

# The Wanderer

February – March 2023

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**COVER IMAGE:**  
(*Polypogon magellanicus*)  
Elsa van Ginkel



forestry, fisheries  
& the environment

Department:  
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



# letter from the editors



February and March were tinted with a mixture of anticipation for the ship to arrive and that sad inevitable feeling that this might be the last time we set foot on this breath-taking island – a little sub-Antarctic gem we called home for the past 14 months. It was such an honour and a privilege to be able to contribute to such a large conservation initiative. We had to face many unforeseen challenges heads on, both as a team and as individuals. We made it through gale force winds and the unfortunate ice pellets of life that came our way during this year but we certainly found moments of utmost joy and these are the memories we will cherish for life. Our expedition has now come to an end and I wish all the M79 team members a safe journey back home and the best of luck for their future endeavours...

To all our readers, thank you for travelling with us on this mirey and volcanic road, meandering through *Blechnum* slopes and up snowy mountains. We are forever grateful for all the support from our loved ones and friends through the challenging times we experienced on this Island.

Enjoy the final edition of *The Wanderer* for 2022/2023.

Elsa van Ginkel  
Editor

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‘Okungapheli kuyahlola’, sisho njalo IsiZulu!

During the month of February, we didn’t have any birthday celebrations, but we definitely had a Valentine’s Day celebration. At this point, everyone was looking forward to going back home and being with their loved ones, though we still pushed through. February was one of those months with unexpected events, but we conquered because of the dedication of the team and by working together. I will be a bit biased because March is my birth month! 🥰 It’s been epic and all in between. I felt special, happy and I enjoyed my birthday. We have a few weeks left before the Red Taxi arrives, so we had a great ‘End of the Expedition Celebration’, which once again brought the team together.

As for coming to the end of this expedition—we’ve all been waiting for it for a long time. I have had a fulfilling year, filled with different perspectives and emotions. All aspects of life were tested and trialed. That’s where growth and maturity come from. M79ers, it’s been good and let this not be the end but the beginning of greater heights and opportunities.

I hope all readers enjoyed the editions of our newsletter and may you all continue to support other teams as well! To the future...



Tankiso H. Moso  
Co-Editor



## from our Team Leader...

- Tshimangadzo Jufter Munyai

It is almost winter time and that can only mean one thing: **yes**, our expedition is soon coming to an end. Not so long ago, a brave team of 21 sailed on a ship for thousands of kilometres, into the unknown, on their way to relieve another brave team of 19 at Marion Island. It was an exciting journey sailing within the sub-Antarctic waters to Marion Island. All of us were extremely excited, looking forward to spending approximately 15 months in isolation. Our time on the island has been filled with a lot of adventure, accompanied with some sad news, as just a few months into our expedition, we had to bid farewell to two of our team members due to medical reasons. It was an emotional and sad day when we had to say our goodbyes to the guys but we soldiered on and here we are.

It hasn't been all fun and games... just like any other team, we had our ups and downs but I am glad we managed to sort out most of our differences and get along. Everyone around base is excited to know that the Agulhas II will soon be departing from Cape Town, with the new M80 team which will be relieving us as we head home.

It has been a great expedition for me, I had the chance to explore the island, learn new things and make new friends. I will forever cherish the time I spent on this island with the rest of the M79 team members.

We came, we saw and we conquered.

Thank you M79 for making my responsibilities easy.

***Ndo livhuwa Ndaa!***



# Interviews...

Meet the Birders and the Environmental Control Officers!

- by Tankiso H. Moso and Elsa van Ginkel

## Oceans and Coasts Seabird Research Assistant – Andile Ace Mdluli

### Qualifications

National Diploma: Nature Conservation. BTech: Nature Conservation. BSc Honours in Environmental Management.

### Your passions? What led you to Marion Island?

I'm passionate about wildlife, especially the conservation of seabirds. I applied for this position because I wanted to get involved with seabirds' research and field work; and Marion Island provides that wonderful opportunity.

### Favourite animal or plant on the island so far?

Gentoo penguin.

### Who do you miss most from the mainland?

Obviously, my family and friends who have been so supportive. They are the ones that have kept me going and enjoying my time here, as well as the field work that I am doing.

### Any food cravings?

I miss Nando's, Marcel's ice-cream and of course fresh fruit.

### Achievements during this year?

As a birder, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity and I would like to ensure that we reach the target for all the activities that we are supposed to do.

### Any advice for future Marionites?

Marion Island builds character and that is what I have learned. It's tough but once you get used to the job, nothing is impossible. If you are passionate about seabirds, then this Island is the place to be.

### Any lessons so far, from the island experience?

If you can survive the unpredictable weather while you are on a Round Island, doing field work; you can survive anything in life.

