

# The **WANDERER**

Marion Island Newsletter

December 2014

PHOTO GALLERY:  
**THE NEW-  
BORNS!**

**MIXED  
PICKLE**  
HUT REVIEW

CELEBRATING  
**CHRISTMAS**  
MARION STYLE!

EVENTS:  
action  
**SOCCER!**

A BLAST FROM THE PAST:  
**CHASING**  
AN ILLEGAL FISHING VESSEL

*Interview:*  
**SEALERS**  
SHARE THEIR  
**SECRETS**

BIRD FAMILY OF THE MONTH:  
**STORM PETRELS**



environmental affairs

Department:  
Environmental Affairs  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**MARION 71**

Expedition 46°36'S 37°57'E

# CONTENTS

# The W



LOW DE VRIES



DANIËL KOTZÉ



LIEZL PRETORIUS



DANIËL KOTZÉ



**COVER IMAGE**  
Daniël Kotzé  
Subantarctic Skua

### **3** LETTER FROM THE EDITOR.

A change is as good as...

### **3** REFLECTING ON CHRISTMAS.

Joe Klaasen on what the day is all about.

### **4** NEWSFLASH. Marion's News24.

### **5** THE PHOTO GALLERY. New-borns.

### **9** STORM PETELS. Learn about the smallest seabirds in the world.

### **10** MPHOS MEMOIRS. Mpho Mphogo's view on island psychology.

### **11** GOD'S GRANDEUR.

Alexis Osborne inspired by nature's awe.

### **11** NOVEMBER ACCORDING TO THE METKASSIES. The weather stats.

### **12** IN PURSUIT OF THE VIARSA.

The chasing of an illegal fishing vessel.

### **13** MIXED PICKLE HUT REVIEW.

The readers' round island continues.

### **15** FANTASTIC FLORA: BLECHNUM.

The pleasure and pain of this little fern.

### **15** CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS.

How M71 spent this joyful event on the island.

### **16** EVENTS. Soccer and potjie birthdays!

### **17** SEALERS SHARE THEIR SECRETS.

An interview with two of M71's sealers.

### **19** GAZELLE BATTLEGROUNDS. Yinha on the fierce fur seal battles at Watertunnel.

### **20** TEAM COLLAGE. What M71 has been up to during December.

## A change is as good as . . .

Wow how this year has run away with us! When there is a holiday break to look forward to, it usually buffers the transition to a new year. Here on Marion, with no holiday, it hit us like a watermelon in the face. If only we had some watermelons...The whole team (except one metkassie on duty) did however manage to take the day off on Christmas and it was delightful. Although there is a lot of important work to be done on the island, it is essential to take a break every now and then to sharpen your focus and get a perspective on things. Since a change is said to be as good as a holiday, Marionites need plenty of the former. Whether it is in the form of assisting in field work (not your own), cooking a new dish or

just sitting down to watch Wandering Albatrosses fledge (p.4) or fur seals fight (p.19). I hope Christmas was as blessed and joyful a day for you as for us here on the island (p.15) and I hope you seized the holiday (even it was only a few days) and feel refreshed for an exciting and adventurous 2015 that lies at our doorstep. I am looking forward to spend the last three months before the ship arrives with my new 18 family members as best I can. So much to do, so little time! It was difficult to squash December into 20 pages, but for the sake of your inbox, we tried. Enjoy this issue!



DANIËL KOTZÉ  
EDITOR

## Letter from the editor



## REFLECTING ON Christmas

TEXT BY JOE KLAASEN

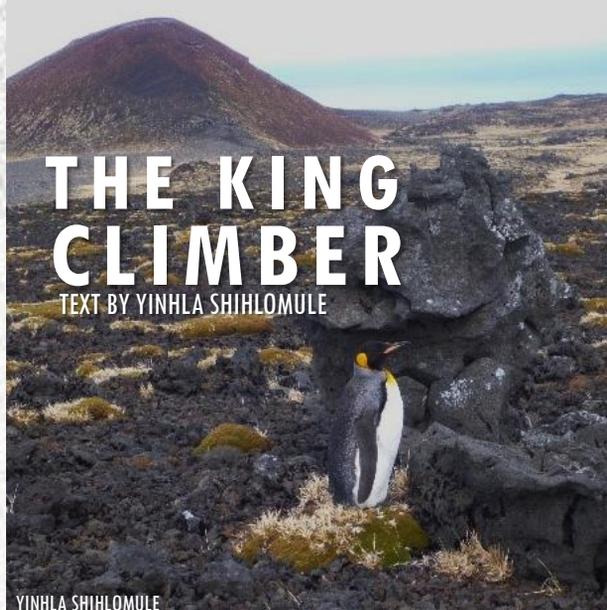
**Luke 2:10-11:**  
**And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you are born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."**

