

# The WANDERER

Marion Island Newsletter June 2014

## TEAM TRAINING

HOW M71 PREPARED FOR MARION

## BASE TOUR

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

*Learn about*  
**ALBATROSSES**



**MEET THE  
TEAM**

19  
13

NEW FACES

MONTHS



**environmental affairs**

Department:  
Environmental Affairs  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**MARION71**  
*Expedition*

46°36'S 37°57'E



# CONTENTS

# The W

# 7

DANIËL KOTZÉ



# 14



# 16



# 17

**3 LETTER FROM THE EDITOR.** Get a grip on things.

**3 A RARE ISLAND VISITOR.** Meet Marion's first warbler.

**4 MEET THE TEAM.** Get close and personal with each of the 19 M71 expedition members.

**7 A HOME AWAY FROM HOME.** Tour the Marion Island base.

**11 BREAKING THE ICE.** Experience team training with M71!

**14 THE GREAT WANDERERS.** Become acquainted with Marion Island's albatross species.

**16 EVENTS.** Catch up on the team's latest birthdays, costumes and dance moves.

**16 WEATHER.** The metkassies share their latest data.

**17 TAKE-OVER MEMORIES.** Highlights from the *month of madness*.

## COVER IMAGE

Daniël Kotzé  
Wandering albatross





# Letter from the editor

For those unfamiliar with Marion Island, I will provide a brief background on where we are, who we are and why we are here. Marion Island is the largest of two islands that form the Prince Edward Island Group (the other island being Prince Edward Island itself). It is roughly situated halfway between Antarctica and South Africa, or 2200km south-east of Cape Town. These islands were annexed by South Africa in 1948 and have been home to annual relief teams ever since. As members of the 71<sup>st</sup> relief team (hence M71), we are appointed by the Department

of Environmental Affairs to continue the biological, meteorological, geological and space physics research on the islands. Staff are also appointed for the maintenance of the base, environment and its inhabitants (see the article on p.4 to meet each team member).

Marion Island, as I often describe it to friends and family, is like heaven with bad weather. The coastline is filled with the most unique mammals, birds, plants and black lava formations. The magnificent snow covered mountain peaks compliment the breath-taking clouds and

rainbows populating the sky. *The Wanderer* is aimed not only at informing you of island news, but to include you in the experiences and stories that we will one day tell our grandchildren about. None of this would be possible without the support of family and friends back home. Many thanks to the contributors of the first M71 edition of this newsletter. Happy reading!



DANIËL KOTZÉ  
EDITOR

## A rare island visitor

Marion Island's first Great Reed-Warbler was sighted just north of the base by David Green on 6 June and was last observed on 13 June. This species migrates to Europe and Asia during the southern African winter to breed. Quite a good record for this year's list of vagrant species, which already includes a Grey Wagtail and Barn Swallows!

IS THIS NOT EUROPE? A Great Reed-Warbler that most probably got lost on its way from southern Africa to Europe.



# 19 FACES, 13 MONTHS ONE ISLAND

## *Meet the team*

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY DANIËL KOTZÉ

It's not just the incredible animals, unique landscapes and absurd weather that contributes to each person's experience on Marion Island, it's the people. Welcome to the M71 family. We are a diverse group of South Africans with no less than seven different home languages, an age range of 33 years and 16 different home towns. We learn more about one another daily (especially in the kitchen!) and are looking forward to good times, hard times and unforgettable memories in the months to come. Without further ado I introduce to you the 71<sup>st</sup> Marion Island expedition team members.

### *Team leader*



**Name:** Frank Venter  
**Position:** Meteorologist  
**Age:** 28  
**Hometown:** Nelspruit  
**Home language:** Afrikaans

### *Deputy team leader*



**Name:** John Skelete  
**Position:** Diesel Mechanic  
**Age:** 42  
**Hometown:** Pretoria  
**Home language:** Portuguese



**Name:** Josef Klaasen  
**Position:** Senior Meteorologist  
**Age:** 43  
**Hometown:** Boksburg  
**Home language:** Afrikaans



**Name:** Ishmail Games  
**Position:** Base Engineer  
**Age:** 48  
**Hometown:** Cape Town  
**Home language:** English



**Name:** Johannes Masinge  
**Position:** Meteorologist  
**Age:** 28  
**Hometown:** Mookgophong  
**Home language:** Xitsonga