### Favourite event so far, on the island?

Birthday celebrations are always my favourite, spending time with the team members and forgetting about stressful things.

### What do you love most about your job?

Each day comes with new challenges and I enjoy facing those challenges. I enjoy being outside in the field and working with the different seabirds on the Island.

### Hobbies?

I love hiking, swimming and chilling with friends.

### Favourite quote

'Life, if well lived, is long enough', by Seneca.





## Oceans and Coasts Seabird Research Assistant - Samuel Peta

### Qualifications

BSc (Botany and Zoology): University of Limpopo.  
 BSc Honours (Zoology): University of Limpopo. MSc  
*Cum Laude* (Zoology): Stellenbosch University.

### Your passions? What led you to Marion Island?

I am very adventurous and love being and working alongside nature; and experiencing the wildlife it has to offer. My education and experiences have affirmed in me that an opportunity to be at the island would be a huge step to practically employ my research expertise to contribute towards the conservation of seabirds on the island, including advancement of my career in biodiversity conservation.

### Favourite animal or plant on the island so far?

Wandering Albatross – which I call ‘The Princess of the Island’ – elegant, peaceful, graceful and majestic birds.

### Who do you miss most from the mainland?

My family and my dog, Tosca.

### Any food cravings?

Yes. I would give my right arm to eat fresh food, especially fruit and vegetables.

### Achievements during this year?

When saving species is your passion, the end goal is to *ALWAYS* contribute towards the research to understand their ecology and conservation. I hope to achieve that mandate to protect the island’s fragile ecosystem.

### Any advice for future Marionites?

I would say... do a background check on the island and the job. Fourteen months are a VERY long time to be on an isolated place you knew little about; or a job you are not passionate about. It is always useful to chat with people who previously overwintered, to share in their experiences, before you make a judgment call to come to the island.

### Any lessons so far, from the island experience?

I came to the island with a plethora of field experience but the physicality required behind the research conducted on the island is on another level. The lesson I learnt is that the island builds character – you should not only be mentally strong to survive in one of the most extreme environments on earth but this isolation is an extreme test of the will to stay at the top without losing yourself in the process.

### Favourite event so far, on the island?

Braai’s every Saturday and the birthday events.

### What do you love most about your job?

Jobs in conservation can be hard work and often demanding, but they are also rewarding. For me, the reactive nature of working as an ornithologist, is the opportunity to interact with amazing bird species on the island. To be able to follow their success from an egg to adulthood stage – it is an absolute joyous space to be in.



### Hobbies?

Outdoor activities, travelling and watching wildlife documentaries.

### Favourite quote

‘It is surely our responsibility to do everything in our power to create a planet that provides a home not just for us, but for all life on earth’, by Sir David Attenborough.

### Anything extra you would like to mention?

Marion Island is one of the most amazing places on earth – an uncharted space very few people get to step on or see. Thus, if you get an opportunity to be on this island – try and leave a legacy that others can build on. Marion Island is our national pride, therefore it remains our responsibility to inspire future research to enhance conservation efforts to better understand the island’s biological life.

## Marine Apex Predator Research Unit: Birder - Lucy Smyth

### Qualifications

PhD in Conservation Biology: University of Cape Town.

### Your passions? What led you to Marion Island?

I really love biological fieldwork, hiking and the great outdoors and have dreamt of coming to work on Marion for a very long time. I have also always been fascinated by seabirds. As I wrapped up my PhD back in Cape Town, I decided that my next step could be a year on Marion, being a full-time hiker and birder; and a few months later found myself sailing away from the mainland on the SA Agulhas II.

### Favourite animal or plant on the island so far?

That is an impossible question! This island is full of such an incredible array of plants and animals that thrive in incredibly harsh conditions, and I simply cannot choose a favourite. I think I'd die of frostbite if I had to spend a single night outside, yet when the temperatures drop, the wind howls and the rain comes pouring down, the creatures here just plonk themselves down, facing into the wind, and wait out the storm. I'm in awe of their ability to survive and thrive in these subantarctic conditions, and have grown to love all of them more and more as the year progressed.

### Who do you miss most from the mainland?

Family and friends: 14 months are a long time to be away from loved ones.



### Any food cravings?

Definitely fruit and veggies. I usually eat a lot of fresh things and am finding it really difficult not having access to any over here. I think that particularly with all of the physically demanding work, one craves healthy, nutritious food.

### Achievements during this year?

I would like to put everything that I've got into my work, in order to help to increase our understanding of these magnificent seabirds and ultimately help us to better conserve them in the future. Spending time on this beautiful island undoubtedly involves a certain footprint on the land, and I hope that the outcomes from my work can help to offset that, and make my time here worthwhile not only for myself but for the ecosystem as a whole. I would also like to absorb and enjoy as much of this spectacular island as possible, engraving the beauty, the smells and the feelings into my memory forever.