Christmas, in many homes, is the highlight of the year. It can be a time to get together with family and friends, to share food and exchange gifts. This year, although away from our family, we will spend Christmas with our 2014 family, the M71 team. For many children it is a time of great wonder and joy. The most

treasured memories of many adults come from the family Christmas experience of their childhood. It is a moment of great significance for our lives as Christians, where we come together to celebrate the joy of 'God-with-us' in the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Whatever our circumstances, the true meaning of Christmas is always available to us in reflection on the Christmas story itself. I take this opportunity to thank those who go out of their way at this time of year to make Christmas special for us on Marion Island. We thank those of other religions and non-religion who join us in celebrating the spirit of peace and goodwill to all heralded by the angels on that first Christmas night. Our prayer is that this joy will touch the hearts of all islanders this Christmas and strengthen our hope in challenging times.

# NEWSFLASH

At Middelrookop, far from the ocean, where fauna is rarely seen (in fact only a few Azorellas grow there), we recently found a King Penguin. What surprised me the most was the distance (almost 4km uphill from Kildalkey Bay!) it had to walk to get there. Most King Penguins enjoy being close to the ocean, but this pioneer decided to explore the island. I can only hypothesise that this penguin was bored or being discriminated by other penguins. It reminded me of *Happy Feet* who was an outsider because of the weird beats he made with his feet.



## THE KING CLIMBER

TEXT BY YINHLA SHIHLOMULE

YINHLA SHIHLOMULE

## FAREWELL FLEDGLINGS

TEXT BY VONICA PEROLD

The first seabirds Alexis and I were introduced to here were the Wandering Albatrosses. We started monitoring the chicks while they were literally still under the wing of the enormous watchful parents. During the past eight months we were privileged enough to see the chicks develop from tiny fluff balls into quirky adolescents and in the last month observe their preparations to leave the nest. We have grown attached to them during our colony checks and feel proud to see them fledging. The signature clap-clap greetings as you stroll past, the awkward gait as they explore and the practice of their take-offs will definitely be missed. They will only return to Marion after five to seven years to look for a suitable life-long partner and start breeding when they are approximately nine to ten years old. We hope that they all have a pleasant journey and a safe return.



DANIËL KOTZÉ

## SUMMER SOLSTICE

TEXT BY DANIËL KOTZÉ

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December many of m71's expedition members experienced the longest day and shortest night of their life. Sunrise was before 03:30 and sunset around 20:00!



DANIËL KOTZÉ

## SKUA RESCUE

TEXT BY ALEXIS OSBORNE

We normally read about seabirds that get entangled by fishing lines and caught on fishing hooks. During colony monitoring, we found a Subantarctic Skua with a fishing line caught in its wing. Upon closer examination it was found that a hook was attached to its back. The hook and line was safely removed and the skua could continue nesting. We wish the skua and his partner best of luck for the future, especially with the eggs now hatching.



VONICA PEROLD

# The Photo Gallery

COMPILED BY DANIĚL KOTZÉ



## Marion's New-borns

With the abundance of new life this month on the island, M71's photographers had no shortness of cute subjects to aim their cameras at. Here are a selection of their favourites.

### Liezl Pretorius

**How?** Nikon Coolpix AV110ss 1/500 sec; F8; ISO 800.



### Skua Magic

This little skua almost avoided detection by hiding very quietly in the grass while mother skua was trying to distract me by attacking my head! I took this picture close to Waterfall Beach, south of the base, one of my favourite places on the island and now also home to many cute skua chicks!

### Pup Tanning

The Sub-Antarctic fur seal pups are now plentiful all over the island and I am enjoying watching them play (and cuddling each other!). It took a lot of energy for this pup to get onto this sunbathing rock to fall asleep just after I took this picture.



**How?** Nikon Coolpix AV110 shutter speed 1/500 sec; aperture f11; ISO 400.



## Nap Time

On a round island trip, I came across the season's first Macaroni Penguin chicks at Amphitheatre. This little one hatched with an appetite, and was fed repeatedly in the relatively short time I spent snapping shots. In this image, the chick is having a quick rest before its next meal.

### How?

Canon EOS 600D; shutter speed 1/125 sec; aperture f10; ISO 400.

## David Green

### Prison Break ▼

### How?

1. Canon EOS 600D; shutter speed 1/500 sec; aperture f6.3; ISO 400.
2. Canon EOS 600D; shutter speed 1/1600 sec; aperture f6.3; ISO 400.

