



# The Wanderer

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DECEMBER-MARCH 2013/4

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## 70 shades of Christmas





The sealers are too busy to write an article so here are just 'n few phrases and photos to describe what we've been up to and witnessed:

Weaners appearing, tagging them, riding them, whiskering, weighing, spooning. Beachmasters fighting, mating, narrow escapes. Furseals tearing holes in gumboots. Censussing in 125km/h winds, new born pup weighing in 130km/h winds. Killers attacking adult male elephantseals, Killers hunting weaners. Newborn pup counts, fur seal device deployments, elephant seal device retrievals etc, etc, etc . . .

If you require further information please email us at [workedtothebonesealers@wetoobusytoansweryou.com](mailto:workedtothebonesealers@wetoobusytoansweryou.com)



For a sealer this counts as loss of limb



**Victoria the Vampire elephant seal:** "I wfunt to suck your blud!"

Sometimes the seals are quicker.







If a picture says a thousand words then this is our long article yet.



*“And impressing a potential mate means polishing those dance moves”*

## Busy Wandering About...

Kim and Stefan

While the last of the Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*) chicks took to the skies in December, the next round of breeding adults returned to the island to begin the cycle all over again. Though some adults return to the nest with the same partner as before, some needed to find a new partner. Impressing a potential mate means polishing those dance moves – with much neck-stretching, chest-inflating, and wing-spreading the potential mates encircle one another in a very graceful dance for such a large creature. In some instances more than just two males are involved in the fight to win over the attention of a female. They also throw in a curious soundtrack of bubble noises and gargling sounds to the mix, all in all creating an enchanting and gripping performance which you could easily watch for hours.

Once mates have been enticed and the pair settles down, the egg laying begins – that is where the PFAO birders come in. It is our job



**Greyheaded chick**

meant hugging a few albatrosses to place bands on their legs as well as, initially, running after birds through mires with binoculars in hand to read band numbers. Working up-close and personal with the Wandering albatrosses gives us a chance to see first hand just how large and majestic they are. And, as they are such long-lived birds, to think that some of these birds are much older than we are, is quite incredible.

to set up the three long-term monitoring colonies near base by marking out nests and identifying all parents and partners. This has

Besides the Wanderers, we have continued monitoring the Grey-headed, Dark-mantled and Light-mantled Sooty albatrosses. The eggs of all of these species have



**Walbie mating dance**



A Nesting Walbie.

now hatched and the vulnerable little fluffballs are now being left alone to fight off the beady-eyed Sub-Antarctic skua's and Giant petrels, while their parents go out to feed. We have cameras set on the Grey-headed and Dark-mantled Sooty albatross

colonies to catch this predation in action.

The chicks in the Northern Giant petrel colonies, which we have also continued to check, are steadily losing their down and will be fledging over the following month. Before they fly off we need to band the chicks which we are currently busy with.

Another thing on our to do list has been deploying GPS tracking devices on the Macaroni and Rockhopper penguins at Funk Bay and Ships Cove, respectively. It has been interesting to work with such different birds to our normal albatrosses and petrels, and especially seeing the chicks grow from tiny in one week to having a bulging

belly the next.

Overall December and January have kept us on our feet and very busy hurrying from one place to the next. Next up is counting all incubators in the Wandering Albatross incubating round island census.

'Til next time

*"the vulnerable little fluffballs are now being left alone to fight off the beady-eyed Sub-Antarctic skua's and Giant petrels."*



Team PFIAO banding NGP chicks



## *The Marionites had a MERRY CHRISTMAS...*

*Anche Müller*



*...filled with lots of laughter, good food and wine.*



*Precious moments...memories that will be treasured for life.*



# MARION ISLAND SEA TEMP AND CLIMATE STATS REPORT

## SEA TEMP REPORT: Jan 2014

Date	Sea Temp	Date	Sea Temp	Date	Sea Temp
01	8.1	11	7.5	21	6.9
02	7.7	12	7.7	22	6.8
03	7.9	13	7.9	23	6.6
04	8.0	14	8.0	24	6.5
05	8.1	15	7.9	25	7.2
06	7.8	16	7.6	26	7.5
07	SWELL	17	7.9	27	7.5
08	SWELL	18	7.4	28	7.6
09	8.0	19	7.2	29	8.0
10	8.1	20	7.2	30	8.0
				31	8.4