### Any advice for future Marionites?

Working on Marion is hard, but amazing. The difficult days make the wonderful ones even more special, so make an effort to appreciate them all. I would definitely only recommend coming to Marion if it is something that you are absolutely certain you would love to do. It's not the kind of job you can go into half-heartedly.

### Any lessons so far, from the island experience?

The same lesson that I learnt from the tortoise and the hare all those years ago: slow and steady wins the race. The steadiness part is crucial. Sometimes things will all feel like too much, but if you just keep on going, bit by bit, you'll get there. Don't give up!



## Favourite event so far, on the island?

My first Round Island, with Eleanor Weideman (M78 MAPRU birder). We studied together throughout all of our years at UCT, and shared many dreams of one day coming to work on Marion Island. To be here at the same time, walking around the island together, was a dream come true.

## What do you love most about your job?

Definitely the combination of time spent outdoors, and time spent so close to such an incredible array of seabirds. Where else in the world do you have Wandering Albatrosses soaring over your head while you walk to work for a day of ringing Skua chicks?

## Hobbies?

There certainly isn't much time for hobbies over here, but luckily my job includes a lot of my hobbies. I love hiking, camping, travelling, animal watching and photography.

## Favourite quote

I'm going to share a quote that is written on the Swartkops Hut door, and I think of often. It says 'Smile, you are on Marion freaking Island'. While simple at first, those few words remind me to live in the moment and appreciate it for what it is: even if I'm sopping wet and my fingers and toes are frozen; how lucky am I to be able to walk around this incredible island, day after day, watching closely as it changes through the seasons?





## Environmental Control Officer - Mishumo Masithembi

### I NEVER DROP THE WALKING STICK!

Masithembi Mishumo holds the qualification of a BSc in Environmental Sciences. He is an experienced conservationist and a registered Certificated Natural Scientist (SACNASP). Growing up in Tshidzini village outside of Thohoyandou town, he was always surrounded by nature. After a primary school visit about environmental education by the local municipality and visiting the Mphaphuli Nature Reserve, Mishumo decided to pursue a career in nature conservation.

A previous participant of the City of Cape Town Kader Asmal skill development programme, Mishumo was also awarded with the Silver Shield Award, to recognize his outstanding performance towards fostering and promoting safety, health and the environment in the work place. His career showed exceptional growth with participation on water security projects consisting of controlling alien and invasive species along water catchment areas and taking part in maintaining healthy ecosystem services.

Mishumo has had the vision of coming to Marion Island since sitting in a University of Venda lecturing hall; the love and desire grew much more after assisting with packing clothes/PPE gear for the team that was coming to overwinter at Marion Island. That is when Mishumo started following the Antarctic Legacy/Marion Friends social media groups and that is where he found out about the Mouse-Free Marion Project, of which he burnt to be part of: saving the environment and to leave a lighter footprint.

In April 2022, Mishumo found himself on-board the SA Agulhas II, as an Environmental Control Officer under the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment; this was a dream come true and a memorable, once in a life time experience.

‘Coming to Marion Island is one of the greatest decisions that I have made in my life, I have the opportunity to work on a South African Special Nature Reserve and perform environmental audit and compliance monitoring, as well as biological monitoring. The M79 overwintering expedition was a great experience as I acquired knowledge about long-term scientific researchers, and integrated biodiversity management.’

‘Earth does not belong to us; we belong to Earth. Take only memories, leave nothing but footprints’, by Chief Seattle.



## Assistant Environmental Control Officer - Gcobani Tshangana

### Qualifications

Diploma in Nature Conservation

### Your passions? What led you to Marion Island?

I'm passionate about nature and its biodiversity! Going beyond South African borders has been my dream, so I can gain experience and skills on an international level. Being here has been a dream come true and a blessing; by saying that I'm grateful for this experience, doesn't quite extract how I truly feel about it.

### Favourite animal or plant on the island so far?

Fauna: Brown skua, Gentoo penguins and Elephant seals. Flora: *Polystichum marionense*, a fern species.

### Who do you miss most from the mainland?

My family.

### Any food cravings?

Pap and maas (uMvubo), fresh fruit and vegetables.

### Any advice for future Marionites?

Be mentally strong and physically fit.

### Any lessons so far, from the island experience?

If you are hungry for knowledge on the island, there is no boundary that prevents you in acquiring the knowledge, as long as you comply.

### Favourite event so far, on the island?

New Year's Eve celebration

### What do you love most about your job?

My work doesn't limit me to work with only one research project, I work and engage with all the projects and researchers on the Island.

### Hobbies?

Playing table tennis and pool.

### Favourite quote

'A winner is a dreamer who never gives up', by N.R. Mandela.