While searching for tern nests, I came across this Kerguelen Tern egg in the process of hatching. A return trip the next day was rewarded with a sight of the freshly hatched chick soaking up some rare afternoon sunlight. In the background is a small discarded fish that one of its parents had brought for it. Also in sight are the remains of the egg shell.





## ◀ Weaner in Jelly

At Bullard Beach there are enough Macaroni Penguins to turn the river green with the mess they make. It is a little, well, disgusting, but this doesn't seem to bother the seals much. I found this young elephant seal playing in the river and loving every second.

## How?

Canon EOS 700D; shutter speed 1/250 sec; aperture f5.6; ISO 800; polarised filter.

## Clown Face ▶

The Wandering Albatross fledglings are not strictly speaking new-born, but they are still young enough! Just before they are fully fledged their feathers are a beautiful brown colour, contrasting the white face. This one was strolling around a bit away from its nests.



## How?

Canon EOS 700D; shutter speed 1/2000 sec; aperture f10; ISO 800.

## When I Grow Up... ▶

On a visit to Grey-headed hut, I assisted some of the birders with retrieving GPS devices from albatrosses. During the removal operation, the chick is exposed for a very short time, giving one the opportunity to quickly steal a few shots. This Grey-headed Albatross chick was just adorable.

### How?

Canon EOS 700D; ss 1/400 sec; f4.5; ISO 800.

## Wet Alien ▼

The Antarctic fur seal pups are growing up fast! This pup was playing in the pools on Gazella Plain when he suddenly saw my lens aimed at him.

### How?

Canon EOS 700D; ss 1/400 sec; f5; ISO 200.



# STORM PETRELS

TEXT BY DAVID GREEN

## THE SMALLEST SEA- BIRDS IN THE WORLD!



TINY BUT TOUGH. A Grey-backed Storm-petrel is among the smallest seabirds in the world, with some weighing as little as 21 grams!

Seabirds have fascinated me for as long as I can remember, owed largely to the air of mystery that surrounds their secret lives out over the great oceans. But one family of seabirds, the storm-petrels, has really grabbed hold of me over the years. These remarkable little birds belong to the family Hydrobatidae, which is broken into two sub-families, Oceanitinae (generally southern hemisphere) and Hydrobatinae (generally northern hemisphere). Marion is home to two Oceanitinae species, the Black-bellied Storm-petrel (*Fregetta tropica*) and Grey-backed Storm-petrel (*Garrodia nereis*).

DAVID GREEN

Marion's two Storm-petrel species are fairly easy to distinguish. The Grey-backed has a silvery grey rump and tail, and plain white belly, while the Black-bellied has a white band over the rump and a black strip running longitudinally along the centre of the belly. Every sighting of one of these little birds brings with it a twinge of excitement. Storm-petrels are tiny (the smallest seabirds in the world), but, incredibly, spend the majority of the year out over the pelagic oceans, returning to land only to breed. The idea that any creature is capable of such feats is nothing short of astounding, but in the case of these diminutive birds, I can only sit back and marvel. One simply needs look at their long legs, too weak for walking, to get an idea of how specialised they are to life on the wing. As with most petrels, they have

adapted to using the movement of air across the ocean surface in facilitating prolonged and continuous flight. Members of the sub-family Oceanitinae, such as the Black-bellied and Grey-backed Storm-petrels, most frequently make use of slope soaring, by which birds angle into the prevailing wind to gain height, and then glide back down over the sea. However, dynamic soaring may also be used, whereby birds dip into the troughs between waves, and then wheel back out into the wind. These methods help these birds cover vast distances without expending excessive energy in the constant search for food. While relatively little is known of their feeding habits, it is believed that storm-petrels eat crustaceans, and the occasional mollusc or small fish, all of which are usually snatched

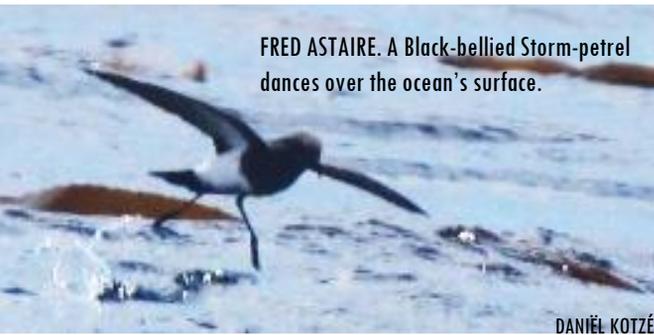


from the ocean surface. When feeding, storm-petrels are often seen 'surface pattering' - holding or moving their feet over the water while hovering just above the surface.

