

The **WANDERER**

Marion Island News

March 2015

**GOODBYE
GAZELLAS**

**ONE DAY
ROUND
ISLAND**

**ANOTHER
CHINSTRAP!**

THE SHIP IS COMING
INSIDE THE *SA AGULHAS II*

INTERVIEW WITH THE

O&C BIRDERS

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PENGUINS



environmental affairs

Department:
Environmental Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



MARION 71

Expedition 46°36'S 37°57'E

16

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The secrets of a small island

When I recently sent an issue of *The Wanderer* to an old friend of mine, I received an e-mail from her shortly afterward expressing her surprise at the fact that so much can be written about such small an island. In fact, during this expedition we have filled more than 200 pages of *The Wanderer* with Marion-inspired content, and there's even more to come. Even though Marion Island is less than 300 km² in size, it seems to have a bottomless pit of secrets and surprises. Even after spending a full year on the island, our eyes are still treated to new sights like the recently hatched Wandering Albatross chicks (p.4) and the young Antarctic fur seal pups heading to the ocean for their

very first time (p.15). Marion also surprised us once again this month with another sighting of a Chinstrap Penguin (after an absence of 26 years!) and a southern right whale (p.4).

On a personal level, I also feel like I can still learn a great deal more from my 18 fellow expedition members, like learning to play the violin from David (p.19) or learning to perfect a karate kick from John. When focusing on what I *have* learned however, I am grateful to the brim for being blessed with an opportunity of

this magnitude. I hope that you have also learned something from this small island through M71's lenses and writing. If not, this is your chance!



DANIËL KOTZÉ
EDITOR



Letter from the editor

GOD'S BEAUTIFUL CREATURES

TEXT BY LIEZL PRETORIUS

Life on Marion has changed all of us. There is no way that you can spend a year on a remote island, far removed from family, old friends and all our creature-comforts, without it having some or other impact on your life. For me, personally, it has been a wake-up call towards our dependence on God. When I look at all the creatures (birds and mammals alike), I can only marvel at how perfectly they were made. They know exactly what and where their place is within the bigger creation and they do exactly what they were made to do. Just look at the Wandering Albatrosses. Whether they soar through the sky, live out on the ocean or rear a per-

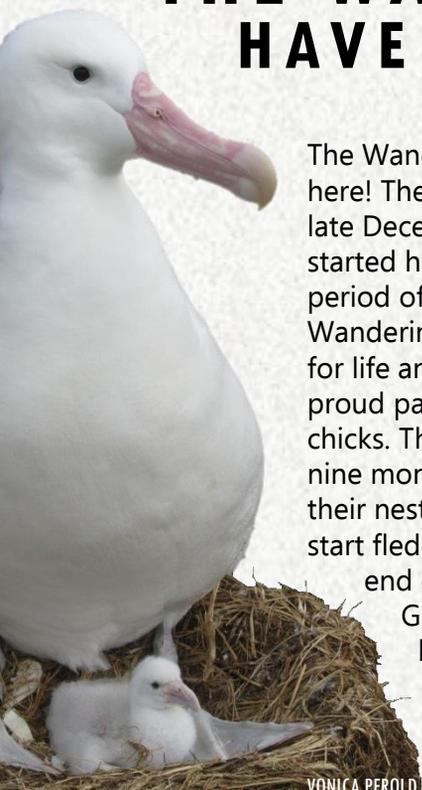
fectly fluffy chick, they do it with grace and commitment without bounds. When I look at adults incubating their eggs through horrible storms (rain, snow, wind or all three), I am humbled at their endurance. Humans can learn a lot from them. Another example is the fur seals. They have to endure quite a lot to complete a year's life cycle. Raising hungry little pups are not easy and it's inspiring to see them returning from sea to feed their young. They are extremely tired after all the hunting, but they have completely committed themselves to their young. Their unique calls to each other has made me weep (yes, I will admit to this!) on more than one occasion. Elephant seals are just as amazing. For three weeks after giving birth to a beautiful black pup, the female will suckle her pup almost continuously,

getting them ready for life on their own as astonishing, silver little weaners. Not only are they extremely functional, they are beautiful beyond words as well! And that is only the start of their journey. I could mention many other examples, but let's just say that each creature that I've come across this year has taught me something important. I hope to take all these lessons and apply it in my life back on the main land. And I pray that all of us get to know our rightful place in God's creation, learn to live without doubts and fear, to humbly seek out God's purpose for ourselves and to look at others through heaven's eyes. Fellow Marionites, thank you for being my island family. You have been an inspiration to me and I will never forget you. You are all beautifully made creatures!