# MARION'S MARVELOUS BIRDS

## Wandering Albatrosses

- by Lucy Smyth



The magnificent mating display of the Wandering Albatross.

The Wandering Albatross is probably one of the most well-known creatures of the Southern Ocean. Enormous, elegant, and stunningly beautiful, these birds travel incredible distances over the vast subantarctic seas. They have the largest wingspan of any bird on earth, and soar through the skies effortlessly. While the wild winds of the roaring forties certainly hamper human process on Marion Island, and I frequently feel like some kind of large, cumbersome, half torn kite being blown all over the place by gust upon gust of wind; Wandering Albatrosses are quite the opposite. The stronger the wind, the more gracefully they seem to fly.

Wandering Albatrosses are one of the few avian inhabitants of Marion Island who are present year-round. Most seabirds who breed on the island are present only at certain times of year, spending their non-breeding months foraging out at sea.

The Wanderer breeding cycle however takes an entire year, meaning that there are always young ones on the island, as well as some parents on chick-feeding-duty. In early January, Wandering Albatrosses lay a single egg in an impressive, raised nest which they build out of earth and plant material. Their nest building efforts require quite a bit of excavation and time, and thus the island comes alive with adult Wandering Albatrosses flocking back to their breeding grounds in December. There were sometimes so many albatrosses flying overhead that I felt like I was at Heathrow airport! In March, little white balls of fluff emerge from their eggs. These amazing creatures then live on top of their throne-like nests for the next nine months or so, fledging only in December. As the chicks grow, their white fluff eventually gives way to chocolate brown juvenile plumage, with a small patch of white feathers around their faces.



# The Wanderer – Wandering Albatrosses

As Wandering Albatrosses age, their plumage lightens. Chocolate brown juvenile feathers are replaced by a more mottled look, followed by whiter feathers with intricate dark pencilling. This pencilling continues to lighten with age until birds become almost completely white, with only some dark flight feathers. It is truly amazing to think of all the places these very pale birds have been, the sights they have seen and the storms they have endured. While most juveniles return to breed at a similar location to that of their birth, some move to other islands. Regular ringing at monitoring colonies allows for birders working on subantarctic islands, to keep track of these movements. In January, birders on Marion Island complete an 'Incubation Round Island', where we walk around the entire island, taking GPS points of all incubating Wandering Albatrosses and checking to see whether they are ringed. We usually find a few birds with French rings, meaning that they have moved to Marion from Crozet or the Kerguelen Islands. So much of the work I do on Marion, feels very much like a solo endeavour, with just me and my two legs wandering all over the place, counting and monitoring and ringing. While I really treasure this time alone, it is quite an amazing feeling to spot a bird with a ring from another country, and think about the interconnectedness of the web of scientists working in these far away, remote locations, so far apart yet connected by their passion for birds, and the wild places they call home.



A parent sheltering its chick from the elements.



Adult and chick.



A large fluffy chick, shortly before it replaces its white fluff for its juvenile coat.

While breeding Wanderers take turns incubating their precious eggs, younger birds return to the island to form bonds and pair up for future breeding seasons. Wandering Albatrosses are predominantly monogamous, and form bonds that last a lifetime or until one partner is no longer around. These bonds are initiated by magnificent mating displays, during which birds spread their impressive wings, vibrate their bills to make a rapid, trilling sound and stretch their heads up to the sky. These displays are a real privilege to witness: one of the many wonders of life in the subantarctic.



# The Wanderer – Wandering Albatrosses

With mates in mind, these birds will return to life at sea for a while, and come back to the island to breed in subsequent years. Breeding is an energetically demanding process however, and therefore unless a nest fails very early on, Wandering Albatross pairs breed only every second year. This gives parents enough time to properly replenish their energy supplies before being responsible for feeding a hungry chick for a whole year. As Wanderer chicks grow and get stronger, they slowly start moving off their nests and waddling around the vicinity of their thrones. They spend a fair amount of time refurbishing their nests, and greet anybody walking past with an enthusiastic ‘clack-clack-clack’ of their beak. Remarkably, they live out even the most formidable storms on top of their nests that provide no protection from the elements, seemingly unfazed by the gales, snowstorms and torrential downpours that frequent the subantarctic so often. Witnessing the entire life cycle of these amazing creatures, has been a dream come true, and I often wonder about the chicks who I grew so used to greeting every day on my frequently travelled routes: where are they now and how are they doing? I do hope they’re staying far away from fishing trawlers, and finding enough squid to keep their tummies full.