# Meet the team



**Name:** Gerhard de Jong  
**Position:** Communications Officer  
**Age:** 57  
**Hometown:** Wellington  
**Home language:** Afrikaans



**Name:** Mpho Mphego  
**Position:** SANSA Engineer  
**Age:** 27  
**Hometown:** Thohoyandou  
**Home language:** TshiVenda



**Name:** Louise Gadney  
**Position:** Medical Orderly  
**Age:** 52  
**Hometown:** Fish hoek  
**Home language:** English



**Name:** Tshilidzi Ramagoma  
**Position:** Environmental CO  
**Age:** 33  
**Hometown:** Thohoyandou  
**Home language:** TshiVenda



**Name:** Rendani Mikosi  
**Position:** Environmental CO  
**Age:** 31  
**Hometown:** Thohoyandou  
**Home language:** TshiVenda



**Name:** Low de Vries  
**Position:** Sealer  
**Age:** 30  
**Hometown:** Kempton Park  
**Home language:** Afrikaans



**Name:** Liezl Pretorius  
**Position:** Sealer  
**Age:** 34  
**Hometown:** Vanderbijlpark  
**Home language:** Afrikaans



**Name:** Daniël Kotzé  
**Position:** Killer whaler/ Sealer  
**Age:** 25  
**Hometown:** Oudtshoorn  
**Home language:** Afrikaans



**Name:** Yinhla Shihlomule  
**Position:** Killer whaler/ Sealer  
**Age:** 24  
**Hometown:** Louis Trichard  
**Home language:** Xitsonga

# Meet the team



**Name:** Vonica Perold  
**Position:** Birder (Fitzpatrick)  
**Age:** 27  
**Hometown:** Durbanville  
**Home language:** Afrikaans



**Name:** Alexis Osborne  
**Position:** Birder (Fitzpatrick)  
**Age:** 24  
**Hometown:** Concordia  
**Home language:** Afrikaans



**Name:** David Green  
**Position:** Birder (DEA)  
**Age:** 24  
**Hometown:** Port-Elizabeth  
**Home language:** English



**Name:** Geneveive Moroke  
**Position:** Birder (DEA)  
**Age:** 26  
**Hometown:** Bloemhof  
**Home language:** seTswana



**Name:** Zuko Nkomo  
**Position:** Birder (DEA)  
**Age:** 28  
**Hometown:** Cape Town  
**Home language:** isiXhosa



DAVID GREEN

# A home away from home

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY FRANK VENTER

**“Will you be sleeping in tents?” “Is there hot water?”. These are questions frequently asked by the most concerned of friends and family. In an attempt to put the minds of loved ones at ease, *The Wanderer* this month brings you an insightful tour of the Marion Island Research Base, or as it has affectionately become known, “The Butternut Hotel”.**

The new Marion Island Research Base was officially opened in 2011 after 8 years of construction. In addition to being the home of the overwintering team, the 6000m<sup>2</sup> base was designed to house 80 people during takeover.



The monumental task could only be performed during two seasons – March to May, and August to November to avoid the harshest of Marion’s notorious weather. These small construction windows meant that the *SA Agulhas* had to undertake a total of 15 voyages to ferry construction material to the site. Today the base stands 28 meters above sea level and is a welcome sight to fieldworkers returning from a stint in the field, as well as those suffering from cabin fever on board the *SA Agulhas II*.