## Sailors' worst nightmare

Unfortunately their small size leaves storm-petrels inherently vulnerable to being blown off course in strong winds. In fact, their name most likely originated from their habit of sheltering behind ships during bad weather. Apparently early sailors associated the appearance of these birds with rough weather to come. I imagine that these unfortunate souls may have seen the dainty storm-petrel as a harbinger of imminent doom. But it is not only sailors that suffer when rough seas hit; without windbreaks such as ships, storm-petrels caught in adverse weather are left to the mercy of the wind. Many are blown close inshore, where in some cases they end up as meals for coastal predators such as

gulls. Both Black-bellied and Grey-backed Storm-petrels breed over the austral summer, nesting in burrows or tunnels beneath dense vegetation. Typical of the petrels, they lay a single egg, which is incubated for about 5-6 weeks, and the chick fledges at about 9-11 weeks. Interestingly, incubation shifts between partners (at least in terms of the Grey-backed Storm-petrel) are poorly synchronised and the egg might go unattended for several days. Despite this, eggs are known to hatch after as many as three days without incubation. Parents return to the burrows under cover of darkness to reduce the chances of predation. So they are most frequently seen illuminated by spot-lamping at night, when they zoom past in what is a very convincing interpretation of a moth. On occasion some individuals may be found foraging over the kelp beds that surround the island. Recently, there has been a spate of sightings of a third species, Wilson's Storm-petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*) around these same kelp beds. This has led to some speculation among expedition members as to whether this species also breeds on the island. No doubt, there is likely to be a good deal of spot lamping over the next few months with the hope of glimpsing a Wilson's. However, while this would be a fantastic addition to the native bird list for the island, it may just be wishful thinking!



FRED ASTAIRE. A Black-bellied Storm-petrel dances over the ocean's surface.

DANIËL KOTZÉ



DANIËL KOTZÉ

WILSON'S STORM-PETREL



## MPHO'S MEMOIRS

TEXT BY MPHO MPHEGO

It has been over eight months on this remote island away from family and friends, but not entirely. I have met a new family, people I regard as brothers and sisters sharing an experience. Absolutely nothing that can be compared to this Marion experience. Imagine walking along the coast one minute listening to the calls of birds, the breaking of the waves and the groaning of seals, and the next having the world around you cloaked in a fine white powder. Majestic to say the least. Being a city boy, the tranquillity here is refreshing. For all its beauty, Marion still has a

side to be feared and respected. Ever changing weather, gale-force winds that causes one to crawl up mountain sides with rocks being blown past you and mires that swallow you are part of the package. It has been the best time of my life. Being in solitude has changed the way I perceive things. Even my identity and perception of myself have changed. With no audience, no one to perform for, I am just here. There is no need to define myself. I have become irrelevant. The moon and the sun is the hour hand, the seasons the minute hand. I have never felt lonely. To put it romantically: I am completely free from the shackles that bound me to myself. *Jehova vhani fhatutshedze nothe miloro ibvele* (God bless all of you and may your wishes come true). *Nnda!*

# GOD'S GRANDEUR

TEXT BY ALEXIS OSBORNE

Since I believe God created everything, I do believe we should see his work manifested in everything we do and observe. This grandeur is particularly visible here on Marion. As a researcher, I am fortunate to witness this first hand. You see it in an albatross soaring above you, two penguins caressing each other during a mating ritual, the sound of a waterfall while flowing down a mountain, a skua crying out saying "my chicks have hatched!" and the snow-covered mountain tops daring you to venture

where few have set foot. The clouds hovering above in different shapes and sizes and killer whales showing-off their calves tells me God is still in control. Even the lava rocks on Marion are of a different nature, some resembles a head of a bird, others a pointing finger, saying "come this way". When night falls, the hills come alive with the singing of birds with different tunes, all making up a rare orchestra performance. Lastly, you can see it in an elephant seal giving birth with the hope that it might one day become a beach-master. Seeing all these things happening right in front of you makes me appreciate life more.

