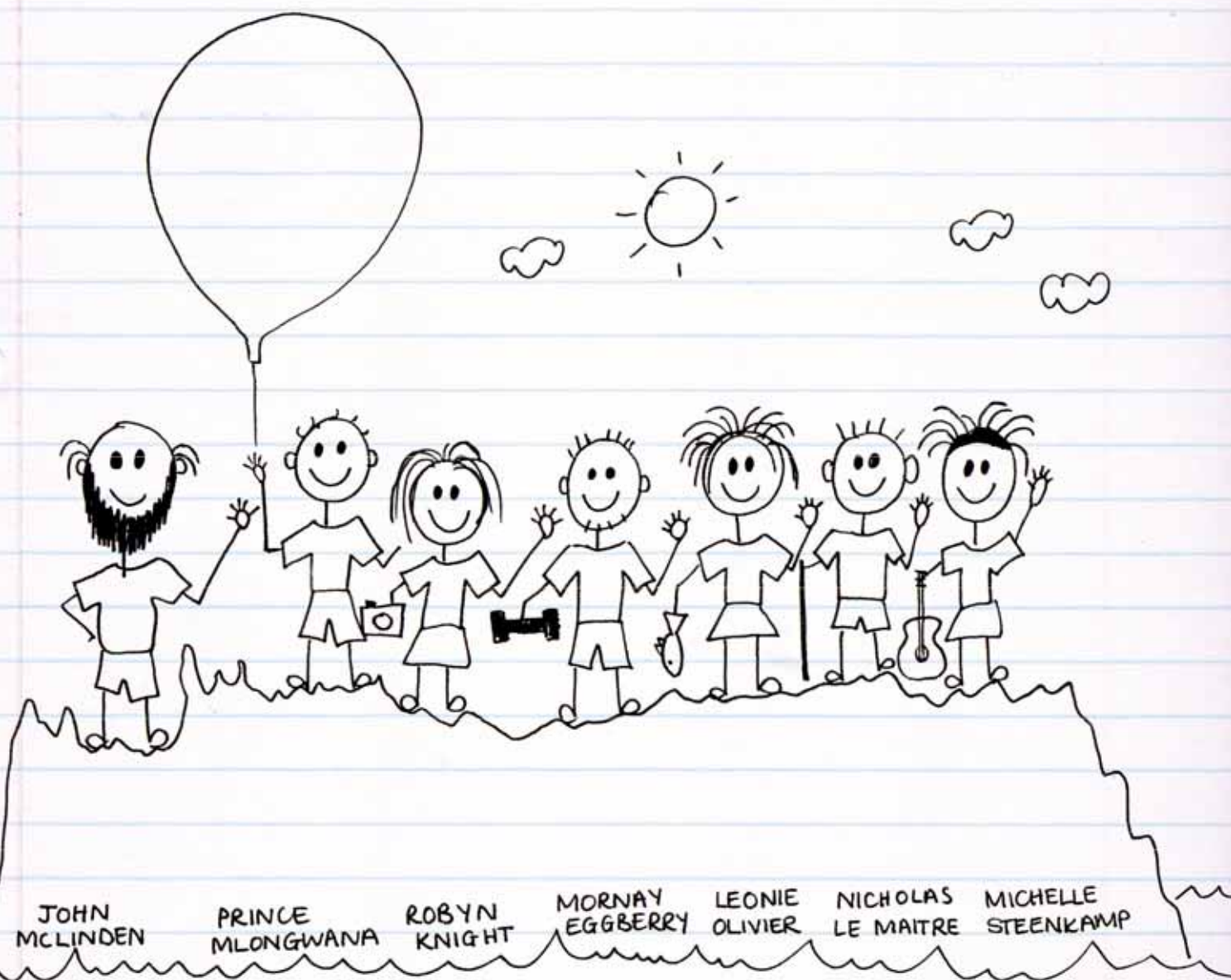


THE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE

Gough Bunting

Issue 6: April 2011



Gough Bunting

Issue 6: April 2011



Villains & Superheroes
Prince's Birthday: 10 March 2011

3

The Mice Crisis

8

**200 DAYS IN,
200 LEFT!**

5

EARTH HOUR

10

From the Met Office

11

THE *MS Olivia*
ENVIRONMENTAL
DISASTER

6

**FROM THE
LAB**

12

WEIGHTWATCHERS
HOME IMPROVEMENT

13

THE WALL OF
~~FAME~~
SHAME

14

GOUGH WEATHER

16



JOHN
MCLINDEN

PRINCE
MLONGWANA

ROBYN
KNIGHT

MORNAY
EGGBERRY

LEONIE
OLIVIER

NICHOLAS
LE MAITRE

MICHELLE
STEENKAMP

Villains & Superheroes

Prince's Birthday : 10 March 2011

PHOTOS by MICHELLE STEENKAMP, ROBYN KNIGHT, LEONIE OLIVIER & NIC LE MAITRE



WE CELEBRATED WITH MICHELLE'S FAMOUS GARLIC BREAD (TO COMPLEMENT THE BRAAI), MICHELLE'S MILLIONNAIRE SHORTBREAD AS PER PRINCE'S ORDER, & A BIRTHDAY CAKE ICED USING SYRINGES!





PLEASE HELP!

Please let us know
who you think should win

COSTUME of the Month

Vote by emailing your choice to
gough@sanap.ac.za by 30 April 2011.

March 21st was Human Rights Day back in SA, but here on the island it also marked the halfway point between when we sailed from Cape Town on 2 September 2010, and the date we're due to arrive back later this year. It was a day of much reflection and we celebrated it by relaxing around the braai.

200 DAYS IN, 200 LEFT!

The coolest thing on the island so far has been:

the tremendous sense that this place is still wild and untamed.

seeing the seals and penguins at Seal Beach, and my day-trip up Tafelkoppie.

the diverse experiences so unique to this island, and a true reflection of my love and respect for the ocean.

being back on the island and being able to watch nature go through another full life-cycle. It is what nature has to offer a person; to grow a deeper understanding of oneself and nature.

to learn to make the most of every situation, and not to take anything for granted, because everything, from nature and the weather to people and their/my moods, changes perpetually!

a curious Tristan albatross waddling towards me and then proceeding to "groom" me for over ten minutes. Few moments will outdo the feeling of living so close to nature.

more than what I anticipated: eight people from all walks of life living together and becoming one family.