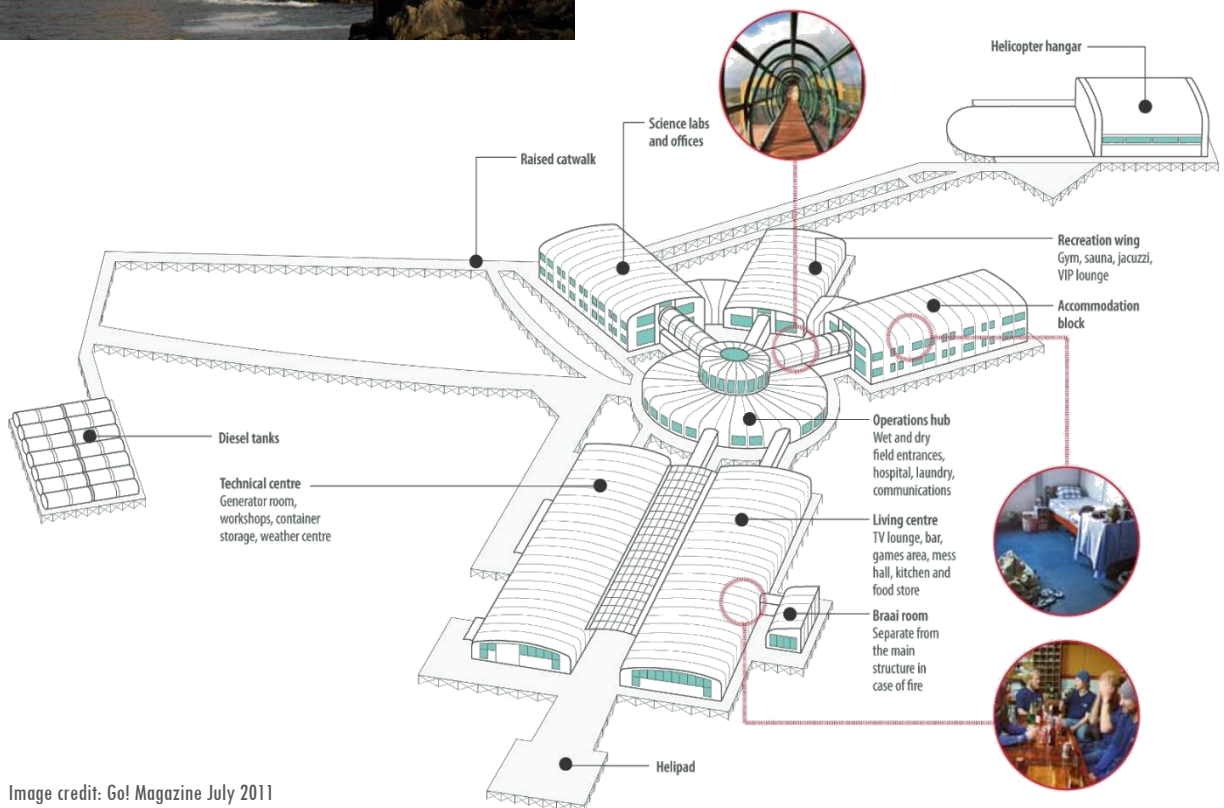


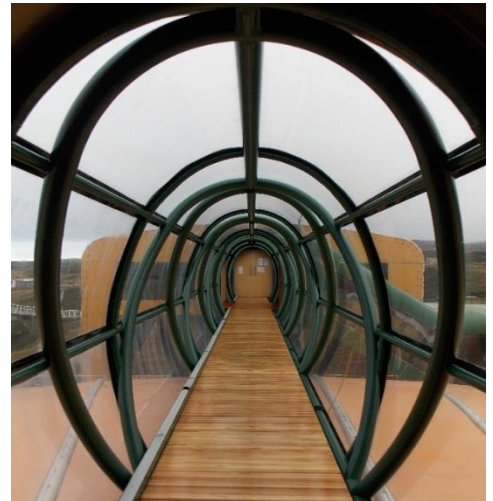
Image credit: Go! Magazine July 2011



# A home away from home

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Designed with the environment in mind, the base was built on a supporting structure of steel columns. This meant that no foundation had to be laid, minimizing the footprint and allowing water to flow freely under the base. The island's precious birdlife was also taken into consideration when lighting the base. To avoid bird strikes at night or during adverse weather, the designers decided to illuminate corridors and tunnels with green fluorescent lights. The base itself consists of a modular, six sectioned design. This meant that the parts could be cast in South Africa and shipped to the site where they were assembled. These separate modules are also functional from a safety perspective. Should a fire occur in one section of the base, the tunnels which connect the modules act as fire break, effectively containing the fire in that area.



## *1. Operations or Central hub:*

This section of the base houses the Hospital, Laundry room and Radio room, as well as a favourite among the team members – the Movie House.

## *2. Science and Office block:*

As the name suggests, this section of the base is all about the science. The first floor consist of well equipped laboratories catering to the needs of mammalogists, ornithologists, botanists and entomologists among others. The second floor houses offices, a library and conference room.

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**BUTTERNUT HOTEL.** Top to bottom: The upper floor of the central hub where the radio room is situated; The glass (hamster) tunnel leading from the central hub to the office block; The base also has a well stocked library; The birders' office (the blinds are closed to avoid bird strikes during the evenings).







