

# The **WANDERER**

Marion Island Newsletter November 2014

**RARE  
BIRD**  
sightings

**MORE NEW ORCAS!**

**SWART  
KOPS**  
HUT REVIEW

**WEANER  
RESCUE**

**FOCUS ON  
TERNs**

Interviews:  
The PFIAO birders

A BLAST FROM THE PAST  
**CAT HUNTER  
TALES**



**environmental affairs**

Department:  
Environmental Affairs  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**MARION71**  
*Expedition* 46°36'S 37°57'E



# 9

# CONTENTS

DANIEL KOTZÉ



The **W**

TSHU IDZIRAMAGOMA



17



13



11

DAVID GREEN

## COVER IMAGE

Daniël Kotzé  
Killer Whale



### 3LETTER FROM THE EDITOR.

Absence make the cravings grow stronger.

### 3RARE & WEIRD BIRD SIGHTINGS.

It's been a month full of avian surprises!

### 4NEWSFLASH. Marion's News24.

### 5THE PHOTO GALLERY. An introduction to summer.

### 9WRONG TERN. Learn how to distinguish between Marion's two tern species.

### 10OCTOBER ACCORDING TO THE METKASSIES. Interesting weather stats.

### 11SWARTKOPS HUT REVIEW.

The reader's round island continues.

### 12A CHANGE OF SCENERY. M71's diesel mechanic shares his view on field work.

### 13KITTY KITTY BANG BANG.

The facts behind Marion's cat hunters.

### 14LIFT A FLASK TO THE

### MASTERS. Saluting our beach masters.

### 15PFIAO BIRDERS INTERVIEW.

Get into the minds of Vonica and Alexis.

### 17JUST AD(MIRE). Something only an islander would be able to truly understand.

### 17SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALE SIGHTING. Share the excitement!

### 18EVENTS. More birthday parties!

### 19TEAM COLLAGE. See what M71 has been up to during November.

# Letter from the editor

## Absence make the cravings grow stronger

One of the favourite questions to ask during *The Wanderer* interviews seems to be "What do you miss most about South Africa?". Apart from family and friends, answers range from fast food to live rugby

and church services. In terms of our needs, there is really very little to complain about here on Marion, but I must admit that avocados, watermelons, surfboards and touch rugby has casually been making their appearance in my dreams. However I also know that I will have a much greater appreciation for those things after the expedition. Similarly I will miss Marion's sounds (and lack of it), smells (except the penguin colonies) and experiences and try my best to appreciate every moment. My message? Never fail to appreciate the here and now, being close to loved ones, eating a McDonalds burger or catching colour on the beach. I hope 2014's penultimate edition of *The Wanderer* also gives you a colourful perspective of our here and now. Enjoy!

  
DANIËL KOTZÉ  
EDITOR



## WEIRD AND RARE Bird sightings

TEXT BY ZUKO NKOMO AND DANIËL KOTZÉ



It's been an exciting month in terms of bird sightings. A leucistic Macaroni Penguin (1) has been sighted at Bullard Beach. At the first sight of this strange penguin, Zuko said: "I thought it was a cat, but came to realise that we no longer have cats in Marion. I managed to get spectacular views from up close!" Vagrant records included a Wilson's Storm Petrel (2) seen feeding between Black-bellied Storm Petrels at Rockhopper Bay and a Southern Fulmar (3) seen at Kildalkey Bay. This is the third and fifth time respectively that these species have been recorded on Marion. A Royal Penguin (4) from New-Zealand has been found to breed amongst its close relatives, the Macaroni Penguins, at Funk Bay, while a King Penguin with a complete lack of colour (5) has been seen at the same site. Other rare sightings included an Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross (6) at Rockhopper Bay and three Black-browed Albatrosses. The former breeds on Prince Edward Island, but are rarely seen on Marion. David has also finally managed to locate a Fairy Prion hotspot!



# WEANER RESCUE

TEXT BY LOW DE VRIES

# NEWSFLASH

On 21 November all the mammal researchers along with the team medic set out to Archway to weigh the very last weaner for the 2014 breeding season. What started off as a day of celebration ended in a day of struggle, for us and a little weaner (Red/White 009). This male (and hopefully future beach master!) managed to get himself stuck between the boulders where he squeezed his head into a minute hole and couldn't reverse out. After more than an hour of pushing, pulling, lifting massive rocks and immobilising the little guy, he was free and happily flopping around the beach again. Obviously this cheater of death now deserves a name and we have decided to give you, our valued reader, the opportunity to name him. Please send your suggestions to me at [jldevries@zoology.up.ac.za](mailto:jldevries@zoology.up.ac.za).