NEWSFLASH

THE WANDERERS HAVE HATCHED!

TEXT BY VONICA PEROLD



The Wandering Albatross chicks are here! The eggs were laid between late December and January and started hatching after an incubation period of approximately two months. Wandering Albatrosses usually mate for life and it is wonderful to see the proud parents lovingly care for their chicks. The chicks will spend the first nine months or so of their lives on their nests until they start fledging at the end of the year.

Good luck
little ones –
M71 will
miss you!



DANIËL KOTZÉ

VONICA PEROLD

SOUTHERN RIGHT WHALE

TEXT BY YINHLA SHIHLOMULE



YINHLA SHIHLOMULE

During an elephant seal south census on 20 March, I was fortunate enough to see a single southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*) at Whale Bird Point. This is the second sighting of this species during our expedition, the previous one sighted in November last year. To add a cherry on the cake, Marion continued to reveal some wonderful creatures in the form of two white-faced Macaroni Penguins at Kildalkey Bay. "To walk is to see" – Tsonga proverb.



YINHLA SHIHLOMULE

ANOTHER CHINSTRAP!

TEXT BY ALEXIS OSBORNE



ALEXIS OSBORNE

On 13 March, during a late afternoon stroll to Good Hope Bay to do Grey-headed Albatross counts, Vonica and I were rewarded with a rare Chinstrap Penguin sighting. After Geneveive and John sighted a Chinstrap at the close of last year, most of us were all quite jealous. Every time I passed Bullard Beach, I hoped to see a Chinstrap, but to no avail. Luckily my fortunes changed and seeing the Chinstrap felt like a true accomplishment. I can now tick that off my bucket list. By comparing markings, this Chinstrap was distinguished from the one seen at Bullard Beach. The only other Chinstrap on Marion was recorded in January 1989!

'TIS THE SEASON

TEXT BY DANIËL KOTZÉ

The 'mice season' is upon us! The invasive house mouse (*Mus musculus*) are found year round on Marion, but become very active at base and the huts between March and June. Although on a small scale, trapping by team members reduces mice numbers in these areas. And no, cats are not the answer!



The Photo Gallery

COMPILED BY DANIĚL KOTZÉ



Memories from March

With March being the final month that Marion Island “belongs” to M71, photographers did not waste any opportunity to fill their viewfinders with the spectacular landscapes and animals that they soon will come to miss.

Liezl Pretorius

BFF's



Two little yearling elephant seals hauled out at Mixed Pickle Cove and kept each other warm by snuggling up to one another. All that was missing were two “Best Friends Forever” rings on those beautiful nails.



How?

Nikon Coolpix AW110;
1/30 sec; f4.8; ISO 360.



Majestic Gentoo

This Gentoo Penguin took my breath away when I saw him standing on a rocky outcrop at Trypot Beach, looking all proud and warrior-like. He did not shy away from me when I moved in for the shot and when I moved away, he just kept on staring into the distance. I wonder what he was thinking about...

How?

Nikon Coolpix AW110; 1/400 sec; f8.4; ISO 125.

Wandering Wanderer

I sat down on the blechnum one afternoon trying to get a silhouette of a Wandering Albatross. As I sat down though, the sun disappeared behind a cloud. I sat for a while and then this albatross got curious and wandered over to me, getting close enough to nip at my camera. Great experience.



How? Canon 700D; 1/200 sec; f11; ISO 200; flash.

Get out of my pool! ▶

During TAPS at Mixed Pickle I walked into the pup pool and tried to get some shots of the pups swimming. Some swam over and played around my boots. Other were less happy with my presence

How? Canon 700D; 1/250 sec; f8; ISO 800.



Alexis Osborne



◀ Proud Parents

During my visit to the Wandering Albatross colony at Goney Plain, I met these two adults with a chick. The egg has recently hatched and the parents came across very protective and very proud.

How? Canon 350D; 1/1000 sec; f16; ISO 400.

Karookop in Colour

It's not often that you have clear skies going over Karookop. The sun enhances the red scoria, blue sky and green azorella to vivid shades.