## CLIMATE STATS: Jan 2014

<b>Ave Max Pressure</b>	1010.4hPa
<b>Ave Min Pressure</b>	998.1hPa
<b>Ave Pressure</b>	1004.8hPa
<b>Max Pressure</b>	1026.5hPa
<b>Min Pressure</b>	982.1hPa
<b>Ave Max Temp</b>	12.6°C
<b>Ave Min Temp</b>	6.1°C
<b>Ave Temp</b>	9.3°C
<b>Max Temp</b>	19.4°C
<b>Min Temp</b>	2.0°C
<b>Ave Humidity</b>	90 %
<b>Max Humidity</b>	100 %
<b>Min Humidity</b>	44%
<b>Max Wind Gust</b>	41.5m/s or 149.4km/h
<b>Total Rainfall</b>	210.2mm
<b>Highest in 24 Hours</b>	36.4mm
<b>Total days with rain</b>	28 days
<b>Total days &gt; 1mm</b>	23 days
<b>Total Sunshine</b>	145.2 hours

## A birder's view

By Mariëtte Wheeler

Summer was a busy time for the birders on the island. It is impossible to picture Marion Island in the summer time without thinking of thousands of red penguin eyes staring out between various rock crevices and cliffs.. skuas dive-bombing towards one walking in the field to protect its nest with eggs or chicks in.. white-chinned petrel calls from their burrows filling the night.. wandering albatross adults returning to the island to nest..



**Rockhopper Penguins are found all around the island, nesting on coastal rocks and in crevices. Our total count for them during the summer census was 62,784.**

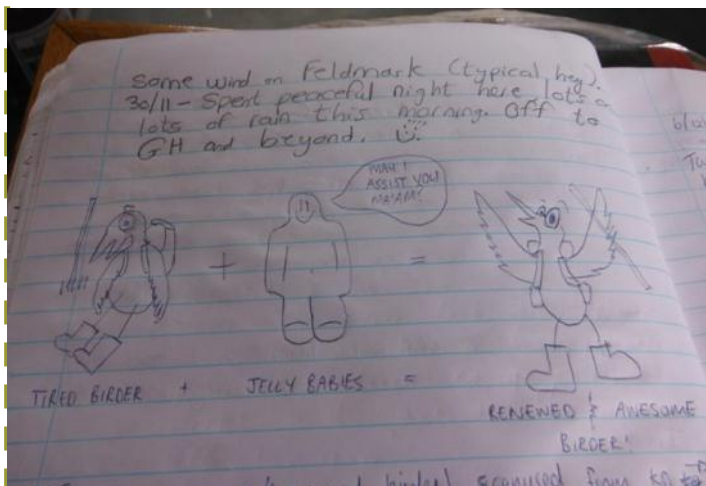
With so many bird species in breeding season, the birders have been running around the island to census the penguins.. southern giant petrels.. terns.. Crozet shags.. sooty albatrosses.. kelp gulls.. terns.. almost anything with a bill.

Thanks to Irma for helping during the January census.

Jelly babies have been useful as energy, as indicated by this hut drawing by Tegan.



**Crozet Shag adults and postbrooding**



**Thanks to the Jelly Babies.**

We also had to weigh 250 Macaroni Penguin chicks. This mission was accomplished at the large Bullard North colony. Thereafter all involved (thanks Nadia for assistance) felt and smelt like penguin chicks!

It was also a time of contrasts on the island - of seeing eggs being laid to chicks being eaten by skuas, giant petrels and lesser sheathbills (aka paddies).. of walking in lovely sunny weather (and getting sunburned!) to getting totally windblown and soaking wet. . of relatively easy walks to conducting census at Blackrocks Plateau (so called after all the black lava)..



**Macaroni Penguins incubating their eggs**



In between all the work, there was time for quiet reflection and for fun.