LOW DE VRIES

## ANOTHER NEW KILLER WHALE

TEXT BY DANIËL KOTZÉ

Another new killer whale calf was recently born into the Marion Island family. Jaws (M063) is the second calf born to Titus. Her first calf, Magnum, is almost old enough to start thinking of beginning her own family. The birth of Jaws came not long after the other adult female in the pod, Ebony, gave birth to Panda (see September's edition of *The Wanderer*). These two calves seem to have already established a strong social bond and are often seen playing together. We are now at the annual peak of killer whale numbers around the island and the majority of them will leave before Christmas. When the dust settles and there is time to study all the photos properly, we might even discover more newcomers!



LOW DE VRIES

## NAUGHTY GAZELLAS

TEXT BY DANIËL KOTZÉ

A video and subsequent publication of Antarctic fur seals raping King Penguins have recently been all over the news and social media. It even went so far as the surfacing of Senguin pictures (seal and penguin offspring). I reckon any publicity is good publicity for the island?



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## GAZELLA PUPS BORN!

TEXT BY LOW DE VRIES

Just as the elephant seal breeding season ended, the Antarctic fur seals (*Arctocephalus gazella*) have started giving birth and the beaches are filled with new or soon to be mothers and angry bulls. The sealers will focus their efforts on Trypot Beach near base and at Watertunnel where the new-borns will be weighed and counted.



LOW DE VRIES



# The Photo Gallery

COMPILED BY DANIËL KOTZÉ



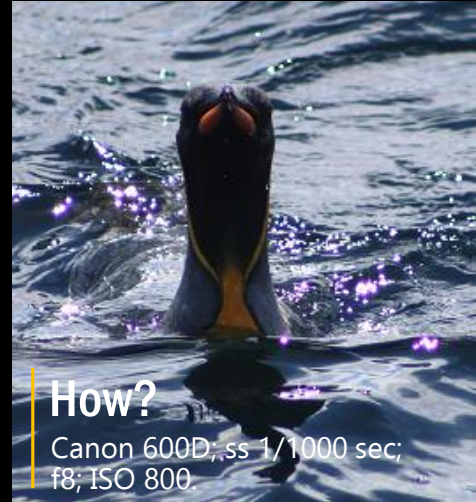
## An introduction to summer

This is a selection of M71's photographers' favourite photos from the past month and the stories behind them.

### Liezl Pretorius

#### The Perfect Tie ►

When I was a little girl it fascinated me to watch my Dad tying his tie. He taught me how, but I could never get it as perfect as he could. This shot showed me that some creatures can just do certain things better than others. Adult King Penguins always look dashing, whether in or out of the water!



#### How?

Canon 600D; ss 1/1000 sec;  
f8; ISO 800.



#### Eddie's Love Nest

Eddie, Goney Beach's master for this year, had his hands full keeping the twenty odd cows in his harem under control! Eddie is the proverbial "cool cat" and did not waste his energy on chasing the sealers around too much. But he did not back down for any other male trying to sneak into his harem! Since Eddie did not seem to mind me too much, I could get really up close and personal for this intimate shot of Eddie mating with one of his "girls". Way to go Eddie!

#### How?

Nikon Coolpix AV110 shutter speed 1/50 sec; aperture f3.9; ISO 400.



**Daniël Kotzé**

## Terning Feathers ▶

During a killer whale observation session at Kill Point, a Kerguelen Tern landed next to me and started to preen itself. I realised that it was waterproofing its feathers from oil glands beneath its tail and I got this comical shot..

## Egg Thief ▼

On my way back from Kildalkey Bay to the hut, I sat and watched the Macaroni Penguin colony for a while. Skuas are continually scanning the colony for any eggs that are slightly unattended. This skua got lucky and I could also see how the egg was carefully chipped away and drank.



### How?

Canon EOS 700D; ss 1/800 sec; aperture f5.6; ISO 800.

### How?

Canon EOS 700D; ss 1/4000 sec; aperture f5.6; ISO 1600.





# The Photo Gallery

## Low de Vries

### Killeeeeeeeer!

One afternoon after a census we sat at Ship's Cove hoping to get a killer whale sighting, and then it actually happened! I got this elephant seal not looking too happy about the killer whales swimming by. Or not very happy with me. I'm sure it was the killer whale though.



### How?

Canon EOS 700D; shutter speed 1/200 sec; aperture f13; ISO 800, flash.

### Testing the flippers

I found this little guy, one of our newly tagged (red-white) weaned elephant seals swimming at the waterfall at Bullard Beach, trying out his flippers before heading out into the big wide ocean. He kept still for just long enough to make this picture work on a slightly longer exposure.