Gough Bunting
Issue 6: April 2011



THE *MS Olivia* ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER

By MICHELLE STEENKAMP • IMAGES SOURCED FROM www.tristandc.com



One of the unique experiences of traveling to a remote island like Gough or Tristan da Cunha is to see a part of the world where nature is untouched by humans. Sadly, however, even these unspoilt islands in the South Atlantic aren't protected from accidents causing long-lasting devastating effects.

On 16 March the Tristan authorities received news that the 225m *MS Olivia*, a 75,300-tonne bulk-carrier had run aground on Nightingale Island while *en route* from

Brazil to Singapore, carrying over 60 000 tonnes of whole raw soya beans.

The following morning a tug left Cape Town with a salvage team and environmental specialists on board to assess the impact before starting the salvage operation. Fortunately all 22 crew members were safely taken on board the *MV Edinburgh* as the stranded ship's superstructure started to break up, causing 1,500 tonnes of heavy crude oil to leak into the sea. This poses a major hazard to the island's tens of thousands

of pairs of penguins as well as the economically vital rock lobster fishery. On the morning of the 19th it was reported by the Tristan Administrator Mr. Sean Burns that there was an awful scene around Nightingale Island and penguins were smothered in oil. The oil ranged from thin films and small balls to larger clumps of tar with the smell of diesel everywhere.

The Tristan Conservation team is still doing what it can to clean up Northern rockhopper penguins coming ashore covered in oil. Nightingale's



penguin colonies include nearly half of the world population of Northern rockhopper penguins which is one of the world's most threatened species of penguin. Trevor Glass (Tristan Conservation Officer) reported: "The scene at Nightingale is dreadful as there is an oil slick around the entire island. It's a disaster!"

A second tug left Cape Town on 29 March carrying the SANCCOB (Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds) staff together with essential equipment and material for the washing and rehabilitation of the penguins. What started out as salvage has turned into a major environmental clean-up.