How? Canon 700D; 1/400 sec; f4.5; ISO 100.



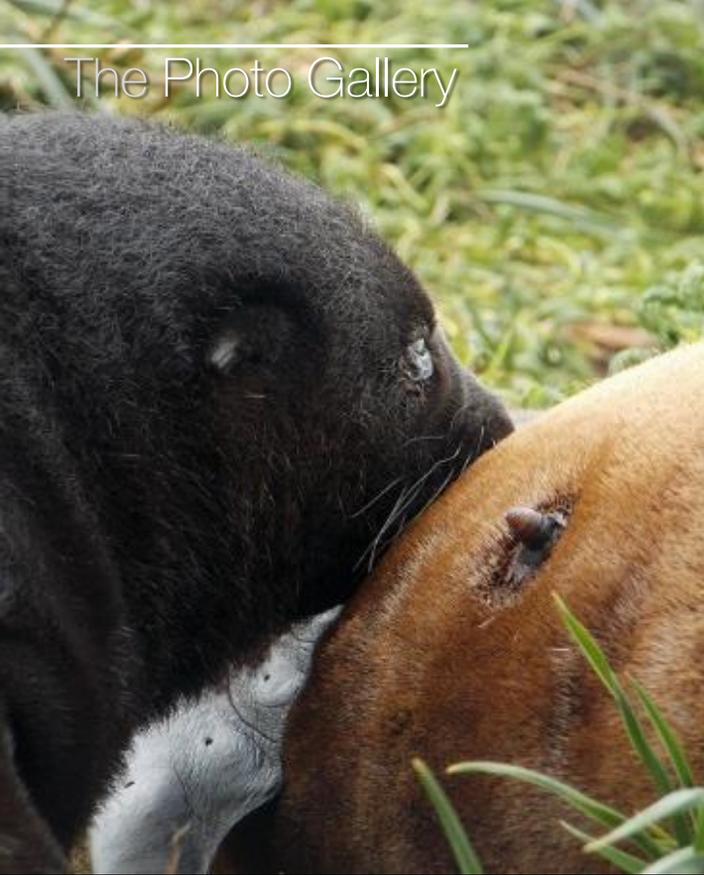
Where's Wally? ▼

This is a part of the Kildalkey penguin colony, Kings at the back and Macaronis in the front.

Yinhla Shihlomule

How? Canon 650D; 1/500 sec; f7.1; ISO 1600.





Frank Venter

Got Milk? ▲

On a recent trip to Mixed Pickle, I had the opportunity to witness a suckling sub-Antarctic fur seal pup. Mom was fast asleep, with the pup enjoying its meal way too much to notice my presence.

How? Nikon Coolpix; 1/60 sec; f5.8; ISO 125.



Louise Gadney

Rocky Hunchback ▲

I photographed this grumpy Rockhopper Penguin at the picturesque Triegaardt Bay. He seemed rather displeased with the cold.

How? Canon PowerShot A1400;
1/160 sec; f6.3; ISO 200.



How? Canon 600D; 1/200 sec; f7.1; ISO 200.

David Green

◀ Repetto's Hill Vantage

I took this photo (with Boot Rock in frame) from the top of Repetto's Hill close to sunset when the clouds broke, showing off a magnificent sky. Sunsets here at Marion are unparalleled in their beauty.

ONE DAY ROUND ISLAND

69KM 21 HOURS

TEXT BY DANIĚL KOTZÉ



THE TROPHY



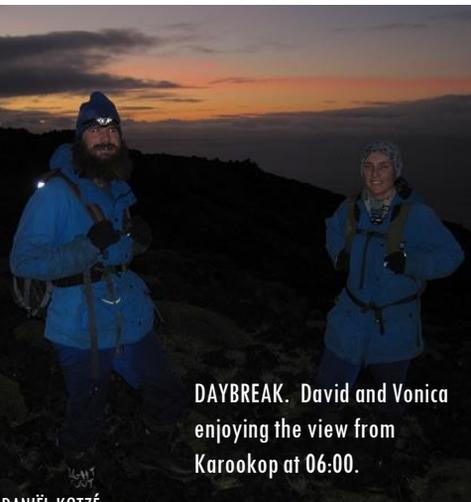
It's 02:00 on the morning of the 28th of March and three headlamps are heading south from base to complete one of Marion's toughest challenges: a one day round island (ODRI). The rules are simple: leave from base, visit every coastal hut and return to base within 24 hours. With cheers from team members, Vonica, David and Daniël were on their way to Kildalkey. Alexis also joined for the first leg of the journey to encourage the trio with his Namaqualand jokes and a send-off prayer. As with most adventures, there were some early setbacks...