It was a busy time, but definitely a time that will always be cherished in memories.



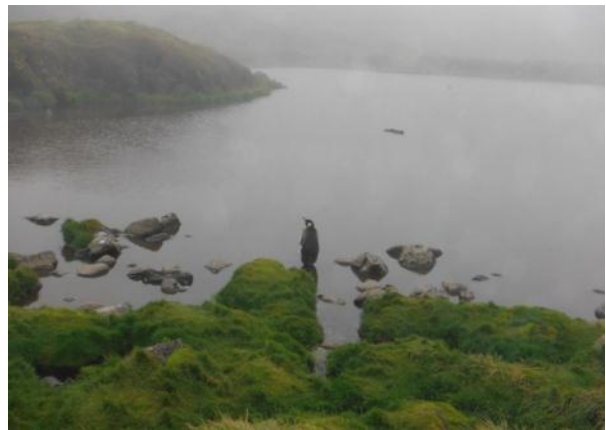
**A few of the remaining Macaroni Penguin chicks at the end of summer. When this photograph was taken, only 35 chicks were still alive from the 322 active nests monitored at Bullard South.**



**Blackrocks Plateau. The black lava caused a hole in my gumboot!**



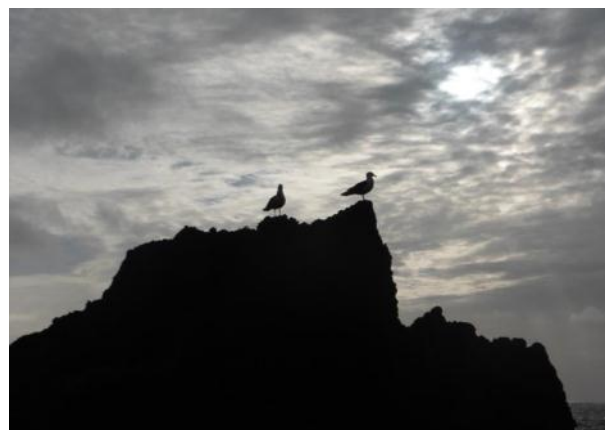
**Feeling and smelling like penguin.**



**A quiet moment.. King Penguin in the fog at Gentoo Lake**



**A yummy hutcake “baked” by steaming in two pots**



# The End of Paradise

By Irma du Plessis

*"During the year, I saw and learned so many things outside my scope of reference."*

This marvelous place has a way of turning any homebody into some form of explorer. Coming to the island, I had a little "to-do" list that got significantly longer the first month we were here. Reality is creeping up on us as take over is closing in. All of us are reviewing our little lists and realising that there are some items not ticked off. All of the "to-dos" have to be fit around one's work schedule. Easily done for me but considering how hectic the field assistants work schedule was, it was definitely not so easy for them to achieve their goals.



## Walk to Ships Cove, Tripot and Archway

While most of the field assistants will giggle like teenagers in the back of a school bus at this goal, for a base paddy who was extremely unfit, it needed a mind shift, firm self talk and the assistance of two sealers (Hennie and Johan) and a birder (Tegan). It was achieved on three good weather days. I slowed their work down significantly but they were patient enough to walk with me all the way.

## Photos, lots of photos

I took the time I had to sort through photos from previous travels but then, being in such a pretty place with so many nice things to photograph, I got more. I am a little trigger-happy when it comes to my camera. The aim was to get a nice photo of every animal that was being studied by our team. I have not yet reached this goal...

## Spend a night in a hut

The first attempt at this failed miserably – I set out with Anche and Mariette to Katedraal Hut one day in July – Anche had to go get a soil sample there. That day, the wind was howling and gusting at stunning speeds. I turned back while the others struggled on. Failure really set my confidence back and only in September did I try again. This time to Kildalkey with Tegan and Mariette. They had work to do, so we took the more difficult coastal route. The walk there took more than twice the amount of time it should have, the weather was terrible, I learned to hate Blechnum and mires but we made it! We spent a total of 3 nights in Kildalkey before walking back to base the inland route in less than half the time.