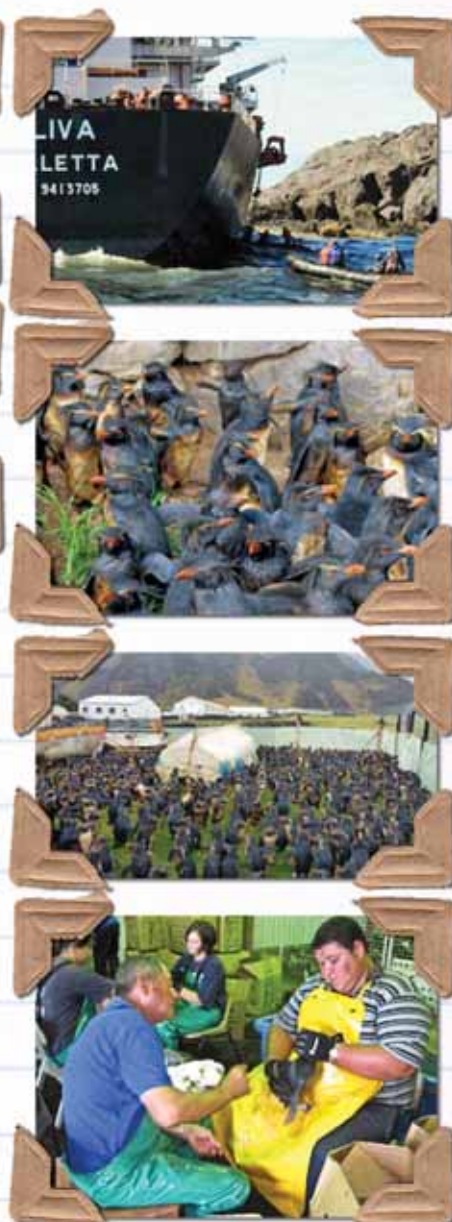
Oiled storm petrels, giant petrels, Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross and endemic Inaccessible rails have been sighted. In the polluted tidal pools, subantarctic fur seals are suffering from the pollution, and two have been reported dead. The main casualties remain the Northern rockhopper penguins which are carefully being collected from Nightingale, Inaccessible and Middle islands to transport them to Tristan Island where they can be stabilised and cleaned and eventually released back to the ocean.

On Tristan they already have two pens housing approximately



2,400 penguins in the rehabilitation centre, requiring over 450kg fish each day, as well as a separate sick bay housing 90 thin and weak birds needing intensive care. Unfortunately heaters or infrared bulbs are not available to keep birds warm after washing, so there is a high risk of pneumonia developing if they are cold. The Tristan swimming pool has been closed for swimming and is being used for birds that are not as badly oiled. Another 530 penguins are expected to be transported in the next week, making the total number of penguins close to 3,000. Sadly 96 penguins have already died.

The *MS Ivan Papanin* with a helicopter on board is due to leave Cape Town this week to provide essential transport and equipment around the islands. The wreck of the *MS Olivia* can no longer be salvaged and will now be allowed to break up and will be consigned to the surrounding ocean depths.



Another concern is the impact that the soya beans will have on the fragile local marine environment which is the mainstay of Tristan da Cunha's economy. Although the oil has reached the west side of Tristan da Cunha, the water surrounding Gough remains clear of oil and the penguins being monitored are all still healthy. For updates or more information regarding the *MS Olivia* clean-up operation please visit www.tristandc.com.



The Mice Crisis: A Predation Predicament

WORDS & PHOTOS by LEONIE OLIVIER WITH ADDITIONAL
PHOTOS by MICHELLE STEENKAMP & JOHN McLINDEN

Introduction of Mice to Gough Island:

The European House Mouse (*Mus musculus*) was introduced to Gough along with the sealers in 1880. In 1888 they were recorded as "numerous", and by 1891 the Island was described as being "overrun" by mice. The exact origin is unknown due to the various sealing vessels that made use of the island.

Identification:

A fairly small brown rodent which is 8-10cm long with a 7-8cm tail, averaging about 10-35g. Droppings are 6-7mm.



Habitat:

Found in all terrestrial habitats from sea level to Gough Island's highest peaks. Adults are territorial although some nests are communal with distinct



runways leading to and from the nests. The mice are largely nocturnal and the sole terrestrial mammal species breeding on Gough Island. As there are no natural predators to keep the numbers down, the mice have adapted well to the conditions.

Breeding Pattern:

Breeds throughout summer, gestation is 19 days with an average of one litter per month, averaging



six pups per litter. Pups are weaned at 14 days and breed at 35-40 days, allowing rapid population growth. They attain high densities of up to 300/ha in lowlands in late summer and decrease in winter.