LIEZL PRETORIUS

The Tessa tape and epoxy that David used to fix a cut in his gumboot the previous night came off within 15 minutes and his left foot was enjoying a permanent bath. We also underestimated the challenge of navigating in the dark and soon found ourselves at the lake on top of Mesrug, slightly off

course. Luckily Richard and Zuko were spending the night at Kildalkey and Richard was kind enough to swap one of his boots with David. Then the icy rain started which was not predicted by *yr.no*. A quick pause in rain exposed a pastel daybreak from Karookop. We were soaking at Grey-headed and breakfasted for almost an hour, listening to inspiring tunes from DJ Friezl (Frank and Liezl). Clear skies lifted the spirits and we were singing anything from F.A.K. to rap. The legs kept strong past Rook's and Swartkop, but fuel was needed at Mixed Pickle to tackle Azorellakop. Louise's droëwors was swallowed down with Bioplus, while DJ Friezl's beats were motivating us on the radio once again. Triegaardt Bay was

spectacular from the top in the late afternoon sun, but the latter soon disappeared and mist delayed our pace while descending to Cape Davis. Here it was again time to mount our headlamps for the home stretch. After a hard 40 minutes we reached Repetto's, where Frank spoiled us with messages from our fiancée, girlfriend and



DAYBREAK. David and Vonica enjoying the view from Karookop at 06:00.

DANIĚL KOTZÉ



THE RELIEF TEAM. Liezl and Frank in Hopptes Hell with the surprise cakes for the ODRI team.

LIEZL PRETORIUS

ONE DAY ROUND ISLAND

boyfriend respectively. This gave us the needed encouragement to struggle over Long Ridge and reach Hoppies Hell. Great was our surprise (and joy!) when we found three lonely cokes in the path there. We later heard that the cokes (sponsored by Louise) were carried out earlier in the day by DJ Friezl, what legends! The delightful fizzy liquid gave us the energy to make it back to base just before 23:00. We received a hero's welcome, champagne, hot lasagne and the gumboot trophy by team members. Thanks for the support guys!

A GPS logger revealed the total distance to be 69.1 km, which we covered in 20 hours and 50 minutes. We added our names below the 13 other names on the ODRI gumboot trophy and broke the record for the largest party to complete this challenge. Vonica also became only the second lady in ODRI history to add her name to the gumboot. Congratulations Vonica, it is well deserved! After 42 hours without sleep and sore feet, I did not take any detours to my bed. This was one of the longest, but also most memorable days of my life.



DANIEL KOTZÉ



LIEZLPRETORIUS

FEBRUARY according to the METKASSIES

TEXT BY JOE KLAASEN

On February the 11th the heavens opened up on Marion Island. Lunch time's hungry stomach growls was replaced with a deafening thunderstorm and buckets of rain. It continued for a whole hour. All the streams were coming alive after a record 29.5 mm of rain was reported by the automatic rain gauge in two hours. We reported 37.9mm of rain for that day, the fourth highest rainfall in 24 hours during our time here on the island. Luckily we were also spoiled with some wonderful warm days as well.

MAXIMUM WIND GUST	127.6 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL	114.7 mm
HIGHEST IN 24 HOURS	35.8 mm
TOTAL DAYS WITH RAIN	10 days
TOTAL DAYS > 1 MM	9 days
TOTAL SUNSHINE	121.9 hours

DUSK AT NEVILLE. Although February produced the highest recorded maximum temperature of the expedition, along with creamy sunsets like this one at Mixed Pickle, we also had a thunderstorm and record downpours.