# Life lessons from Marion Island

- by Michael Ross

After being on Marion Island for almost a full year, my adventure is drawing to a close. Much of what I have experienced here is yet to sink in. I suspect it will take me a few months to process this year, and reflect on how I have been changed as a result of my time here. This is perhaps not very helpful to you, the reader, if indeed you were interested in what I have learnt whilst here. Do not despair, because, while I can't sum up the entire year, I can pick out some life lessons I have gleaned along the way. In general, these have been acquired through, at times necessary, and at times completely avoidable hardship, and I hope to help both you, and my future self, avoid especially those that are unnecessary. With a little creativity, I am sure you'll find no difficulty applying these to some of the situations you encounter.

## 1. You can go really far, it just takes a while.

One day, a few months ago, I decided to go for a long walk. I needed to drop a few things off at a couple of huts and instead of staying for the night, I figured I would rather pack light and do it in one day. I knew it would take most of the day and that I would have nothing but my thoughts for company. Off I went. It took about 11 hours and by the time I returned to base, I had walked almost 50 kilometers. I said it was a long walk. In our culture of instant gratification, we have lost the patience to wait for things that take time. Marion Island has helped curtail that; some things just take time. I regularly set off on walks which I know will take hours and hours - I can walk a little quicker, or a little slower, but in either case I will be out there for a long time. What I have come to realise however, is that if I'm willing to be out there for a long time, plodding away, eventually I'll turn around and realise I've come a very long way indeed.

## 2. You can never have too many snacks, but you can certainly have too few.

When I get really hungry, I have a bit of a meltdown. It is a most unpleasant experience for me and for those around me. The situation is however, both easily prevented and remedied with food. Unfortunately, I frequently underestimate either the time a task will take me (and hence don't bring any snacks), or how hungry I will be (and plough through all the snacks I do have). I have attempted to find a workable solution here. I now always go out with some snacks, even on short trips. Whenever I am out for more than a few hours, or going away overnight, I take a lunch box into which I pack lunch, for snacks cannot possibly replace lunch. Lastly, and perhaps the best idea I have had here, is to have an emergency supply of snacks. These snacks are placed in an infrequently visited part of my bag, and are never touched except in case of a looming meltdown. They are not considered as part of my snack ration for the day, but have saved me on numerous occasions when I have made a grave error in calculating the required quantity of food. I've never once regretted bringing too many snacks, but my word, I've regretted having too few.



### **3. It won't rain forever.**

I have had a few truly miserable days on Marion. There haven't been many, but there have definitely been times when I have seriously questioned my life choices. These have typically been cold, rainy, windy, wintery days. I am not especially cold tolerant, and when my fingers get frozen, my enthusiasm rapidly wanes. Sometimes I have pushed through, hoping the weather would improve, and at other times, I have called it a day and vowed to try again tomorrow. I am not advocating one approach over the other, each have had their place, but both operate under the assumption that conditions will improve. In every case, sooner or later, the clouds have parted and the world has suddenly seemed a much friendlier place.

### **4. Check the weather, but don't trust the forecast.**

I have great respect for the Norwegian geniuses who run Yr, the weather forecasting website ubiquitously and frequently used by Marionites, especially the field assistants. Predicting the weather is challenging, especially in an environment as fickle and ever-changing as the one on Marion Island. Despite this, Yr does a brilliant job and oftentimes they are spot on, predicting the onset of rainfall to within a few minutes. However, at other times their forecasts are but a fantasy and the howling gale, torrential downpour or unrelenting ice pellet squalls in no way resemble the beautiful day we were supposed to experience. Mercifully, at other times, their forecasts turn out to be a bit overdramatic and Marion Island blesses us with milder weather than we expected. In short, you never know what you might encounter when you leave the security of base. The weather forecast can give you some idea, but don't ever forget your rain jacket.

### **5. There is far too much cream-style sweetcorn in this world.**

If there is one thing the huts on Marion Island have an abundance of, it is cream-style sweetcorn. I am not quite sure what one is supposed to do with cream-style sweetcorn. Who invented this, and what were they thinking? Nevertheless, we adaptable field assistants have made it into corn bread and sweet corn fritters. We have mixed it with tuna, or sieved out all the 'cream-style', leaving only sweetcorn, or mixed it with other vegetables to make something resembling a curry. We have had to initiate an informal rule that every few days you were out, you had to eat at least one tin of cream-style sweetcorn. I am not sure quite what the life lesson in this is, but one thing is certain: you'll never see me eating cream-style sweetcorn again.

Every person who overwinters on Marion Island returns to the mainland at least slightly different to who they were when they left. A year is a long time, where a lot can happen, and in the Marion Island crucible, your metal is truly tested. I would like to think I am leaving the island a little wiser than I was when I arrived, probably just a little, but I live in hope. If nothing else, I'll try to remember these five lessons, in the hope that there is indeed some wisdom hidden therein.