Diet & Food Source:

Diet consists mainly of seeds, plant matter and invertebrates. Because they are both predators and herbivores, mice can cause major disruption to the functioning of ecosystems and can also threaten indigenous species. At low altitudes the mice feed mainly on bird carrion and introduced invertebrates such as earthworms and woodlice. At higher altitudes they feed mostly on the caterpillars of the moths or Robyn's chocolate and Mornay's cigarettes as they found out with their hiking trip to Gonydale. Recently it has been discovered that the mice attack and feed on chicks of the Tristan albatross, Atlantic petrel, great shearwater and Atlantic yellow-nosed mollymawk chicks.

Humans have introduced a variety of mammals to the islands, either deliberately for food and transport, or inadvertently through shipwrecks and stow-aways in cargo. Two species of rodents are serious pests and there are plans to eradicate them from Tristan da Cunha and Gough using aerial drops of poisoned bait; Nightingale and Inaccessible islands remain rodent-free.

The arrival of the mice and the consequences of their introduction to Gough Island may well have represented one of the most significant events for the natural history of the Island.

References:

1. Hanel C, Chown S, Gaston KJ (2005) Gough Island - A Natural History
2. Ryan P, Andrew T, Bester M, Glass J, Gremmen N, Hanel C, Jakubowsky G, Roux K, Scott S (2007) Field Guide to the animals and plants of Tristan da Cuhna and Gough Island



Sincere thanks to Richard Cuthbert, Peter Ryan, John Cooper, Marthan Bester and Ross Cowlin.

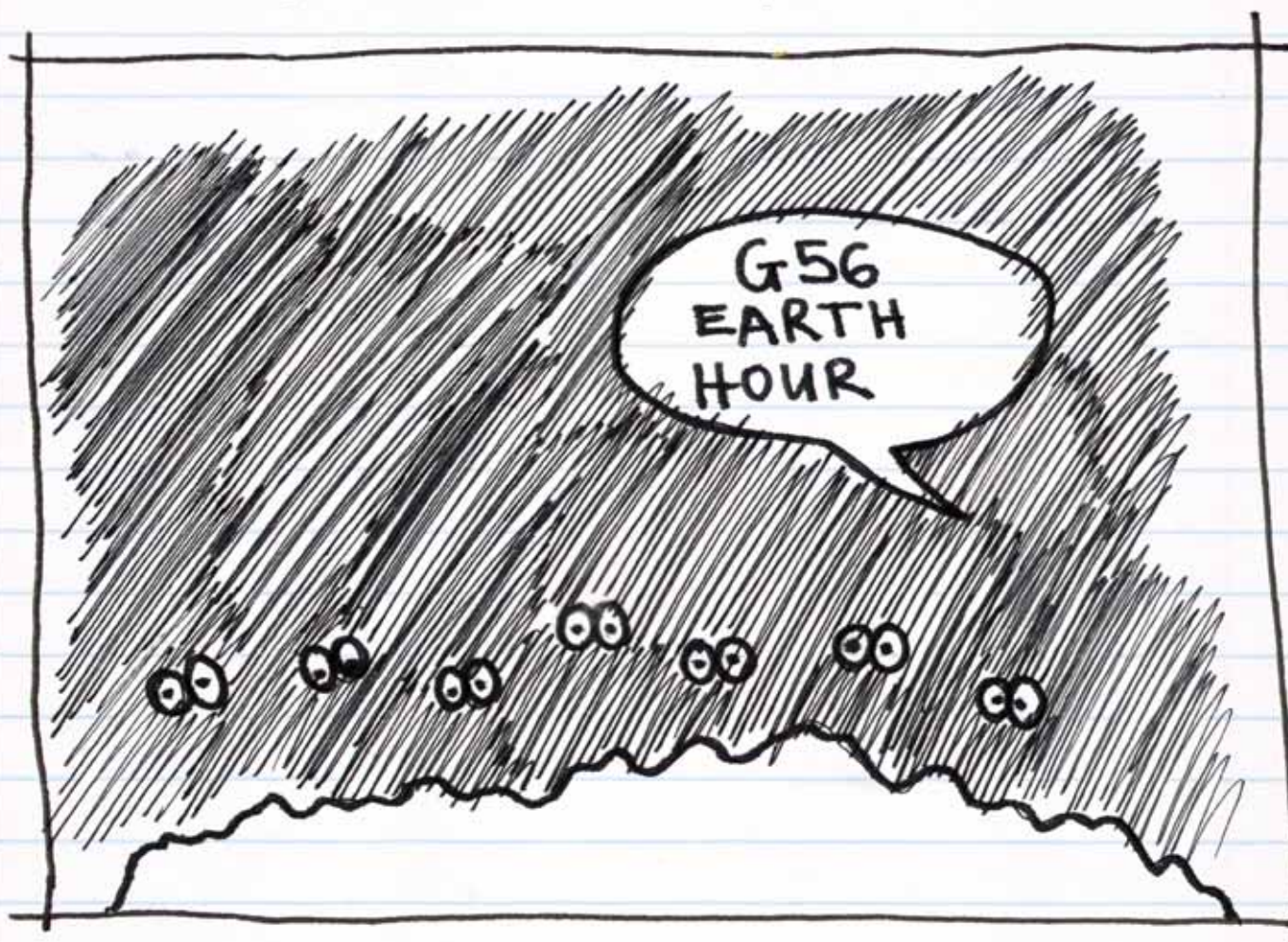
I dedicate this article to my brother Pieter Visser (who suffers from Musophobia, Murophobia, Suriphobia or more plainly, fear of mice)