### How?

Canon EOS 700D; shutter speed 1/10 sec; aperture f20; ISO 100.



### Phoenix

When Macaroni Penguins build their nest, they use whatever material they can find in the vicinity. At Kildalkey Bay, many use bones of dead Macaroni and King Penguins to build their nest. Morbid as it is, there is something almost beautiful in the fact that new life is hatched on the backbone of the previous generations.

**How?** Canon EOS 700D; shutter speed 1/800 sec; aperture f11; ISO 800.



### ◀ Piew Crag Vista

This photo was taken on a beautiful afternoon walk along Piew crags while I looked for Lightmantled Sooty Albatross nests. Overall, the awe-inspiring sight of the crags and absolute silence made for a humbling experience.

#### How?

Canon EOS 600D; shutter speed 1/1000 sec; aperture f13; ISO 800.

### Afternoon Nap ▼

I found this king on the verge of moulting and taking a siesta at the water's edge at Macaroni Bay. Moulting is an energy expensive business, and penguins try to conserve as much energy as possible during this time.

### Lying About

While looking for beach debris at Macaroni Bay, I came across a group of Gentoo fledglings hanging around on the beach. One of the birds was lazing about on a rock and took little notice of me as I passed by to take a few quick snaps.

#### How?

Canon EOS 600D; shutter speed 1/500 sec; aperture f9; ISO 400.

#### How?

Canon EOS 600D; shutter speed 1/1000 sec; aperture f5.6; ISO 800.



ANGEL WINGS. An adult Kerguelen Tern feeding over kelp beds.

# WRONG TERN

TEXT BY DAVID GREEN

On Marion, two bird species that go largely overlooked are the Antarctic (*Sterna vittata*) and Kerguelen Terns (*S. virgata*). This is somewhat surprising as, while not present in particularly large numbers on the island, they are quite conspicuous in their habits.

It is fascinating to watch terns feeding over the kelp beds as they hover over the sea, dipping and diving to snatch unwary prey from the surface. Occasionally they will dive into the water and for a fraction of a second be lost beneath the churning surface. However, within the blink of an eye they burst forth to resume their restless flight. One seldom spends a day in the field without seeing a tern darting around in erratic loops over the breakers or hearing its excited call issued somewhere overhead. Terns seem perpetually excited and whether warding off potential predators, or chasing conspecifics, they do it with gusto. They are fearless when it comes to nest protection, and will even go as far as dive-bombing fieldworkers should they get too close. Both species are handsome, but also very similar in appearance, making it notoriously difficult to tell the species apart. The distinguishing features are not particularly easy to discern, and include the length, shape and colour of the bill, overall size and the darkness of the plumage (apparently best seen in bad light). This has led to numerous identification debates amongst team members looking to tick both species. Interestingly, however, despite these morphological similarities, Antarctic and Kerguelen Terns maintain quite different life-histories, which is most clear in their seasonal habits. Kerguelen Terns are sedentary, rarely venturing further than 2 km

from the shore, whereas Antarctic Terns migrate a couple of thousand km to over-winter at temperate latitudes north of Marion. For both species breeding occurs over the summer months, with Kerguelen Terns beginning a few months earlier than Antarctic Terns. Both species nest on the ground, often in loose mixed colonies in rocky areas. They don't exactly make a nest, and suitable locations for laying seem to be chosen rather haphazardly. The eggs are an extremely well camouflaged speckled brown, which goes some way in reducing the effects of nest predation. Incubation lasts for about a month and chicks hatch within one to three days of their first peep within the egg. It must be said that few things are as cute as a tern chick, which looks like little more than a ball of fluff punctuated by two eyes and a bill. They are semi-precocious and leave the nest soon after

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE. An Antarctic Tern displays its white underwings by which it can be distinguished from the Kerguelen Tern.



DANIEL KOTZÉ



## WRONG TERN

hatching. This is quite a nuisance for observers trying to locate them. After identifying a nest's location, the time taken in reaching it is ample for the chick to wander off elsewhere. I experienced this first-hand when I saw a ball of fluff picking its way between the rocks and then attempted to force itself under some vegetation. The ability to move around probably helps chicks avoid the gaze of hungry skuas, which are ever vigilant for an easy meal. It seems that this camouflage is effective, and one would hope so, as these populations could scarcely support high levels of nest predation. While neither of these terns is particularly abundant on Marion, nor the first birds to spring to mind when one thinks of the island, I don't doubt that their absence would be felt. For this reason, and as is the case with all other native

species on the island, it is crucial that the populations of both tern species be carefully monitored. A walk along one of Marion's beaches would not be the same without seeing and hearing the restless flight and agitated calls of a couple of terns.