### *3. Recreation block:*

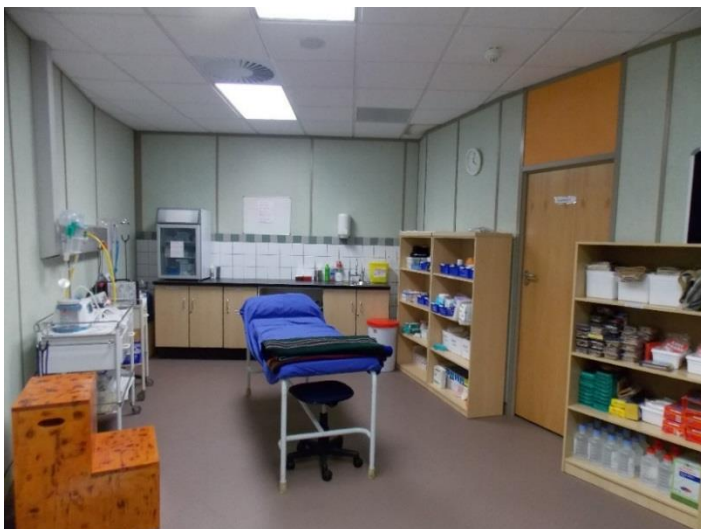
This is where the tired and stressed Marionite comes to relax. Whether you like to let off steam in the fully outfitted gym, or just by relaxing in the sauna or jacuzzi, the Recreation block has it all. Also located in this block is one of the base's 3 lounges.

### *4. Accommodation block:*

The base has a total of 30 bedrooms – more than enough space to house 80 people during takeover and to ensure a comfortable environment for the overwintering team during their year on the island.

### *5. Living centre:*

Marionites come together in the Living Centre, with stories of the day being shared over a hot meal in the dining room and kitchen. The Living Centre also houses a bar and games room, complete with table tennis and pool tables, and dart boards. And what would a South African base be without a braai area? The glass structure is located just off the bar area, and is separate from the base to minimize the risk of fires. Kitted out with both charcoal and gas braais, this is arguably the heart of the base. The food store is also accessed from the bar area. This is where we go shopping. It's almost like Pick 'n Pay, although without a fresh fruit section and without the problem of queues and cash. The food store is also known as one of the major battlefields between man and mouse.



VERY ACCOMMODATING. From top to bottom: The analytical laboratory in the science block; The corridor around the central hub illuminated by nightlights to avoid bird strikes; An example of a bedroom in the base (although they come in many shapes and sizes); The hospital's consultation room, which we hopefully will not make too much use of.

## A home away from home



**THE ISLAND LIFE.** Clockwise from top left: Bar area with games room in the background; TV lounge to catch up on those long overdue series; Kitchen, where each team member finds his inner chef; Gymnasium (yes, we also do some exercise from time to time!); The team comes together for dinner each evening in the dining hall.



# BREAKING THE ICE

## Team training in a nutshell

TEXT BY LIEZL PRETORIUS



**FIRING UP.** The members of M71 eager to get their fire fighting training under way at Ottery, Cape Town.

**Before any successful expedition, meticulous planning and thorough training needs to be undertaken. The purpose not only being to increase our skills, but also to lay the foundations of transforming M71 from a diverse bunch of South Africans into a tight knit family.**

When you put a bunch of strangers in a room, one generally doesn't know what the outcome will be. With much anticipation we all walked into the Department of Environmental Affairs' (DEA's) conference room, anxious to finally meet the selected few with whom you will be spending the year on Marion. As we went around the room introducing ourselves, one could immediately feel the buzz in the air; M71 is going to be a team to be reckoned with!

During the two weeks of training, the DEA gave us a thorough introduction with regards to what to expect of the island. We got to know each other a little better, and sometimes in very odd situations!

# BREAKING THE ICE

Besides the hours spent in the rental taxis (hours that add up in Cape Town's peak hour traffic) talking (mostly) nonsense, we had a wide variety of training scheduled for us. *Staying alive* (BeeGees) and *Another one bites the dust* (Queen) provided the perfect beat for chest compressions during the basic CPR course. I guess one just has to take the situation in consideration before you start humming either of these songs during a real life trauma incident, or maybe just play it safe and stay with the *BeeGees*. It will inspire more confidence! Fire Marshall training had the team playing with fire, but in a good way.