EARTH HOUR



commitment in combating climate change, has become the largest mass-participation environmental event in the world. G56 proudly partook in this event, and on Saturday 26 March at 20:30 the dining room alone was lit only by a few candles. Shortly after starting Earth Hour the candles were blown out and we experienced the complete darkness of Gough, with no street lamps, cars or surrounding buildings to give any light. This also meant that we couldn't see Mornay moving about stealthily in the room to scare his next victim while telling original Gough ghost stories. This was a wonderful hour to be part of as a team while we took a few moments to think about the environmental impacts we have on our own unspoilt island.

Earth Hour, during which the WWF encourages people across the globe to turn off their lights for one hour to show



From the Met Office

The 23rd of March every year commemorates World Meteorological Day and this year's theme was "Understanding Climate through Weather"...

A South African Weather Service History

- 1860 : South Africa (Cape Colony) becomes one of the first countries in the world to establish a weather service.
- 1912 : The first weather forecast for South Africa is issued from the Cape Town office on 15 April.
- 1934 : Upper air observations start supplying information to the needs of developing aviation activities.
- 1949 : The South African Weather Bureau (SAWB) is officially named as a directorate in the Department of Transport.
- 1970 : An electronic databank is established.
- 1977 : The first major computer for numerical prediction is installed.
- 1986 : The SAWB is transferred to the Department of Environmental Affairs.
- 1993 : The first super computer (CRAY XMP) in Africa is installed.
- 1994 : The Government of South Africa's rights and privileges as a member of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) are restored.
- 2001 : The South African Weather Service (SAWS) is established as a public entity under the Ministry of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.
- 2005 : SAWS receives the United Arab Emirate Prize for Weather Modification.
 - : A lightning detection network (LDN), one of three in the Southern Hemisphere, is installed.
- 2008 : The Meteorological Association for Southern Africa is established under the chairmanship of South Africa.
 - : The Severe Weather Forecasting Demonstration project in five southern African countries is launched.
- 2009 : South Africa is one of three countries in the southern hemisphere to achieve status as Global Production centres for long-range forecasts from the WMO's Commission for Basic Systems.
 - : The SAWS Meteorological Training Centre receives provisional accreditation with the Transport Education and Training Authority to offer the National Certificate in Weather Observation (NQF level 5).
 - : SAWS is transferred to the new Ministry of Water and Environmental Affairs.
 - : SAWS starts with the installation of its new weather radar network.
- 2010 : South Africa celebrates 150 years of organised meteorology.