# OCTOBER according to the METKASSIES



MAXIMUM WIND GUST	186.4 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL	86.4 mm
HIGHEST IN 24 HOURS	21.2 mm
TOTAL DAYS WITH RAIN	20 days
TOTAL DAYS > 1 MM	12 days
TOTAL SUNSHINE	267.3 hours

**COLOURFULL.** Where there is sun and rain, there is a rainbow! Although Marionites would fancy a larger portion of sunshine, we have no shortage of rainbows in the sky.

	AVERAGE	MAXIMUM	MINIMUM	AVERAGE MAX	AVERAGE MIN
TEMPERATURE	5°C	11.5°C	-2.8°C	8.2°C	1.9°C
PRESSURE	1012.6 hPa	1030.5 hPa	977.6 hPa	1017.7 hPa	1007 hPa
HUMIDITY	84%	100%	27%	-	-

DATA COURTESY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WEATHER SERVICE



A Reader's Round Island:

# SWARTKOPS

TEXT BY LOW DE VRIES

## Home of the *Amphitheatre*

Welcome, and congratulations on making it to the west of the island. It has been a long journey, but well worth it, and a good one we hope. You will notice that things are a little different on this side; the seas are rougher and most of the beaches slightly more inhospitable and inaccessible. There are more cliffs, and the mountain peaks seem higher. Cliché as it is, it is just a bit wilder.

FRANK VENTER

Swartkops hut is used by sealers mostly as a one night stand, whereas the birders will spend multiple nights here. Don't get me wrong, it's a great hut, very pretty, just not well suited for sealers. There are few seals around, and what is a sealer without a seal? For the birders though there is the amphitheatre right at your front step. This is another one

of Marion's natural wonders. It's the remains of an old crater, and during summer, an estimated 25 000 Maccaroni Penguins climb these terraces to breed. That adds up to roughly 125 tons of penguin! Royal Penguins have also been seen in the area and cross breed with the Maccaroni's. The birders use this colony to investigate nest

attendance patterns. Swartkops is also a breeding ground for the beautiful Blue Petrel.

### How to get there

From Rook's you have a choice of two routes, across the toffee lava, or around La Grange's Kop. Toffee lava, or pahoehoe, is fast flowing lava that forms tunnels and caves with a brittle layer over it and, with a little imagination, sort of resembles toffee. In shape, not colour. If you're scared of falling through this lava, you can walk coastally to Vrystaat Point (at least the Cheetahs always have a point on Marion) and then aim for La Grange's. From the top you can see the hut sitting behind the amphitheatre in the middle of the Chinese Teagarden. It might sound pretty, and I suppose it is, but the Chinese Teagarden is really just a nice way to say "mires everywhere". However, at this stage of the trip

**BREATH-TAKING.** Thousands of Maccaroni Penguins fill the amphitheatre during their breeding season, resulting in a spectacular sight.



DAVID GREEN



# SWARTKOPS HUT REVIEW

LAKE VIEW. The Chinese Teagarden Is characterised by a large number of lakes around Swartkops hut.

LOW DE VRIES

you are so fit you can spin across a mire like a three litre Ford on a wet road in the East Rand of Jo'burg (it's okay, I'm allowed to say this, I'm from the area). With mires being less of a problem, the route to Swartkops is enjoyable and scenic. There are no rivers at this hut, so water must be taken from the lakes around it. The water is clean, but some people insist to boil it before use because of Swartkop "ninjas".

These are small crustaceans known as Copepods. They can be seen kicking and swimming in your glass, but that's pretty much all they do. Harmless little guys. That's Swartkops. A hut with coffee and a soft bed where you can fall asleep listening to the dove-like calls of Blue Petrels, while little ninjas kick around inside your stomach. Have a pleasant stay and please remember to switch off the gas in the morning.

## RECIPE: SWARTKOPS PIZZA

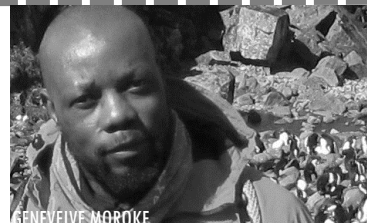
1. Mix ½cup self-raising flour, 1 tbslp salt, pepper and mixed herbs and 2 tbslp oil and vinegar in a bowl.
2. Slowly add warm water, mixing it until you have a good looking dough.
3. Bake in an oiled pan on low heat and cover pan with another pan.
4. Turn after 10 min
5. Add toppings after 5 more min and bake for another 5 min.
6. Toppings that can be found in huts include tomato sauce, chutney, ham, bully beef, viennas and mushrooms, so it is advisable to carry additional toppings such as cheese, salami and jalapenos. Maybe even some pickled onions.