Lectures and instructional videos were worked through before the real fun started. This involved crawling through a pitch dark room holding onto a teammate's shoulder or ankle (or whatever you could get hold of in between) and bound the team even closer together! And let's be completely honest, there is something quite satisfying about extinguishing a really big fire. The M71 team's culinary skills were also put to the test during a two day cooking course. We learned that the presentation of food is almost as important as the food itself. But the team did not disappoint. Not only was the food glorious, but the team did not look half bad doing the cooking! In between all the training, the dentist had to be paid a visit in Simon's Town. At least it was quite a painless visit and we were lucky enough to witness a submarine

IF YOU CAN'T TAKE THE HEAT. Low de Vries sharpening his fire extinguishing skills at Ottery (TOP), while cooking lessons by Xsite Foods provided for a lot of fun and good food (BELOW).





## BREAKING THE ICE



**THE FINAL COUNTDOWN.** Clockwise from top left, Geneveive is moved onto a stretcher by team mates during first aid training; Yinhla demonstrates the Heimlich manoeuvre; Alexis going gangster during fire training; David and Frank pretending that everything is okay in their kitchen; M71 team members very excited before their first visit to the *SA Agulhas II*.

leaving the harbour! The packing of our luggage into the ship's containers suddenly made the trip to Marion more of a reality. Everyone scrambled to get the last details finalised but eventually we were all packed and ready to go. The farewell braai held for us by the DEA was very special and had us enjoying a feast next to the *SA Agulhas II* in the V&A Waterfront. The day of departure was something else! Our M71 clothing range had us looking and feeling unified as an awesome team! After interviews with the press and a last *kuier* with family and friends, the national anthem was sung with passion and we were allowed (for the second time that day) to board the ship. And boy

oh boy what a wonderful feeling to finally get on the ship for the voyage! Although all of us were sad to say farewell to our family and friends for the next 13 months, the excitement of actually being on our way to Marion Island and the knowledge that we had each other to rely on, was enough to get us through it. With family (and Kusi) dancing on the pier, we waved our last goodbye's. And with nervous excitement we looked towards the open waters. Marion Island, we hope you are ready, M71 is coming!

# The great wanderers

TEXT BY DAVID GREEN



GLIDE MASTER. A wandering albatross gracefully glides over the Marion Island landscape as the *SA Agulhas II* arrived.

I was initially asked to write an article for each issue of *The Wanderer* about a Marion Island bird of the month. However I thought that, as there are 28 native species representing 10 families, it would be more appropriate to write about a bird family of the month, which would conveniently bring me to 10 issues. This first article will deal with the family, perhaps most familiar to all, Diomedidae - the albatrosses.



# The Great Wanderers

Travelling down to Marion on the *SA Agulhas II* found me spending most of my time in front of the bridge scanning the horizon for passing seabirds. I have always been fascinated by these creatures because of their mastery of ocean travel, which has remained a daunting prospect for people since they began to sail the seas. During the voyage, I saw a multitude of species; gannets, cormorants, shearwaters, petrels and terns, but it was the albatrosses that really grabbed my attention. They are truly impressive, dwarfing other seabirds as they soar effortlessly across thousands of kilometres of featureless ocean on long outstretched wings. One can't help but feel awed by their calm and fluid flight in the midst of gale force winds and rolling seas big enough to cause even the largest of ships to lurch. Along the way, I was treated to a few close-up views of Wandering Albatrosses, the largest member of the family, as they glided past, just inches above the water. As I arrived on Marion, I observed neat heaps of snow all around the base, which also turned out to be Wandering Albatrosses incubating their eggs or warming their hatchlings on nests.



DAVID GREEN



DAVID GREEN



DANIEL KOTZÉ



DANIEL KOTZÉ



DANIEL KOTZÉ

**BIRDS OF THE SAME FEATHER.**  
Clockwise from top left,  
Greyheaded-; Sooty-; Young  
Light-mantled-; Wandering-  
dwarfing a Greyheaded-;  
Wandering albatross chick at  
the end of the rainbow.