Gough Bunting
Issue 6: April 2011



FROM THE LAB

by **NICHOLAS LE MAITRE**



Hatching Tristan albatross chick. Photo: Nicholas Le Maitre

March has been a fairly busy month, with many visits to the Tristan albatross nests on Tafelkoppie and at Gonydale. Each nest is visited and the identity of the incubating adult is logged until all the pairs of incubating adults have been recorded. These records are then used to establish whether the albatrosses form stable breeding partnerships. While the adults are incubating it is also much easier to place metal identification rings on un-ringed adults. I had hoped to be able to visit the breeding colony on Albatross Plain, which lies North of Gonydale on the far side of the Rowetts, to do a count of incubating adult Tristans, but the weather has not played along and all three of our attempts were unsuccessful. The chicks are beginning to hatch and thanks to a very obliging adult I was lucky enough to be able to watch the entire process, a very special experience indeed.

This month has also marked my return to Seal Beach to weigh

and measure adult rockhopper penguins before they begin their moult. They have been at sea for several weeks,

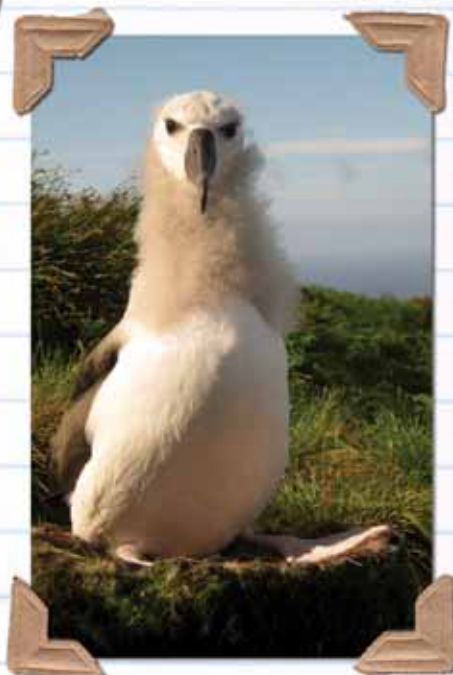


Photo: Nicholas Le Maitre

fattening up so that they will have sufficient reserves to stay ashore for three to four weeks moulting. This was also an ideal opportunity to recover the remaining dive depth loggers (DDLs) that Ross and I deployed in December and January as well as the geolocators (GLSs) deployed in September last year by Jeroen. Five DDLs and fourteen GLSs were recovered over the course of several visits to the colony. With the shipwreck on Nightingale, it was thought that some of the penguins from the colonies here might be

affected so regular checks are being done to ensure that no oil or oiled birds turn up here. Thus far we have been very lucky and nothing has been found.

All of the twenty-seven yellow-nosed albatross chicks in the study colony near the base are very close to fledging, so with the kind and very able assistance of Mornay, they were all measured (to determine the gender of the chick) and identification rings were placed on their legs.



Almost-fledged yellow-nosed albatross chick. Photo: Robyn Knight



WEIGHTWATCHERS

BY LEONIE OLIVIER

People come into our lives for a reason and, even if only for a short time, they still help to shape us into

who we are. Thanks for being part of mine. For the families, loved ones and colleagues out there in the Land of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, the G56 team is being looked after, as

it is not only the responsibility of the leader or the medic, but a great team-effort as we have experienced during the last six months. May the team be blessed with another six months of good health, strong teeth, and may the few extra kilos just melt away!

HOMIE IMPROVEMENT

BY JOHN McLINDEN WITH PHOTOS BY LEONIE OLIVIER

This was another busy month. Mornay, Leonie and I started off with sealing the roof, but after more rain the roof still leaked. The next good weather day found us back on the roof looking for and sealing more holes. Then we had to wait a few days for more rain and this time we finally had the leaks beat! The hospital light fittings where rusted due to the leaky roof, but now that the leaks have been sealed we have changed all the lights in the hospital.

Mornay, Nic and I did some coax-pulling, pulling in a new coax line from the radio room to the antenna mast. Mornay also taught Leonie how to use the weed-eater and she is fast becoming a grass-cutting expert.

Then one morning towards the end of the month an alarm went off around 1a.m., but it wasn't the usual "False Fire" alarm. It was the generator alerting us to the fact that it had stopped running. Mornay went down to find an oil hose had burst, and so later that morning when it was light we had a big clean-up of the generator room which had been sprayed full of oil.



THE WALL OF ~~FAME~~ SHAME

MOUSE-HUNTER of the Month:

Shmonie - 165 mice

(Base: 86 • Food Store: 47 • Workshop: 32 in 2 days!)