DANIEL KOTZE

## A CHANGE OF SCENERY

TEXT BY JOHN SKELETE



GENEVIÈVE MOROKE

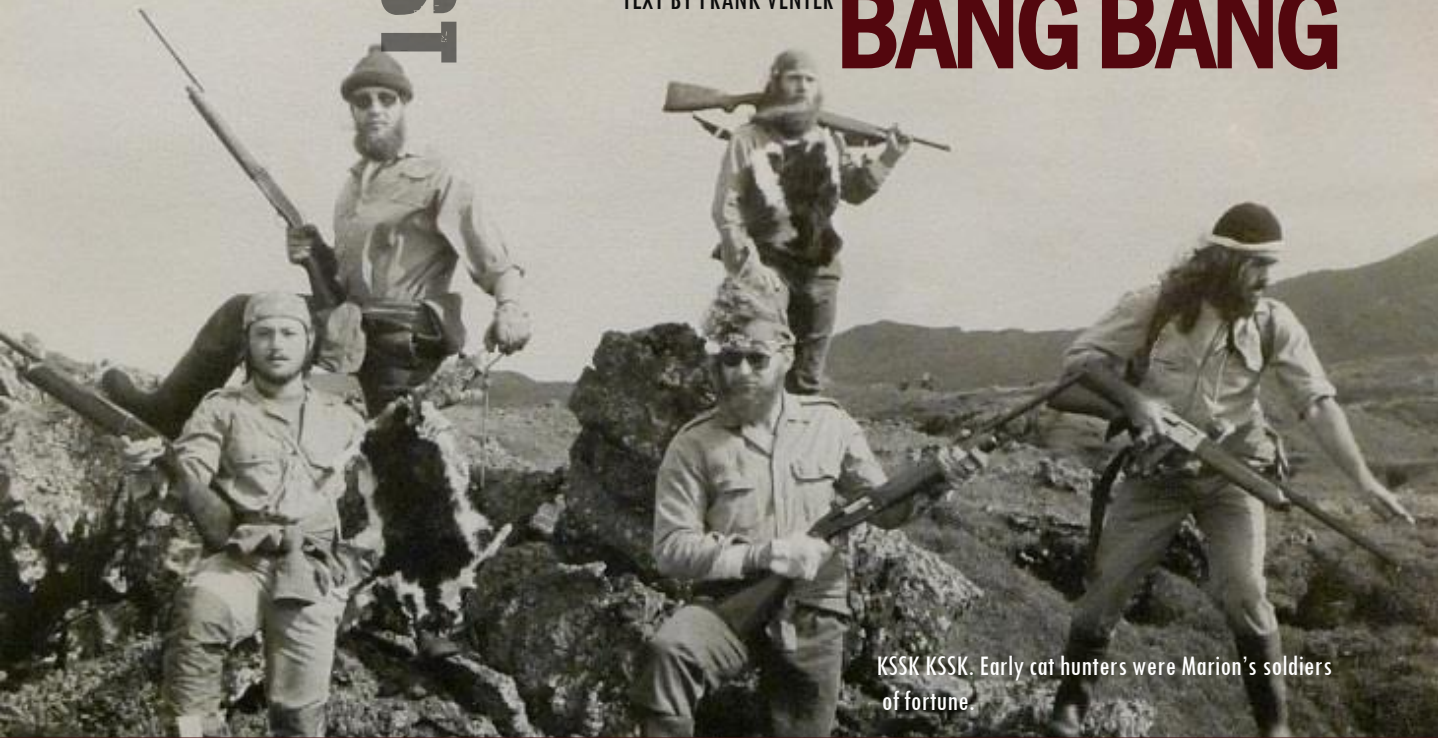
The charm of Marion's noble scenery and the refreshment of escaping into the unspoiled solitudes of nature, far from indoor employment, makes me grateful. I took the opportunity to join my team mates in their respective field work as it is totally different from mine (Diesel Mechanic). "This is crazy!" I claimed without hesitation. The landscape at times resembles a war zone, you know, stark scenery, no animals, no trees, no leaves, nothing living there just emptiness. Luckily we know that on Marion there is always life just around the corner, such as penguins, seals and killer whales. It is always fascinating to see what the field assistants are doing. Coming up close and personal with these animals is an exciting experience and I'm enjoying every moment of it. I can't wait to go back to the field! *Je vais avoir le temps de ma vie* (French: I am having the time of my life). I respect my team mates, the birders, sealers and killers, for their outstanding work, dedication and support so far. *Mille grazie* (Italian: Thank you) and continue with your good work!