# Through the eyes of the Medical Orderly

- a year on the astonishing Marion Island -

- by Mndeni Aaron Hlatshwayo

A diary entry:

21 April 2022 - 18 May 2023

I am Mndeni Aaron Hlatshwayo, currently the medical orderly for the M79 overwintering team. The day I touched base at Marion Island, my heart filled with both excitement and concern. Fourteen months away from friends and family... is a long time. I had a fear of the unknown and of how this expedition will turn out but here we are, on a sub-Antarctic Island: no turning back, we can only go forward. We started this journey, now we have to run the race and finish it.

Today, when I look back...

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2022, when I took that flight down to Cape Town, the city of *Good Hope*, '*Ikappa lodumo*', there were approximately 410 days ahead of me; with my final destination being Marion Island. During my training as a soldier, I had to live in similar harsh environments.



Medical orderly on duty.

Marion Island opened my eyes to different ideas, gave me new experiences and increased my knowledge. I had to be part of a team of 19 members, looking after their health and wellbeing. This position requires a lot of zeal, patience, understanding, willingness to listen and guidance from and to me. I found that the bi-lateral approach works much easier and efficiently when the team is united.

As a team, we had to join together, to cross this bridge. I arrived at the island a year ago and for some reason I had no clue what lie ahead or what to expect from this 14-month expedition. Many thoughts crossed my mind as to how I should approach this year without my wife, kids and close friends. Oftentimes, these are the people we go to for peace and comfort, and especially for that much-needed morale boost. Being away from them, 'stretches the wings wider'... Perhaps, one should always be ready for any form of a challenge.

In the beginning, for several weeks, I had no routine. I was trying to settle down and admit to myself that the 'Queen', Mariam Makeba (SA Agulhas II), has finally left me on this Island to return back to South Africa for her duties. On 2 June 2022, I woke up and decided to take a run on the treadmill in the well-equipped Marion gym; I ended up doing a 10 km (in 65 minutes), I did some body-stretches as well as multiple other exercises. Suddenly, I figured out the first piece of the Marion-puzzle. Exercise. I remembered, during take-over, that someone had promised me that I will roll to the vessel (actually she used these word in Isixhosa: '*Ndzakuqengqela enqanaweni*'), should I not get regular exercise, daily. Those words sparked a fear in me and rung in my mind every time I felt too lazy to wake up and get dressed for the gym. Until today, I hold on to those words; they push me forward every day during my training sessions.





Inqganawe (the ship); Ship's Cove trip – first snow.

The second puzzle piece that fell into place, was that I should read at least ten pages a day. I read almost three books during the expedition. Additionally, I have revised my medical updates and skills as medical professional. I feel I have done a great job here at Marion Island as a medical orderly. We also had two medical evacuations that occurred during this expedition and I would like to say this, 'Wow, M79ers of the 2022-2023 overwintering expedition. I've learnt a lot about the courage, love, support, preferences, priorities, and zealously of an enthusiastic team. When differences are set aside and we stand united as one team, with one goal set in mind, we function optimally. I don't think I would have been able to face these medical challenges alone; I was at my best and fully capable of my responsibilities due to your influence, team M79. Thank you.'



A successful medical evacuation.

To me, the best moments of our island life, consisted of socializing; this was definitely a morale boost. I saw the togetherness and unity of the team during each birthday celebration. We are a team: a combination of different races, ethics, genders and beliefs but we are one, with one goal: winning the island race. I enjoyed the braai's, baking, cooking, pool table battles, assisting with seal pup-weighing, base skivvy, dressing codes, the team photoshoot, the Christmas and New Year's lunch sessions, crafting torn trousers and most of all, the laughing.



Heritage day.

Then there was dinner time. The best quotes I've heard around base: 'Why are you sour, why you pouring wine?', 'Reduction of salt and consider our health', 'please comply', 'Andiva ke Ngoku' ('Now I don't understand...'), 'Njani Njani' ('How?'), 'chowing errors', 'coming with bad luck here'. These are some of the sayings that keep a smile on your face when the isolation or the miserable feeling of missing home, kicks in. You find yourself laughing alone about some of these sayings and then you actually realise, I lived amongst some great people on this island. 'Bella caio, Bella caio...', the lyrics of one of the songs I often listen to, is also something that you often hear around base.





Elephant seal pup-weighing.



Getting mired on the way to Ship's Cove.

I occasionally joined some of the field researchers with their work. My trips to Ship's Cove and Archways - weighing weaners (elephant seal pups), with the Sealer-team, were a great experience; I even assisted in weighing a 182 kg weaner (the heaviest pup for the season) with the M79 Sealers. This was one of the best moments I had, working with these magnificent animals, thanks to Sealers Banele and Mike. I also enjoyed a trip, with the Oceans and Coasts (O & C) Birders, during which the Gentoo Penguins were monitored.

Time has definitely flown. Just like that. In the blink of an eye.