SCAREDEVIL of the Month:

Prince: 3 Mornay: 6

MEALS of the Month:

Leonie's Lamb Potjie with Dumplings

John's Pea Soup and Irish Beer Bread

Nic's Chili Con Carne

DESSERT of the Month:

Robyn's Ginger/Cinnamon Bread

FLOP of the Month:

Prince's Birthday Cake baked by Michelle
(the cake that can be disguised as a breadboard!)

MESS of the Month:

Michelle's flopped birthday cakes (there were two attempts) which she turned into Lamingtons (consequently turning the kitchen into a bomb-site and living up to her initials, which ironically are M.E.S.)



next

THE WALL OF ~~FAME~~ SHAME

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"Ek wens ek was 'n plank" - Michelle

"It all tastes the same; it's alcohol" - Robyn

"Hierdie pantihose sit tot onder my boobe" - Leonie

"365 days, many years ago" - Prince (trying to explain when he was born)

"My eye's peeling off" - Michelle

ALL WELCOME

DAY-TRIP TO/UP
SOUTH PEAK.

LEAVING @ 8am
PACK LUNCH. :)



THE DARWIN AWARD

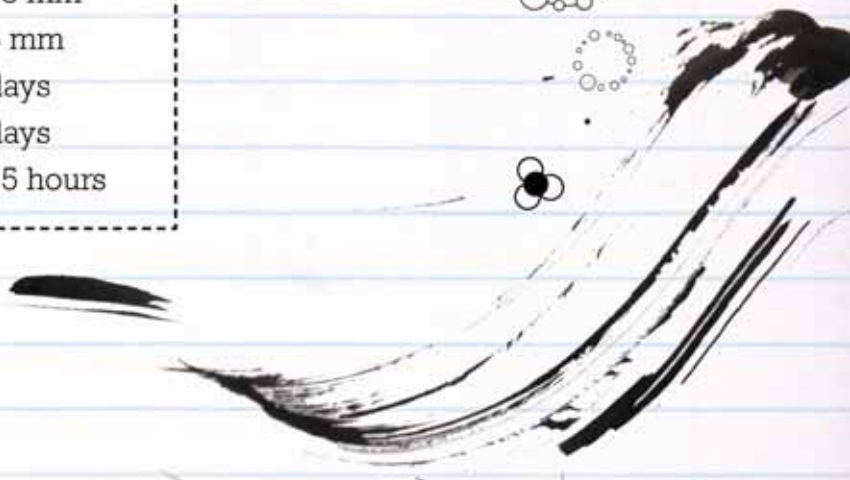
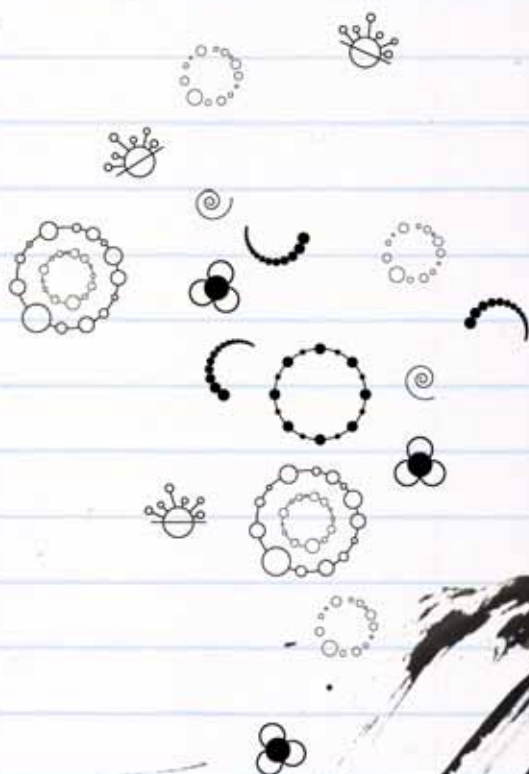
"PICNICLESS NIC"

Nic went to all the effort of packing lunch and then left it behind, EVEN after the note on the board!