LIEZL PECTORIUS

# NOVEMBER according to the METKASSIES

TEXT BY FRANK VENTER



DANIĚL KOTZÉ

|                      |             |
|----------------------|-------------|
| MAXIMUM WIND GUST    | 140.8 km/h  |
| TOTAL RAINFALL       | 136 mm      |
| HIGHEST IN 24 HOURS  | 42.8 mm     |
| TOTAL DAYS WITH RAIN | 16 days     |
| TOTAL DAYS > 1 MM    | 12 days     |
| TOTAL SUNSHINE       | 159.9 hours |

**CLOUD STREETS.** Among the strange cloud formations seen on Marion, "cloud streets" have arguably drawn the most attention. Although they have not escaped the attention of conspiracy theorists, they are certainly a naturally occurring phenomenon. Cloud streets, or horizontal convective rolls, form over flat areas such as the ocean, when adjacent columns of rising warm air meets sinking cool air. Occasionally mountains, or in our case islands, can disrupt the flow of these "streets" to form patterns and swirls known as von Karman vortex streets.

|             | AVERAGE    | MAXIMUM    | MINIMUM   | AVERAGE MAX | AVERAGE MIN |
|-------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| TEMPERATURE | 5.5°C      | 13°C       | -0.1°C    | 8.6°C       | 2.3°C       |
| PRESSURE    | 1004.6 hPa | 1021.9 hPa | 965.9 hPa | 1009.6 hPa  | 998.7 hPa   |
| HUMIDITY    | 85%        | 100%       | 42%       | -           | -           |

DATA COURTESY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WEATHER SERVICE

**A BLAST**  
from the  
**EAST**

# IN PURSUIT of the **VIARSA**

TEXT BY FRANK VENTER



**Construction of Marion's new base was progressing as scheduled in August 2003, when a call came in requesting help from the SA Agulhas. Not to launch a rescue mission of another stricken vessel, or to evacuate expedition members from a remote island. This voyage would involve a high octane chase across 7000 kilometres, in search of the illegal fishing vessel, Viarsa 1.**

It is a well-known fact that the oceans are over-exploited to such the degree that global fish stocks are threatened with collapse. As such, a number of governments have established Marine Protected Areas, the Prince Edward Islands included. In such areas, fishing and industrial practices are outlawed in an effort to protect the valuable marine life they contain. On 7 August 2003, the patrol ship *Southern Supporter* intercepted a suspicious vessel in the protected waters of Heard Island, Australia. Suspected of illegally fishing for toothfish, the crew of the Uruguayan ship *Viarsa 1*, was ordered to stop. Instead, they opted to flee south, with the Australians in close pursuit. The chase progressed into Antarctic waters, through rough seas and pack ice. Eventually becoming lost in the inhospitable southern seas, the poachers altered their course, fleeing east. It was clear that the chase might be lost if help was not enlisted. The second construction window for the new Marion base, traditionally between August and November, was well underway when personnel were ordered back to the Agulhas. She was to join a British patrol vessel in the *Southern Supporter's* chase. The crew of the *Viarsa 1*

refused to surrender, instead making for the sovereign waters of Uruguay. Eventually reaching 4000 km south-west of Cape Town, escape seemed likely for the poachers. Then on 28 August 2003, the pursuing vessels successfully created a blockade, trapping the *Viarsa 1*. Having nowhere to run, the

**“...found 97 tonnes of toothfish.”**

South African Navy vessel *Drakensberg*, with Australian customs officials on board, moved in on the surrounded ship. *Viarsa 1* was boarded on 3 September 2003, where Australian officers found a staggering 97 tonnes of toothfish. The poachers were arrested, and together with their vessel, escorted back to Australia to stand trial. The trial lasted 2 years, with the poachers eventually being acquitted and set free. While it may seem that these men escaped justice, one might take solace in the fate of the *Viarsa 1*. Being scrapped at an Indian shipyard some time later, her poaching days were certainly over. More than that, the efforts of the SA *Agulhas* and others sent a clear message that illegal fishing in our Marine Protected Area's would not be tolerated.

# MIXED PICKLE

TEXT BY LOW DE VRIES

## The Sealers' Beach Cottage



Mixed Pickle is the hut nearest the ocean (hence Sealers' Beach Cottage or *Huisie by die See*). Lying in the hut you can hear the waves crashing onto the rocks and the fur seal pups calling to their moms.

In many regards Marion is like Dunedin rugby stadium, "the house of pain". Half the time you are cold and wet, your knees hurt and your feet ache. None of this matters though because you love the game and will do anything to keep playing. However, every now and again it is nice to get back to Ellis Park and play a home game. For sealers, this is Mixed Pickle.