I have now also gone on a Round Island. I have experienced most of what base had to offer and it was time to explore further; to experience and enjoy the island, with its mires and mountains, the lava rocks, wind, rain, cold temperatures, treacherous ice pellets and the occasional sunny weather. It included long hours of walking, filled with cold sweating, a fresh breeze, mountain frost and the cold air.

On my first day, on the way to Kildalkey hut, we passed the Soft Plume River, where we made a stop and drank some clean, fresh water directly from the stream (as on Marion Island it is safe to do so). Kildalkey was my first stop and also where I spent my first hut night. I joined the O & C Birders, Andile and Sam, for a trip around the island. After a long day of approximately four hours and 35 minutes of working and walking around the inland and coastal sections, we finally reached our first stop, Kildalkey Hut, where we could rest. We were cold, sweaty and our clothes were quite wet. I had a warm hut coffee and a tin of fruit cocktail as my sugar levels were extremely low. These were the first few things I did in the hut, which were followed by a good hot meal and some well-deserved sleep, especially after a good walk of about 11,6 km. My body was extremely tired.



Kildalkey – first hut night.

I will call my second day, the ‘Mountain-view trip’. I lost track of how many hills and steep mountain-sections we had to conquer but after about 16.71 km and eight hours later, I could finally have a good rest at Rooks Hut. To see these beautiful mountains and to experience the cold fresh air, combined with both wind and rain... well, I truly enjoyed this day.



First hills towards Watertunnel.

On the third day, we travelled to Swartkops Hut, which took us about 10 km, and we covered this distance in approximately five hours. It was a good day, filled with sun and warmer weather. There was also much less wind, which was wonderful! It was also my turn to cook. We had tinned vegetables (after three months without truly being able to enjoy vegetables). What a meal, I even went for a second helping, just to get the taste of veggies and soup, with some boerewors – the amazing ‘wors-package’ that we carried for three days, as we brought it from base. The Island is a refrigerator on its own (do not ask me how, why or where but all I know is that the boerewors was still in a good state to eat). It was also time for a hut bath – the first bath point after two days of amazing walking over the lava rocks and the ‘*Blechnum*’ ferns. The Swartkops area was so windy during the night that I couldn’t sleep until 02:00 am, I’m actually not sure what time I finally fell asleep. That evening was challenging, because the whole hut was shaking, including the beds.

The best part, during the Round Island with the O & C Birders, was the Swartkops to Mixed Pickle stretch. The mires were not easy, but I took this great challenge upon myself... I walked up steep hills, over crumbly lava rocks; and it was definitely mentally challenging. I experienced some stressful moments during this Round Island but it taught me the value of patience, to think twice before tackling any obstacle, and to be cautious. This island humbles you but if you show it respect, you will reach your destination. The thing I enjoy most, is when the wind is blowing from behind, as it pushes you forward; you even move over the mires at a quicker pace, which then prevents you from sinking into them... Heavy snow caused my gloves to often become slightly frozen-over and icy cold, occasionally to such an extent that I couldn't feel my fingertips. A special thanks to the birder crew for taking me on this Round Island. Andile and Sam, you guys were amazing and extremely supportive throughout this whole trip.



The Amphi-theatre at Swartkops.

The weather associated with Marion life, is as unpredictable as ever. For the past months, the island's weather has done its utmost best to banish all hope, especially when you are out in the field with unsurprisingly strong wind speeds; substantial amounts of rain, snow, ice pellets and snowflakes. I've experienced all of these weather phenomena and this island tests you every time you find yourself outside. Another aspect that fascinates me, is the sea surface temperatures and the swell of the waves that we experience here.

My Round Island and other adventures were accompanied by countless blizzards; and memories were etched into my heart: I lived, worked and enjoyed great times on Marion Island, with Team M79.

I would actually like to thank the whole team and that I could be part of such a family as the M79ers. For me, this was a great time and stage in my life as I experienced personal growth, as well as integration with a community, made up of all kinds of different backgrounds and home upbringings; it was an exceptional experience. This is something that you cannot buy with any coin.

Team M79ers, it is time to go home now and I wish all the best in your future endeavours. Cheers...

Gibel'bhasi (M.A.H.)



# *Memorable shots!*



*Elsa van Ginkel*



*Elsa van Ginkel*



# March Birthday Celebrations!

Jufter's Birthday – 5 March  
The base engineer and team leader...



Tankiso's Birthday – 27 March  
The SANSA engineer!







# Mainland Quarterly™

- by Abuyiselwe Nguna and Vhuawelo Simba -



A jaunt through the ocean and the swaying waves, the story swings from the 79<sup>th</sup> Marion overwintering expedition and everyday adventures at Marion Island, to a surreal dream fable of the medical evacuation of two M79 members that had to head back to the mainland.