Here is my list:

## Learn to walk

Sounds easy but walking on the vegetation is like walking on a sponge mattress or through a bed of tangled threads. Then there are the mires...







### Hike around the Island (Sleep in all the coastal huts)

In November, Daniswa and I set out on this adventure. We spent 12 days out and during that time counted and organised all the food in the hut pantries. We were extremely fortunate with the weather – days we needed time to work at the hut, the weather was bad. Days we were walking to the next hut, the weather was amazing. We even saw heat waves on the black lava between Rooks and Swartkops Huts! Getting geographically embarrassed after climbing Azorella kop was definitely the least fun thing of the trip – we ended up walking through the infamous “Devil’s Footprint” and it took a ridiculous 7 hours to get to Cape Davis Hut. The island was quite dry during the time we went around but the night we were in Repettos Hut, it rained. A lot. Marion filled all the mires between Repettos and Base for us making our last day, hm... shall we say, interesting.



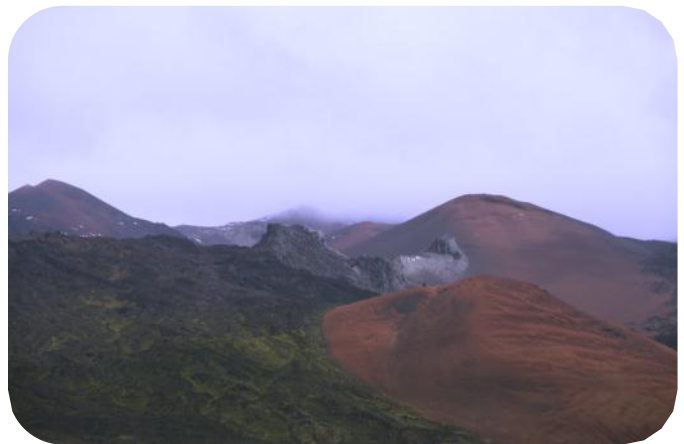
### Get a good photo of a Killer

This is a separate goal to the other photo goal since you can’t go and hunt for killer photos. You have to wait for them to come to you. When Nadia sees the killers are hanging around in the bay, she lets us know via radio. Usually we all go to the Helipad or Braai room to get photos but I went to Crane Point one day. Just to see the pod cruising on to Tripot. I thought the opportunity had gone but then the pod circled back. One female cruised into the bay at Boulders Beach and I got my pho-

tos. Funny, though. After that, I just wanted more! Gorgeous creatures...

### Climb Juniors

So, Mariette and I are planning another trip around the island but both of us have work to do first. It is so hard when work interferes with your entertainment... However, it is a criminal waste to let a good weather day go by without doing something pleasant. Inside work can always be done after the sun has set! We grabbed the opportunity when we had sunshine and almost no wind to go and climb Juniors. The view from up there was spectacular! We then decided to go check out the dam from which the base gets its water. There are so many waterfalls in that river!



During the year, I saw and learned so many things outside my scope of reference. Animals and plants have never really featured high on my list of priorities but after spending some time with the biologists – Anche sorting plant samples, the sealers weighing and tagging pups and the birders weighing penguins or ringing fledglings – I have found a love for nature that was just a fuzzy warm feeling before.

The trouble is, it is coming to an end. Our year here is almost over and soon the newbies will start with their “to-do” lists. We have to start packing our things away to make space for the 60 people that will arrive soon and take over our home. O dear, not home. We will be **going home**... I have a new “to-do” list!

Change Mind Set

Pack trommels

...



## Organization



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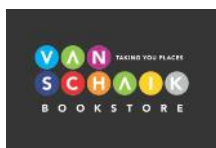
South Africa's involvement in Antarctica and the sub-antarctic islands dates back to the earliest voyages of discovery, due to the then Cape of Good Hope's position as a stopover for explorers, whalers and sealers.

After World War II, South Africa became more formally involved, undertaking meteorological expeditions to the Prince Edward Islands. A permanent weather base was established on Marion and the annexation by SA of these islands was concluded in 1948. In 1959 the first South African National Antarctic Expedition (SANAE) was undertaken, establishing a permanent presence on Antarctica that endures to this day.



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