### What's in a name?

The name of the hut is explained in an as yet unpublished article by John Cooper, *The field huts of the Price Edward Islands*. The very first recognised biologist, Robert "Bob" Rand walked around Marion Island at the end of 1951 and found a hut that was probably used during the early part of the 20th century by seal hunters. Inside the hut there were bottles of food that were still edible. This included bottles of mixed pickles and the name stuck to the cove where the hut was found and the new hut is now situated. Mixed Pickle was a popular spot for sealers back in the day and that has not changed. During winter there is always at least one member of the mammal researches staying there to do TAPS (Tropicalis Attendance Patterns) and each of us has spent very close to a full month there. Being alone for up to ten days without seeing another human can do strange things to a person, and that is possibly why we start talking to seals. Obviously you can't talk to something if it doesn't have a name, so we have names for the pups according to their tags such as Lucky, Chappie, Maverick and Goose. The library is well stocked with great

books such as *The boy in the striped pyjamas* and a copy of *No pathway here*. Tired of reading? Take a walk inland and have a look around, or try your hand at baking a hut bread. You can even play darts and listen to the traffic on RSG while you have a chuckle at the people stuck in it. At night, White-chinned Petrels perform the role of crickets around the hut. The stream running past the hut doesn't often flow, but when it does it makes a beautiful waterfall onto the beach. Due to Daniël's Project Mixed Pickle, the hut is spotless and organised so one can just relax. ▶



# MIXED PICKLE HUT REVIEW

SPOT THE HUT. The view from the beach

LOW DE VRIES

## The path from Swartkops

It is not even a two hour walk from Swartkops, which means you can have another cup of coffee before you depart. On the way you pass Kaalkoppie, the site of the most recent lava flow on the island. This koppie is made of solidified volcanic ash, also known as tuff, which erodes very easily and here gave rise to formations that resemble a cathedral. Beautiful. You then pass a cat trap and Kampkoppie, but since you have time, why not walk along the coast with beautiful beaches and where all the action is. It's here where you can see a skua defend its chick from a

giant petrel or watch a Wandering Albatross glide with grace over the waves. At the hut you can drop your backpack and take a walk to the beach and play with the fur seal pups, but make sure you go a bit further to also see Triegaardt Bay. Here you can sit on a rock and just stare out over the ocean for hours. On one of the beaches you can still find the remains of an old ship. Once you are back at the hut though, grab a tin of ham and get dinner going, because you might want to get to bed early. Next month we have to walk over Azorellakop. Be ready. And in the meantime, have a merry Christmas!



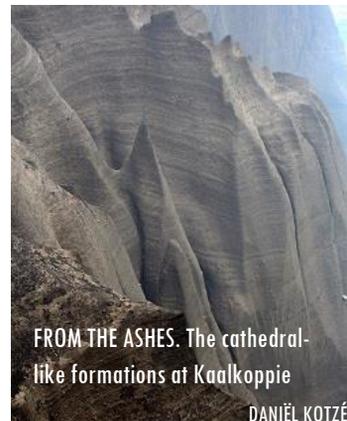
DROP DIGGERS. Low and Daniël digging a new long drop at Mixed Pickle.

LOW DE VRIES



THE GUARD DOG. A Sub-Antarctic fur seal guards over the beautiful Triegaardt Bay.

LOW DE VRIES



FROM THE ASHES. The cathedral-like formations at Kaalkoppie

DANIËL KOTZÉ



STORMY. Heavy swell at Mixed Pickle Cove.

DANIËL KOTZÉ



BLISS. The pup pool

DANIËL KOTZÉ



COZY. The sleeping quarters.

DANIËL KOTZÉ

## RECIPE: MIXED PICKLE DEEP FRIED POTATOES

This is the first recipe I ever recorded in a hut book. Enjoy.

1. Fill a pot with oil and bring the oil to the boil.
2. Open up a tin of potatoes.
3. Once the oil is boiling toss the potatoes in and fry them deeply.
4. Keep them frying.
5. Fry them some more.
6. After a long wait realise that it is impossible to deep fry tinned potatoes, admit to your failure and eat them as is. Oily.



# FANTASTIC FLORA BLECHNUM

TEXT AND PHOTO BY LIEZL PRETORIUS

*Blechnum penna-marina* is a small fern with small leathery leaves. It is common on well-drained lowland slopes, as well as dry mires and lowland feldmark. It is common not only on Marion, but also in numerous other islands and countries. Most fieldworkers will agree that one is generally in two minds about this plant. Walking downhill on blechnum slopes, I've found myself praising this plant on more than one occasion. It is wonderfully soft on the knees and one can make pretty good time down

a steep slope. If blechnum was a superhero, it would be called "The Knee Saver"! However, for every downhill slope, there is usually a more severe uphill waiting for you. And instantly your love for this little fern turns into pure hatred. Okay, no, hatred is too strong a word, it's only a plant. Let's rather call it displeasure. For the same innocent-looking fern now suddenly becomes a (literally) breath-taking, leg muscle exhausting obstacle of note! It does make you feel the joy of reaching the top of a hill more intensely though. So I guess it has its physical and psychological advantages. Blechnum is not as spectacular as some of the other plants on Marion, but for some reason

it holds a special place in my heart. Maybe it's because it serves as a great lunch spot during long field days or because it provides an easy way around mires. Maybe it's just because it's almost everywhere. And as we approach Christmas, I can't help but imagine it as small Christmas trees. Then I think of family and friends back home and I smile.