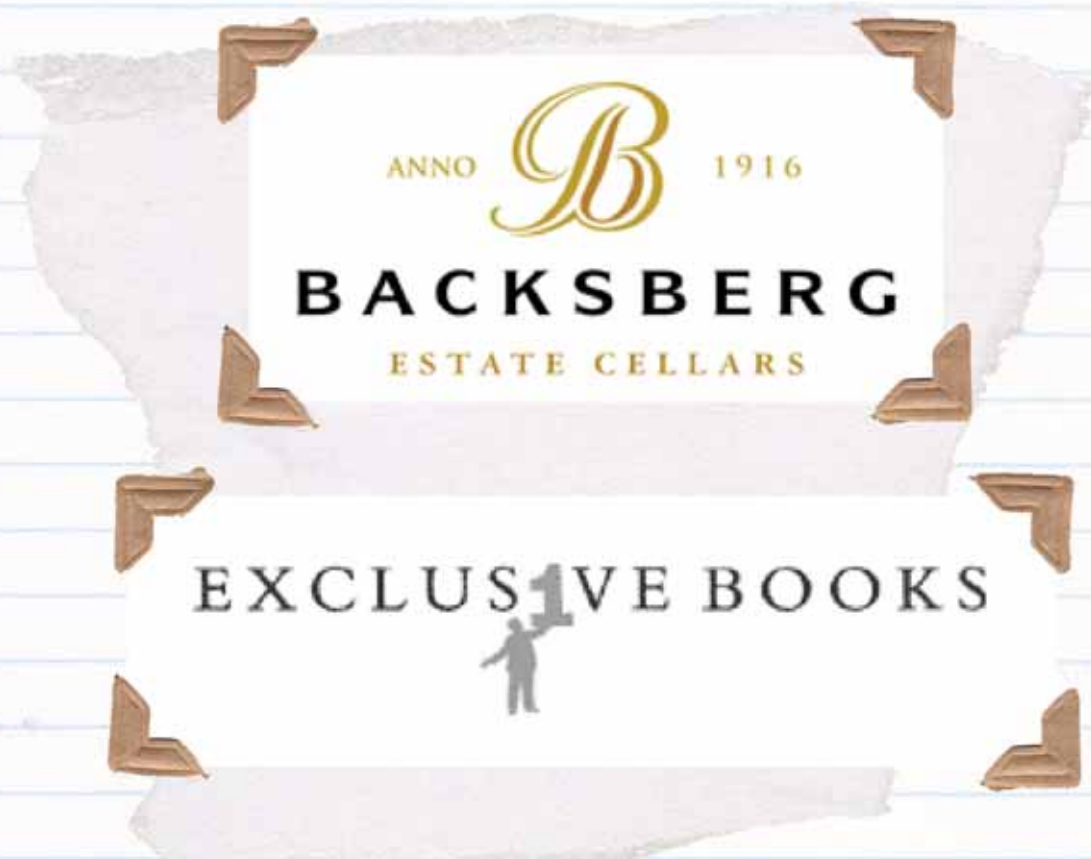
GOUGH WEATHER

• MARCH CLIMATE STATS •

Ave. Max Pressure	:	1013.2 hPa
Ave. Min Pressure	:	999.7 hPa
Ave. Pressure	:	1009.6 hPa
Max Pressure	:	1021.3 hPa
Min Pressure	:	984.2 hPa
Ave. Max Temp	:	16.6 °C
Ave. Min Temp	:	11.8 °C
Ave. Temp	:	14.2 °C
Max Temp	:	20.4 °C
Min Temp	:	7.0 °C
Max Sea Temp	:	15.6 °C
Min Sea Temp	:	13.8 °C
Ave Humidity	:	77 %
Max Humidity	:	95 %
Min Humidity	:	49 %
Max Wind Gust	:	28.8 m/s or 103.7 km/h
Total Rainfall	:	165.8 mm
Highest in 24 Hours	:	68.8 mm
Total days with rain	:	20 days
Total days >1mm	:	14 days
Total Sunshine	:	142.5 hours



SPONSORS



G56 would like to thank Exclusive Books for their kind donation of three large boxes of books, as well as Backsberg Wine Estate for the wine we received from them. Their contributions have definitely helped make us feel that much more like we're at home away from home.

If you have any comments or queries about any of the content of this newsletter, or any suggestions for following issues, please contact us:

gough@sanap.ac.za
+27 (0) 21 405 9470

Designed and edited by Robyn Knight
Translations and cover illustration
by Michelle Steenkamp

PLEASE NOTE

The Gough email address is incorrect on all previous issues of the G56 Bunting.

gough@sanap.ac.za is the correct address.



Gough Bunting
Issue 6: April 2011