	AVERAGE	MAXIMUM	MINIMUM	AVERAGE MAX	AVERAGE MIN
TEMPERATURE	8°C	16.8°C	0.5°C	11.4°C	4.6°C
PRESSURE	1010.8 hPa	1023 hPa	981.2 hPa	1014.8 hPa	1006.5 hPa
HUMIDITY	89%	100%	35%	-	-

DATA COURTESY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WEATHER SERVICE

THE SHIP IS COMING

Inside the **SA AGULHAS II**

TEXT BY FRANK VENTER



There is a jovial mood in the air as South African and Finnish dignitaries gather in Rauma, a quaint seaside village in Finland. The 11th of July 2012 marks the occasion that a special ship, the first in her class, takes to the water. Polar research laboratory, passenger ship and cargo vessel, that ship is the *SA Agulhas II*.

South Africa is a founding member of the Antarctic treaty, and as such has a responsibility toward the protection and scientific study of Antarctica, and its surrounds. To fulfil this role, the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) manages three bases: SANAE IV in Antarctica, Gough Island, and Marion Island. While extensive land-based research is performed at these bases, DEA also has com-

mitments to meteorological and oceanographic research at sea. This is a massive undertaking, requiring the transport of scientists, maintenance crews, cargo and fuel.

Building the *SA Agulhas II*

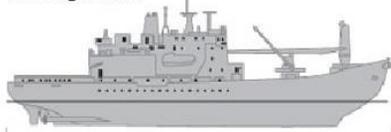
For over three decades, the original *Agulhas*, an icon of Antarctic exploration and research, satisfied the logistical needs of DEA. Come 2005 however, the aging vessel was no longer suitable for these demands. This prompted DEA to commission a brand new, purpose built vessel, with STX Finland being the successful bidder. Finland has a proud ship building history, and their Rauma shipyard was to be the birthplace of the *Agulhas'* replacement. The new ship was to be assembled from 26 separate blocks, with the first

steel being cut in September 2010. On January 2011, the South African ambassador to Finland placed coins from the two countries on the first of those blocks. With her hull completed six months later, the ship took to the water, and was named the *SA Agulhas II*.

The ship at a glance

Unlike the original, the *Agulhas II* was purpose built to be an ice-breaking research vessel. The bow is designed to break sea ice of up to 1 m thick, while still travelling at 5 knots. She is the first ship in the world which is allowed to carry both passengers, and bulk fuel. The innovation doesn't stop there however, as she is also the first ship in the world to satisfy SOLAS' stringent safety specifications. Safety is taken so seriously in fact, that under-deck

S.A. Agulhas I



Length: 111.95m
Breadth: 18.5m

S.A. Agulhas II



Length: 134.2m
Breadth: 21.7m

heating keeps the decks ice-free, even at -35 degrees Celsius! With her eight permanent, and six containerised laboratories, on-board scientists can perform oceanographic, meteorological, and biodiversity research among others. Other high-tech features include the ability to take core samples of the seabed at over 5000 m, and an automatic weather station which sends data to Pretoria in real-time. Such innovation does not come at the cost of comfort, as the *Agulhas II* sports facilities such as an auditorium, gym, sauna, bar and library.

The voyage home

On the 8th of May 2015, we will board the *Agulhas II* for our journey home. Unfortunately for those inclined to sea-sickness, this voyage will take seven days, opposed to the usual five. The extra time at sea will be spent performing oceanographic research. While it will be sad to leave Marion, a voyage on this magnificent ship is worth looking forward to. Food lovers can eat to their heart's content in the dining hall three times a day, while avid birders can spend hours on the observation deck snapping away. For those of us who love technology, a tour of the engine room or bridge won't disappoint.

QUICK FACTS

- Cost:** R1.5 Billion
- Number of passenger:** 100
- Number of crew:** 44
- Helicopters:** 2
- Propulsion:** Diesel-electric (2 x 4500 kW)
- Speed in open water:** 16 knots (30 km/h)
- Speed in 1m thick ice:** 5 knots (9.3 km/h)
- Cargo space:** 4000 m³
- Operating range:** 28000 km