THE KNEE SAVER. Blechnum is great for downhill hiking and afternoon naps in the field.

## HOW M71 CELEBRATED CHRISTMAS!

TEXT BY DANIËL KOTZÉ

Christmas day 2014 on Marion Island was certainly a special event that will not be forgotten. We were divided into a brunch and dinner team and everyone worked together in good spirits to create some of the most inspiring dishes we've seen this year. A church service was held after brunch and we even got a band together (two guitars and a violin) to praise and worship. How we missed singing! A special thanks to Louise for going all out with the creative Christmas decorations. After dinner Geneveive presented a slideshow of M71 photos as far back as team training, which had us all laughing at how some of us have changed! Thanks to all for celebrating this day in the true spirit of Christ.



LOW DE VRIES



LOW DE VRIES



LIEZL PRETORIUS



LIEZL PRETORIUS



VONICA PEROLD



VONICA PEROLD



LIEZL PRETORIUS



LIEZL PRETORIUS

# DECEMBER EVENTS

Mseventyfun TEXT BY FRANK VENTER

## Gerard's Birthday Potjie

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, Gerard celebrated his 58<sup>th</sup> birthday. Blessed with great weather, M71 spent the day in the braai room soaking up the sun, socializing, and of course, making a delicious potjie! Being an experienced expeditioner, Gerard has celebrated birthdays on Gough and at SANAE. We hope that this Marion birthday was a memorable one, and that there are many more adventures in future!

## Mpho's Soccer Birthday

The 20<sup>th</sup> of December marked the birthday of Marion's Space Engineer, Mpho. The occasion was the perfect opportunity for us overworked Marionites to unwind by partaking in action soccer. Congratulations to Zuko, Yinhla, Tshilidzi and Mpho for winning the tournament! Pizza was served after the games, and the day ended with M71 showing off its dance talent (with hilarious video footage to prove it). Happy birthday Mpho!



DANIËL KOTZÉ



LIEZL PRETORIUS



VONICA PEROLD



LOUISE GADNEY



VONICA PEROLD



DANIËL KOTZÉ



LOUISE GADNEY



DANIËL KOTZÉ



DANIËL KOTZÉ



VONICA PEROLD

LIEZL

LOW

# SEALERS

## SHARE THEIR SECRETS

TEXT BY DANIEL KOTZE



Liezl Pretorius and Low de Vries are both highly qualified researchers and Gauteng residents. Being a sealer is one of the toughest jobs on Marion. It involves thousands of km's hiking and sometimes getting into tricky situations with these dangerous animals. We asked them how they coped with this and more.



### QUICK FACTS

LOW DE VRIES

#### LIEZL & LOW'S FAVOURITE...

**MOVIE:** *Big Fish* & *The Big Lebowski*

**BOOK:** *The Chronicles of Narnia* by CS Lewis & *Last Chance to See* by Douglas Adams

**SONG:** *Love is not a fight* by Warren Barfield & *Back in Black* (album) by ACDC



LOW DE VRIES

LIEZL

### 1. What is your academic background?

LOW

In 2004 I graduated in Human Medicine and Surgery (MBChB) at UP, in 2006 I received an honours degree in Zoology at NMMU, and in 2013 a Veterinary Medicine (BVSc) degree at Onderstepoort, UP.

I did a BSc in Zoology followed by an Honours degree with a project focussed on mole rats and their circadian rhythms. After that I started an MSc on aardwolves which I upgraded to a PhD later on. I finished my PhD in Zoology last year.

### 2. What countries outside Southern Africa have you visited and why?

In 1998 I spent a year on Bainbridge Island, Washington, United States as an Au Pair. During that time I also travelled to Vancouver and Victoria in Canada, as well as Maui, Hawaii. It was a great experience!

During my honours I went on an exchange program to Germany for four months. We lived off very cheap pasta and saved up enough money to tour to Switzerland, France, Italy, Austria, England, Ireland and Scotland.

### 3. What is your favourite seal species and why?

Elephant seals. They are big, but quite vulnerable and gentle. Some will even allow you to sit next to them. Cows and pups have strong bonds and special calls, while the beach masters have impressive testosterone displays to protect their harem. And those big eyes are just adorable!