Picture this: You were medically evacuated and are feeling grateful to be alive. But as you sit in the comfort of your own home, sipping on a warm cup of coffee, memories of that isolated paradise flood back into your mind. So, what do you do? Well, if you're like us, then you head straight back to where it all began - Marion Island! And let's not forget about our trusty team – the M79ers who were there with us every step of the way. Join us as we touch base with these resilient individuals and reminisce about our unforgettable experience on one of the world's most unique islands.

It has been nine months since we were medically evacuated from the Island, so we guess we are due to touch base with the M79ers on Marion Island. We sustained injury and sickness during our short stint on Marion Island last year. We were evacuated on the Island early July 2022 and made it back safely to the mainland to attend to our various medical conditions. Before we dive deep, we would like to say thank you to our team for their part in ensuring we made it back to the ship safely. We would also like to thank Captain Knowledge Bengu and his crew for their heroics during the evacuation. Now, with all that out of the way, *'Howzit people?'*



Abu (Abuyiselwe): Let's rewind to eight months before now. The last thing from the Island I remember seeing vividly, was Crane point, as we drifted away from Boulders Beach, on a raft, dressed in big red rescue suits, holding on to the ropes for dear life. A very scary four minutes, mixed with relief, as we took our first steps to health and recovery. We were transferred from the raft onto a speed boat, where we glided over the wavy seas and eventually boarded the SA Agulhas II. As innumerable passengers came to view this spectacle occurring in the middle of the ocean in the sub-Antarctic, we received much-needed medical attention and a superbly nice meal; during the night we started sailing back to the mainland. I arrived in Cape Town, stayed over for the night and then flew back home the following day, to the Eastern Cape, via East London and then my hometown, Queenstown.



The rehabilitation process of my wrist had started, and the surgery was done within a month of me being back on the mainland; I have made a remarkable recovery since then. I can now do various things with my injured hand: I can write, type, handle light groceries and even wash dishes. I am still working my way into doing hard manual labour. What frustrates me the most is the inability to drive still, I injured my left wrist which I normally use for changing gears and it's super painful, so unless it's an automatic, I cannot drive yet.



Vee (Vhuawelo): During the medical evacuation process, I experienced a whirlwind of emotions. On the one hand, I felt an overwhelming sense of relief as I knew that the evacuation was vital for my wellbeing and recovery. I welcomed the opportunity to regain my health. On the other hand, sadness washed over me as I realised that leaving Marion Island meant parting with the breath-taking landscapes, unique wildlife, and newfound connections that had become an irreplaceable part of my life.

When we arrived in Cape Town, I got admitted at Groote Schuur Hospital, as I needed urgent medical attention. After that, I flew to Port Elizabeth, where I had to prepare for the required surgery. It's been a little over six months since my surgery and I'm feeling great! I am so grateful to my team and employers (Mouse-free Marion) for the support they have shown me throughout this journey. It has been a long road, but I am thrilled that I could be part of the M79 team. Who knew life would be better in gumboots? The wistful memories of my time at Marion Island remain etched in my mind, accompanied by a lingering yearning to return someday.

We had this idea to just touch base with the guys as they countdown to their return home. We are pretty sure that everybody is excited and exhausted from the year and looking forward to unwinding and throwing those gumboots away. The repo rate has gone up and things are expensive in the country, so you all need to prepare yourselves. When we left the island, we said to each other, 'When one door closes, a window opens.' We are happy to inform you that we both found those windows and excellent opportunities that we are excited to embark on.







# Island life



Photo credit: Elsa van Ginkel



# Weather

## for the brave

- by Sikhwari Thendo, Tshitavhe Tanganedzani and Faltein Siphesihle

### SAWS Weather Stats: February – March 2023

		FEBRUARY	MARCH
TEMPERATURE	MIN	2.9 °C	0.9 °C
	MAX	17.3 °C	18.7 °C
	AVERAGE	9.8 °C	8.2 °C
	AVERAGE LOW	6.7 °C	4.7 °C
	AVERAGE HIGH	13.7 °C	14.0 °C
PRESSURE	MIN	974.5 hPa	972.9 hPa
	MAX	1022.2 hPa	1030.2 hPa
	AVERAGE	1001.9 hPa	1010.1 hPa
RAIN	TOTAL	227.8 mm	168.4 mm
	DAYS WITH RAIN	25 days	17 days
	DAYS WITH RAIN > 1 mm	19 days	14 days
	MAX IN 24 HOURS	57.8 mm	69.6 mm
WIND	MAX	102.96 km/h	121.0 km/h
	DIRECTION	Southwest	Northwest
SUNSHINE	TOTAL	137.1 hours	126 hours
HUMIDITY	AVERAGE	78 %	77 %



South African  
Weather Service

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