ROUGH SEAS

DANIËL KOTZÉ



BATHROOM

DANIËL KOTZÉ



CABIN

DANIËL KOTZÉ



BAR

GENEVEIVE MOROKE



BIRDING

CHRIS OOSTHUIZEN

ROUND-ISLAND: MY THANK YOU GIFT

TEXT BY LOUISE GADNEY

Prayers, hopes and dreams *do* come true. I dreamed of doing something different last year and here I am living this dream on Marion. I prayed I could be more than just the medic for M71 and I have been blessed through careful guidance to help in the field. The sealers with TAPS/GAPS and pup weighing, while the birders often kindly invite me to penguin weighing and moult sampling. I hoped I could achieve a round-island trip despite being the second oldest team member with the athletic abilities of a confessed chocoholic-couch potato! So it was with much delight and fear when Liezl (sealer, friend and confidant) announced that she booked our hut nights for my first round-island. Her thank-you gift to me for helping with the fieldwork. I was *actually* going to achieve a round-island, a big deal for any base paddie! The 20th of March came far too quickly, excitement rendered no real sleep the night before but I was ready. Daniël (killer whaler), Liezl and I stepped out into a coldish day heading fort Grey-headed hut, the furthest I have ever been from



DANIËL KOTZÉ

base. My first hurdle was the climb up Black Haglet Valley. I have come down that way but now I was going up! Johnny- and Arthur's Hill could be seen from the top. What a view! In the gentle persistent rain my glasses were of no help and Karookop and Santa Rosa Valley became a very interesting contest between my feet and perceived vision. Suddenly we were at the shiny orange Grey-headed hut. All of us tired, but happy. Daniël soon prepared a delicious dinner for the three of us.

Marion's west side

I had a great view of the Grey-headed Albatross chicks as we headed up the ridge after breakfast and quick walk down to the spectacular Good Hope Bay. Daniël turned back after Rook's Peninsula and Liezl and I reached Rook's hut in bathing sunshine. I provided some entertainment to the penguins at Rook's Cave when I slipped. A hut bath now became essential. The next day I longed to send my legs out to walk by themselves so the rest of me could sleep! Liezl kindly decided we should walk coastally to Swartkop hut, and what a walk this was! Lava domes, cracked veg-lava, lakes and volcanic ash plains where one could easily do a 100m sprint! The crashing waves and majestic mountains left me wondering why I would want to ever leave Marion. At Swartkop there were Wandering Albatrosses nesting as far as the eye could see. I could not help gazing and trying to commit all to memory. That night, my pickled button mushrooms were delicious! Our fourth day started in admiration of the awesome Amphitheatre filled to capacity with moulting Macaroni Penguins, dainty feathers blowing softly around our feet while our cameras were doing overtime. Liezl guided us coastally past Kaalkoppie and Chess Castle Beach

towards her sealer home, Mixed Pickle. Here I saw my first Light-mantled Albatross whilst a curious skua chick investigated Liezl's outstretched fingers.

Whenever we stopped a paddy would always (unsuccessfully) try to get some tasty morsel from our dirty walking sticks. A starry night was enjoyed with Liezl's delightful hut burgers. The next morning Liezl

chuckling told me that, judging by my snoring, I probably slept well. The fifth day we explored Fur Seal Peninsula and Triegaardt Bay and watching seal pups splashing in the pool. At times a pup's curiosity would get the better of it and we would be treated to their trusting, innocent ink-black gazes and quizzical looks. We even received visitors. Rendani, Joe and Mpho were treated with Liezl's honey flapjacks and iced tea before climbing Azorellakop. The next day was my turn, without glasses due to the rain! It was tedious, tumbling fun, but Liezl's patience and skill got us to Cape Davis. Boot Rock, rising out of the sea before the hut, made me remember my first visit to *The Beer and Buoy*. The sound of the White-chinned Petrels were beautiful during our candlelight dinner (Yes, no ESKOM black-outs, no running water or flushing toilets!)

The homecoming

Now for the homeward stretch, past Repetto's and up Long Ridge. I cannot say it was easy, it seemed every little hill on way back to base taunted me, but like a courageous Joan of Arc, Liezl dispelled all my doubts and fears. No one was anyways going to come and get me now, I had to get myself back to base! Hoppie's Hell gave me a first glimpse of base, now I was happy, legs getting stronger and I knew I could celebrate with that rare island commodity: ice-cold Coke! A million thanks to Liezl, it's been the best gift ever. Praise be to God!



LOUISE GADNEY



LIEZL PRETORIUS

MACI CROWD. Louise at the Amphitheatre close to Swartkop hut. LEFT: Liezl gazing out from Repetto's 'throne'.