Marion is home to four breeding albatross species namely, Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*), Grey-headed Albatross (*Thalassarche chrysostoma*), Light-mantled Sooty Albatross (*Phoebastria palpebrata*) and Sooty Albatross (*Phoebastria fusca*); with a fifth species, Indian Yellownosed Albatross (*Thalassarche carteri*), breeding on Prince Edward Island. They are all striking birds, with beautiful plumage patterns and markings.

Unfortunately this magnificent group of birds is in serious trouble. Of the five species breeding on the Prince Edward Islands, four

are threatened and the fifth (Light-mantled Albatross) is listed as near threatened, and all are in decline. The single greatest threat lies in accidental bycatch by the long-lining industry. Albatrosses (amongst many other seabirds), are caught and drowned when they take baited hooks – a horrible way to go. Fortunately, there has been an immense step forward in not only albatross conservation, but all marine top predators, with the proclamation of much of the Prince Edward Islands Economic Exclusion Zone (200 nautical miles) as a no fishing reserve. Let's hope we never lose these extraordinary birds.

# EVENTS

*We like to party!*

TEXT BY VONICA PEROLD

Nothing better than some birthday celebrations to keep the spirits high! We have had two birthday boys so far. Alexis Osborne turned 24 somewhere in the Southern Indian Ocean during our voyage on the *SA Agulhas II*. Thanks to Bernie and the *SA Agulhas II* crew for organising delicious cakes and snacks for the event. It was a big surprise and we all enjoyed the party! Alexis has another birthday with M71 and we will celebrate his official island birthday just before take-over next year. The second birthday we celebrated was that of David *Sue-Anne* Green. The party was fantasy-themed and the outfits ranged from Pop-eye the sailor man to tiny Tina Turner. It was a fantastic bonding experience for the team and we started a new M71 tradition involving a song called *Wrecking ball*. David surprised us all with his excellent dancing skills. Thanks M71 for a great evening! We are looking forward to the rest of the birthday parties on the island.



WORK HARD PLAY HARD. David's costume party brought a wide variety of fantasy characters together (TOP), with birthday boy himself opting for Hugh Hefner and Playboy Bunny look (BOTTOM RIGHT). Alexis (John Lennon?) lifting one to another year (BOTTOM LEFT).

## May, according to the METKASSIES



MAXIMUM WIND GUST	40.5m/s (81KT)
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TOTAL RAINFALL	291.6 mm
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HIGHEST IN 24 HOURS	60.4 mm
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TOTAL DAYS WITH RAIN	27 days
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TOTAL DAYS > 1 MM	20 days
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TOTAL SUNSHINE	68.4 hours
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	AVERAGE	MAXIMUM	MINIMUM	AVERAGE MAX	AVERAGE MIN
TEMPERATURE	5.7°C	14.2°C	-1.3°C	8.3°C	3.0°C
PRESSURE	1003.3 hPa	1023.5 hPa	970.7 hPa	1009.6 hPa	996.8hPa
HUMIDITY	90%	100%	61%	-	-



# TAKE-OVER memories

TEXT BY DANIËL KOTZÉ

DANIËL KOTZÉ

BON VOYAGE-M71 bids the *SA Agulhas II* a colourful farewell until next year.

With the shooting of flairs, excited shouting and popping of sparkling wine, the *SA Agulhas II* disappeared over the horizon. The last month was a lot to take in. It was filled with new faces, a radically new environment and a lot to learn. As soon as we stepped off the helicopter, we were heartily greeted by a group of (mostly) bearded individuals. M70 (2) made us feel at home straight away and many friendships were formed between members of different teams. In between the amazing meals cooked by chefs Alfalfa and Jason, cargo were offloaded (1) and research teams got going as soon as the weather allowed them.

On the morning of 15 April, the base woke up to a white island and while some could indulge in snow-fights (3), others were scheduled to do a round island and were not scared off (4). In between all the hard work, there were also time for socialising (5-7) and fun events like pool, table tennis and boot throwing competitions (8). The memorable month ended with the traditional take-over function

which was opened by violin and vocal performances by David Green and Dr Darren Green and enjoyed by everyone. Tears understandably filled the eyes of M70 when they left the island, as this is a very special place.

**KODAK MOMENTS.** Starlite delivers cargo (1); M70 (2); Snow everywhere! (3,4); Daniël & Nish enjoying a game of pool (5); Sealer party (6) with Chris, Prof Bester & Dr de Bruyn (7); Low at his best during boot throw (8).

