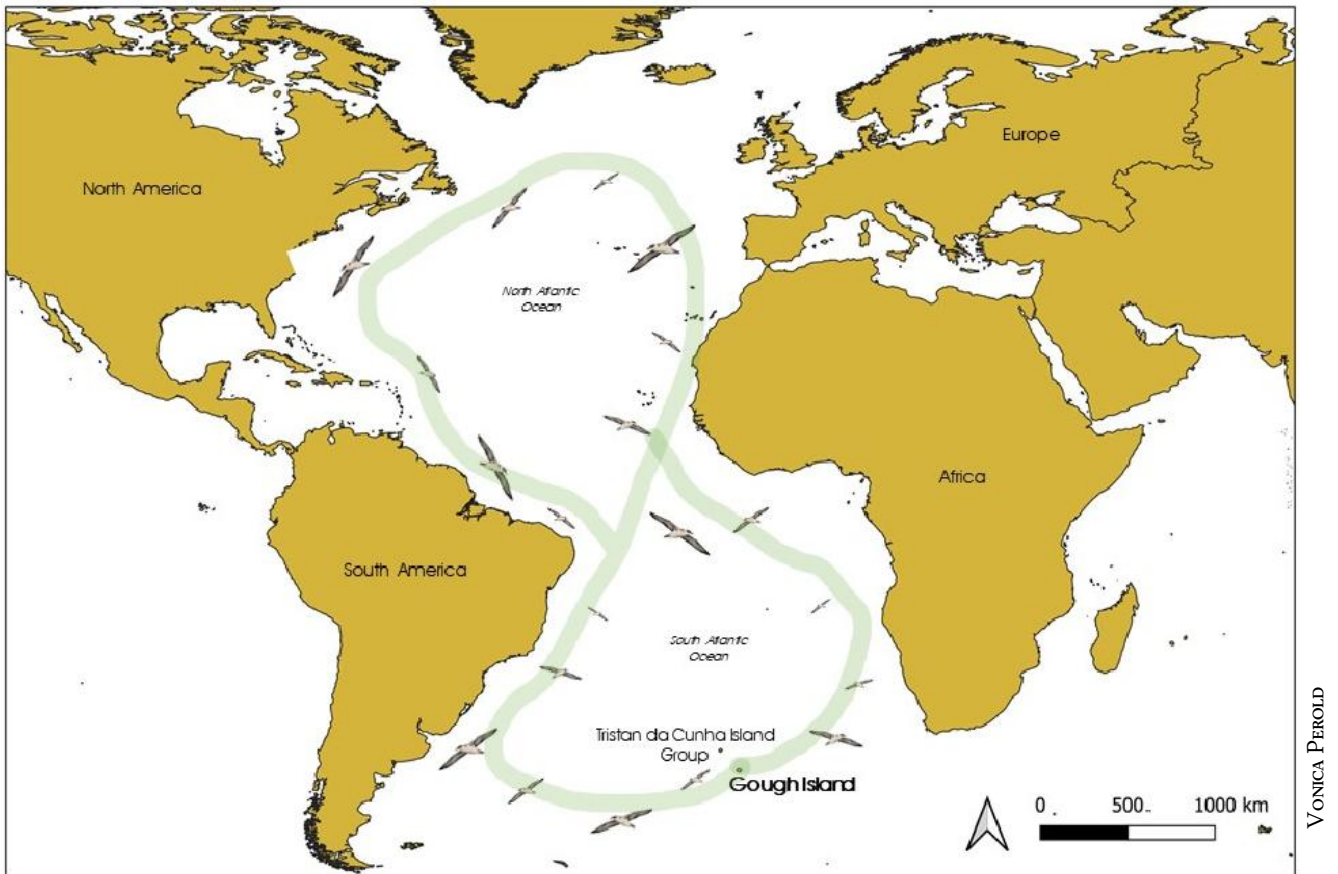
After arrival, the birds spend their time getting reacquainted with their partners and refurbishing their underground nests in burrows. They leave in October for the pre-laying exodus to fatten up and in November, the team at base is once again treated to the mass arrival of large rafts as the birds return to lay eggs.

Each year, the field team conduct long-term monitoring of the Great Shearwater population on Gough Island by checking all burrows along three established transects and counting the number of birds on eggs.

For this, we use a burrow camera which allows us to peak into burrows to see if the bird is incubating. We also survey selected nests during the hatching phase to determine the breeding success for the year.

The chicks hatch in January, and fledge in May, after which the Island grows quiet until September, when the cycle starts all over. It truly is a privileged to witness the breeding cycle of this unique seabird. – Vonica Perold

June to August	September
Spends non-breeding months in the North Atlantic Ocean. After moulting, returns south.	Arrives in large rafts at Gough. Courtship. Refurbish nests in burrows.



The distribution and migratory pathway of the Great Shearwater (in green) from their breeding Islands in the South Atlantic, to their non-breeding and moulting areas in the North Atlantic Ocean.

Map adapted from Robuck et al. (2021)

## A TYPICAL YEAR

October

Leave the island for pre-laying exodus.

November to December

Lays one egg. Parents take turns incubating.

January

Chicks hatch and are fed by both parents.

February to March

Chick rearing phase.

April to May

Adults leave the island and chicks fledge.

### Fun Facts:

- Their call sounds like a crying baby.
- The population size on Gough is estimated to be around 1 million pairs.
- They mostly nest underground in burrows that are between 0.5 – 1.5 meters long.
- They eat fish, squid and crustaceans.





ROELF DALING

▲ Cavern Head surrounded by returning Great Shearwaters



PETER RYAN

▶ The name “Shearwater” comes from the birds’ flight style of shearing across the fronts of waves with their wings held stiff.



▶ Our custom made burrow-camera allows us to monitor nest activity

S  
A  
W  
S  
D  
A  
T  
A

# OCTOBER

Temperature	MIN	4.4°C
	MAX	18.7°C
	AVG	11.5°C
Humidity	MIN	37%
	MAX	94%
	AVG	76%
Wind	MAX	119km/h (NW on 31st)
Rain	MAX	70.8mm (on 19th)
	TOTAL	167.6mm
Sun TOTAL		183.9h

▶ Young Tristan Albatross fledglings waits for the right winds to carry them to the ocean for the first time.





# NOVEMBER

Temperature	MIN	5.4°C
	MAX	19.2°C
	AVG	12.7°C
Humidity	MIN	48%
	MAX	97%
	AVG	78%
Wind	MAX	80km/h (NNW on 22nd)
Rain	MAX	50mm (on 21th)
	TOTAL	246.2mm
Sun TOTAL		138h

# DECEMBER

Temperature	MIN	7.8°C
	MAX	20.8°C
	AVG	14.6°C
Humidity	MIN	51%
	MAX	96%
	AVG	80%
Wind	MAX	113km/h (NW on 8th)
Rain	MAX	62.6mm (on 25th)
	TOTAL	167.4mm
Sun TOTAL		127.7h



F  
A  
R  
E



*sitting left to right : Lezil Pretorius, Tom Clark, Tshililo Kharivha, Sandtjie Du Toit, Vonica Perold, James Burns.  
standing left to right: Megan Dalton, Hareen Da Silva, Rhiannon Gill, Karabo Mokwena, Kim Stevens, Amy King,  
Selvin van Wyk, Antje Steinfur, Katie Wells*



W  
E  
L  
L



FRIENDS



*front left to right: James Burns, Tshililo Kharivha, Vonica Perold, Roelf Daling.  
middle left to right: Kim Stevens, Sandile Nkebe, Karabo Mokwena.  
back left to right: Peter Chuku, Selvin van Wyk.*