# A BLAST from the PAST

# KITTY KITTY BANG BANG

TEXT BY FRANK VENTER



KSSK KSSK. Early cat hunters were Marion's soldiers of fortune.

**Silent and determined, the hunter lies in wait. Even though the freezing rain and wind has battered his body for hours, he stays focused. Sweeping over the night-time landscape with a spotlight, he searches for signs of movement. Suddenly, as if it was an extension of his arm, he lifts the shotgun and pulls the trigger. The hunter collects his prize - neither a pheasant, nor a deer...this is Marion Island after all. His prize is the common cat, *Felis catus*.**

Though the idea of hunting cats may seem grim, even cruel, it is important to note the devastating impact these animals had on Marion's ecosystem. Cats indeed once roamed the island, not as a native species, but through a disastrous attempt at controlling another alien mammal. Mice have been present on Marion Island since at least 1818, and are thought to have been introduced by shipwrecks or early sealers. In addition to being a nuisance around base, they were a serious problem for the native fauna and flora. Omnivorous mice have been shown to bite bird chicks, eat flightless moths (*Pringleophaga marioni*), and even burrow into Azorella cushions. So in 1949, five cats were brought to Marion Island.

## **The cats, the birds & the virus**

The animals initially performed well at their intended task, catching mice around base.

Cats slowly began to multiply, with an early study deeming their numbers as "too few to significantly affect the island's bird population". The feline population continued to grow however, and by 1973, there were more than 2000 feral cats spread across the island. No longer content with mere mice, the cats developed a taste for Marion's precious avifauna. A survey was launched, and the results were shocking. In addition to hunting Great-winged Petrels and Salvin's Prions, White-chinned Petrels were experiencing a 0% breeding success. It is estimated that at one point, cats were killing a staggering 450 000 burrowing petrels per year. Ultimately, the feeding frenzy resulted in the local extinction of the Common Diving Petrel. Cats had reached vermin status, and action had to be taken. Feline panleucopaenia virus (FPV) was proposed as a bio-control agent, as it is not only specific to cats, but also highly infectious. In early



1977, it was introduced into the cat population, now numbering 3500. FPV proved successful indeed, leading to a 60% reduction in the island's cat numbers by 1982. At this stage however, there was evidence that some degree of resistance to the virus was developing in the cats, and as such, another strategy was needed.

### The cat hunters

Different methods such as trapping, poisoning and even trained dogs were tested. These however proved to be either inefficient, or too costly. Following the discovery by 2 enterprising team members that hunting cats at night was feasible, it was decided to test the efficacy of full scale hunting in 1981. Results were promising, and in 1986 the first team of dedicated hunters were deployed. Over the next three years, eight teams consisting of two hunters were sent to Marion. Stationed around the island, men were armed with 12 gauge shotguns and spotlights. The hunters were also responsible for constructing Marion's famous stone cat traps, which can still be seen today. These x-shaped structures consist of two low stone walls, with a small "cavern" in the centre. The walls acted to channel the cats to the central cavern, which contained baited gin traps. These teams were highly effective, catching or killing close to 1000 cats by 1989. So effective in fact, that the following year, cats were sighted too infrequently to hunt. In a final push to ensure total eradication, 1400 traps and 30000 baited chicks poisoned with sodium monofluoroacetate (1080) were deployed. In the end, the programme cost almost a million US dollars, but lead to the last Marion cat being captured in 1991. It has been 25 years since the last cat was sighted, and burrowing petrel populations have since started to recover. The project remains, to this day, the most successful cat eradication programme in the world.

### Mice. An ongoing problem.

While Marion remains cat-free, mice are still present, and increasing in number. There is hope however. At Gough Island, the site of another South African research base and which has a similar problem with mice, a trial is currently underway which

will involve aerial dropping of poison pellets. The pellets are highly toxic to mice, but pose no risk to other species. Marion Island however presents a challenge, as it is considerably larger than Gough, with different terrain and species diversity. The DEA awaits the outcome of this project, in the hope of one day launching a similar programme at Marion.



TRAPPED. The remnants of one of the cat traps at Kaalkoppie built from lava rocks.