Probably the Sub-Antarctic fur seals (*A. tropicalis*). I spent a lot of time with them during TAPS and I love their attitude; they just have that little swagger!



One of the toughest days I've had on Marion was when Yinhla and I had to weigh ten elephant seal weaners in a row, all between 100 and 160kg! And then there is the constant walking. I would like to quote a friend, Chris Oosthuizen (and sealer legend), on this subject: "Some days you walk and you grow (as a person); and on other days you just walk." The best part is spending so much time with these amazing marine mammals and seeing their full life cycles.

#### 5. What are your plans after Marion?

I will be taking a short holiday to spend some time with family and friends, eating a lot of fresh fruit and veggies. After that I will most probably do some locum work in the veterinary field.

#### 6. Share one of your most memorable moments on Marion.

My first killer whale sighting up close! It has been a life-long dream to see them in the wild. I fondly remember a little orca bath toy that had to endure many adventures with me. Every time I see them, my heart skips a beat and I am humbled to know that the Lord has made these majestic animals with so much love.

#### 7. As only the 4<sup>th</sup> female sealer, what would your advice be to aspiring female sealers?

You will be tested mentally, but even more physically, beyond anything you've ever experienced. At times you will just have to draw on the passion for the animals and put your head down and do the work. The previous female sealers (even though I don't know them all) have been a great inspiration to me, especially on really difficult days. The mere fact that they survived it, gave me that extra boost whenever I needed it. Thank you, ladies, for paving the way!

The toughest must be when you are sitting in a hut or base with a warm cup of coffee looking out at the pouring rain and howling wind knowing that you have to go out to work in it. Overcoming the elements and being able to work so closely with these incredible animals is something special. It's basically like living an episode of *BBC Planet Earth*.

#### 5. Any interesting pets back home?

I have a few snakes, scorpions and spiders which are used for training purposes. I do demonstrations for companies to teach people how to work around these animals without harming them and to show that they are a very important part of the environment.

#### 7. What other hobbies do you have?

Anything outdoors really, camping, hiking, scuba diving, birding and all those. I also love making music with the band back home.

**"It's basically like living an episode of *BBC Planet Earth*"**



SAY WHAT? Liezl surprising an elephant seal weaner.

EDUISE GADNEY



BULL FIGHT. Low struggling to read a beach master's tag at King Penguin Bay.

YINHLA SHIHLOMULE

IN FOR THE KILL Low getting a close view of a killer whale hunting.

LIEZL PRETORIUS

First and foremost, my family and close friends. I love you guys so much! Also being able to swim in the ocean. This island is pure torture in this regard as one is constantly surrounded by so much water and perfect waves, but it is too cold!

I really miss live music, food, my family and my friends. In no specific order, but I would be willing to trade a friend or two for some sushi and a cream soda!



LOUISE GADNEY

PARTY! New year festivities.



LOUISE GADNEY

MOTHERLY INSTINCT. Liezl handling a fur seal pup at Trypot Beach



CHRISTMAS. Dressed for the occasion.

YONICA PEROLD



YINHLA SHIHLOMULE

BOOT LEG. Helping to keep up Boot Rock.



FRANK WENTER

PIRATE. Night birding.



LIEZL PRETORIUS

SEA DOG. Low with an elephant seal pup.



LIEZL PRETORIUS

HIGH FIVE! Getting to know a moulting elephant seal better.

# WATERTUNNEL: GAZELLE BATTLEGROUND

TEXT BY YINHLA SHIHLOMULE

All the actual inhabitants of Marion is returning to breed. This includes the controversial animals of the island known for their bad behaviour (like having sex with penguins). This is the Antarctic fur seals (*Arctocephalus gazella*), known to us as gazellas. The most traumatizing thing I have yet observed on the island was one of the young bulls at Archway Bay "cuddling" with a King Penguin. Other than that, there are good guys I call the warriors, who fight to actually reproduce. They get brutally injured while fighting for females and some even die in the battle. The Lesser Shearwaters, skuas and giant petrels always looking to exploit wounds for an easy meal make things even worse for them. These bulls will do absolutely anything to see their genes transferred to the next generation. Survival of the fittest makes more sense when one is around these wonderful creatures. Although it is sometimes a cruel sight to see these injured bulls, I respect the way that they give everything to be successful.

DANIEL KOTZE



YINHLA SHIHLOMULE



# TEAM COLLAGE

COMPILED BY FRANK VENTER

## What has M71 been up to this month?

### Around the island