DANIEL KOTZÉ

## LIFT A FLASK TO THE MASTERS

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY LOW DE VRIES

The elephant seal breeding season has flown by quicker than an albatross sweeping down a valley. The reign of the beach masters is at an end. These big guys went without food for months to obtain mating rights, fought off other males and controlled their harems. So let's raise a flask of the strong stuff (blueberry game of course) and salute a few of the legends. Eddie (PEB BB800, from Prince Edward), Leto (1: X455, always posing) Tinkerbelle (2: PP003, light on his feet), Tshepo (3: X476, run, just run!), Reggie (4: RR408, Reginald when he is chasing you, Reg when he is cuddling one of his girls) and Cornerstone (YY384, master at King Penguin Main Beach of 52 females!), and all the other boys. Congratulations on a successful year and may you chase sealers for many more years to come!





# PFIAO BIRDERS

## *The Interview*

### WHAT WE DO

Vonica and Alexis work for the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology (PFIAO) based at the University of Cape Town. They monitor the breeding success of albatrosses and petrels and assist in data collection for PhD and MSc students at the institute. The data they collect are used in long-term monitoring programs to assess the population trends of these magnificent and often endangered birds and can aid in important management decisions.

### ALEXIS

QUESTIONS BY VONICA PEROLD

#### 1. Where are you from and how did you end up here?

I was born in Concordia, a small town in the Northern Cape. After studying BSc Biodiversity and Conservation Biology at UWC, I started working for the DEA and Development Planning when this opportunity presented itself. Marion is every biologist's dream and I grabbed the opportunity with both hands and no regrets whatsoever.

#### 2. What is your favourite part of working with seabirds?

Working with these birds up close and personal. It's a rare opportunity and it's satisfying to know that the data we are collecting helps with the conservation of these birds.

#### 3. Beside friends and family, what do you miss most about South Africa?

Fresh fruits and a Steers Burger! But on a more serious note I miss going to church on Sundays.

#### 4. Beside your delicious hut pancakes, what is your favourite dish to prepare for the team?

I am not much of a cook, so I try to avoid the kitchen at all cost. I do however love to braai (which should go with a delicious salad). Luckily everyone loves braaivleis, so I'm safe for now.

### VONICA

QUESTIONS BY ALEXIS OSBORNE

I'm from Durbanville. After completing a course in Veterinary Nursing, I studied BSc Plant Science, BScHons in Wildlife Management and MSc in Zoology at UP. Marion sounded like it would be a once in a lifetime adventure and an opportunity to contribute to the conservation of so many amazing species.

This is difficult to answer. I especially enjoy working with albatrosses, but each species has unique qualities that I admire. I have taken a special liking to Rockhopper Penguins. I could sit and watch them all day long if we had time.

#### 3. What's your favourite spot on the island?

It has to be either Good Hope Bay (spectacular cliffs and the beautiful Grey-headed Albatrosses) or Piew Crag (the view and the silence).

#### 4. What will you miss most about Marion?

I will miss everything - the wildness, isolation, freedom and the spectacular animals.



## 5. What has been challenging on the island for you so far (except the slow internet)?

The sudden change in weather conditions. The combination of long distances hiking and bad weather conditions can get rather tough.

## 6. Tell us about an expedition highlight.

Being able to see the complete lifecycle of some of the bird species, from egg stage to where the chicks leave the nest. Not forgetting the beauty Marion presents on a daily basis. Marion never ceases to amaze!

## 7. Following the serious debates during our hikes, what island bird would you like to be?

Definitely a Subantarctic Skua. They never back down from a challenge and can take down prey twice their size. They can even steal eggs from right from under birds with their beaks, which indicates their speed and intelligence.

## 8. What would your advice be to birders coming to Marion Island in the future ?

Firstly, being on Marion is a huge privilege, which not everyone gets to experience in their lifetime. Appreciate every moment on Marion - it goes by too quickly! Walk out as often as you can, the island will always amaze you!

## 5. How do you cope with the long distance hiking often required of a birder?

Now that we are "Marion fit" the walking is so much easier. Sometimes you don't even realize that you have been walking for hours, you sort of zone out. On long walks I sometimes listen to music and sing (only when I am alone).

## 6. What were your first thoughts when you arrived on Marion Island?

This place is so cold! How am I going to survive here? That feeling soon passed and I was very excited and a little overwhelmed by the size of the Wandering Albatrosses that nest around base. It all felt surreal.

## 7. How is your Marion experience thus far?

So far it has been everything I hoped for and more. I am so grateful that I was given this opportunity.

OUT AND ABOUT. Field work takes Alexis from (CLOCKWISE) Good Hope Bay to Piew Crag to Grey-headed Albatross Ridge with his beloved birds.



VONICA PEROLD

DANIËL KOTZÉ

ALL ROUNDER. Vonica is not only loves working with Wandering Albatross and King Penguin (BOTTOM LEFT), she also has no problem summiting Junior's Kop (BOTTOM RIGHT).



ALEXIS OSBORNE



DANIËL KOTZÉ



DANIËL KOTZÉ



DAVID GREEN



# FANTASTIC FLORA just admire

TEXT BY LIEZL PRETORIUS AND LOUISE GADNEY

A common definition for a mire is a stretch of swampy or boggy ground. The word can also be used to describe something that got stuck in mud. Ironically enough, "mire" also means a complicated or unpleasant situation from which it is difficult to extricate oneself. And I, for one, can honestly say that it can be quite an unpleasant thing to get oneself out of a proper mire once you've sunk up to the thighs! These wet areas consists of low nutrient soils with high organic content and are mainly encountered on the coastal plains. The mires on the island are a constant source of amusement and frustration. We will never forget those breath-holding moments when you cross an area full of mires in a hunched-over, knees bent, nimble-footed way (making me think of the movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon!*), hoping that you won't get wet with the full day's work ahead of you! When you DO sink, one flings oneself forward onto your walking stick, trying desperately to get your boots out before it fills up with water or mud. You just shake your head, laugh a little to feel better, wring out your socks and continue. Mires are common on Marion, though increased temperatures have caused the island to become drier in recent years. Although field workers are grateful for the easier walking, we know it comes at a great cost to the native vegetation. When it rains, one can almost feel the whole island taking a deep sigh of relief! Spectacular places like Swartkops just wouldn't be the same without mires.

## A POEM BY LOUISE

So beware when you leave base  
there is that place  
that will cause you to fall  
on your face, slow your pace  
not a spot to admire, it ruins your attire and the rest of your walk you will be the talk, the butt of jokes  
as it cloaks, you cold and smelly, initiated from head to toe, it will eventually let you go  
you've got to love the mire!

**Gerard, how do you feel about mires?**

"Nasty!" and another outburst of a descriptive nature that cannot be published.

# SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALE SIGHTING

TEXT BY LIEZL PRETORIUS AND JOE KLAASEN

LIEZL PRETORIUS

**On 5 November, a single Southern Right Whale was seen by a lucky few team members not far from base. Liezl Pretorius and Joe Klaasen share their encounter with this mega-mammal.**

**LIEZL:** I was busy doing a ten hour killer whale observation at Kill Point. I just sat down after taking pictures of passing killer whales when something odd caught my eye. At first it looked like a rock that has just appeared in the ocean, about ten metres from me. It suddenly moved and I could see it clearly, a Southern Right Whale! It surfaced so close to me that, if the water wasn't so cold, I would have jumped in to touch it! The whale's magnificence reminded me of Eph 3:18: "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ". God truly loves his creation and I'm blessed to experience everything that Marion offers!

**JOE:** God smiles on me again. After seeing the birth of an elephant seal last month, I felt truly blessed with the sighting of this *meneer* of a mammal on our way to Archway Bay. We (Yinhla, Richard and I) set off for Archway along the coast to weigh elephant seal weaners. As we reached the open waters of Macaroni Bay and sighted a group of killer whales, we spotted the Southern Right. We initially mistook it for a killer whale, but the absence of a dorsal fin made us realise what it was. After six minutes the group of killer whales surrounded the whale, but no attack was made. It seems I have chosen the perfect day to go to the field. Nature never ceases to leave me speechless.



MIRE. Yinhla experiencing a first class mire.

CHRIS OOSTHUIZEN

# NOVEMBER EVENTS

Mseventyfun TEXT BY DANIËL KOTZÉ

## Low's 30<sup>th</sup> Celebration

Congratulations to Low for turning a respectable 30 years of age on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November. The occasion was celebrated with a very enjoyable team braai and a delicious cake topped with the number 30 (unfortunately we did not have enough birthday candles). Low, we hope that it was a special island birthday and that the seals won't give you too many problems for the remainder of the expedition!

## Ishmail's Dinner Party

PHOTOS BY LOW DE VRIË

M71's base engineer, Ishmail, celebrated his 49<sup>th</sup> birthday and decided to spend the day preparing a delicious lunch and semi-formal dinner for the team. Ishmail is one of M71's top chefs and we are grateful that he spoiled us in this way. May you have a prosperous year and make the most of the time we have left on the island!

**Thank you to everyone who organised these events!**





# TEAM COLLAGE

COMPILED BY DANIEL KOTZÉ

## What has M71 been up to this month?

### Around the island



### Around base