A Reader's Round Island:

BACK BASE

Time to go home

TEXT BY LOW DE VRIES

Repetto's hut is nestled in the shadow of Repetto's Hill, one of the many volcanic cones on Marion. This specific one is known as a single cone as it stands alone, and at an impressive

LOW DE VRIES

Huts and cricket

Many things on Marion are hard to describe to people back home, and a field workers love for a field hut is one of those things. It is almost the same as trying to describe test cricket to a foreigner (by the way, AB and the boys, you made us proud! #Proteafire). In the end you have to take them to a game, put something cold in their hand and tell to watch and enjoy the pure brilliance that is going to unfold in front of them. The huts are the same. How could you possibly explain the relief you feel when you have been walking in the rain for more than ten hours. The wind has been blowing from the front so that the rain blows horizontally and you have a waterfall down your back. Seals have chased you and you had to wade through lakes of penguin faeces while they splatter you full of it. You have finished your emergency tin of sardines two hours ago, you are out of game and down to your last purple sparkle. Dead on your feet. Then the hut appears. A dry warm spot with coffee and a soft mattress. It is something that you have to experience to appreciate, and I hope that it came through in my articles. However, it's time to go home now.

Leaving home

Since about September people stopped saying that they are walking back to base, but rather that they are going home because that is what this

place has become now. Home. And now it is time to take the last journey of the round island and head back home to prepare the base. You see, in a few days the ship will be next to the island and then it is time for a very strange occurrence called take-over. As I understand this phenomenon there will be a about a hundred people on the island, which is terrifying to say the least since we have not had more than 19 people in base for 11 months. Anyhow, there will be a whole bunch of people who will work around the island and at the end of all this they throw you in a helicopter, fly you to the ship and that's it. Your time is done. It doesn't matter if you want to go or not, if you still need that last photograph or time to perfect your hut bread. No, you have to go back to the main land whether you want to or not. As excited as we are to go home, I think many people wouldn't mind staying just a little longer. Just to get one more hut night or one more walk to Archway. Just long enough to see a diving petrel or see a killer whale breach. One more round island. Just one more. It certainly won't be easy leaving paradise.

From Repetto's to Base

The road back to base is a short one, easily under three hours, so take your time and enjoy the last bit. You have a choice of two routes as always, coastal or inland. The coastal route is great, amazing even and has some of the best beaches



HUT REVIEW: REPETTO'S

on the island: Goney, King Penguin and Pinnacle. Better than the beaches are probably the lack of mires, which is plentiful on the inland route all the way up to Prinsloomeer. The inland path has the upside of taking you to a waterfall that pours out of the middle of Long Ridge, literally just coming out of the ground. It is a must see. Whichever route you choose you have to go up and over Long Ridge, which is the last bump in the road, so to speak. After that you head for the northern slope of Third Sister towards Junior's Kop, where you will find the path home. The well trodden path takes you through Hoppie's Hell, over the

Van den Boogaard River and all the way to base. And that's it, you are home. Your round island is done. Now it is time to hit the showers, because, let's face it, you need one. Then throw a piece of steak (that was freshly frozen a year ago) on the braai.

From now on it is time to prepare the base for take-over which is days away. Time to pack your trunks, move out of your room and prepare for the onslaught of people that is about to arrive. Don't worry though, there is always one escape route away from everybody, straight up the mountain to our final hut. See you there next month.



OBEDIENT THIRST. The impressive waterfall bubbling out of Long Ridge.

LOW DE VRIES

THANKS FOR THE LAUGHS

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY LOW DE VRIES

People say that laughter is the best medicine, and I have always found the saying very annoying. I mean, sure, it makes you feel better, but it's never cured the common cold now has it? However, that being said, if laughter really is that good for you surely the cause behind the laughter deserves all the praise, such as a sub-Antarctic fur seal (*tropicalis*) pup. No matter how tough your day has been, these little guys will always put a smile on your face. Whether they are playing in a pup pool, snoozing on the veg or play fighting, they are the little clowns of the island with completely too much attitude to be contained in those tiny bodies. Thanks for the laughs guys.



GOODBYE GAZELLAS

TEXT AND PHOTO BY DANIËL KOTZÉ

The Antarctic fur seal pups (*gazellas*) have left Marion at the end of March to hunt and explore the waters of the southern Indian Ocean and beyond. The Trypot and Watertunnel colonies were weighed for the last time on 27 March with some pups weighing up to 18 kg! *Gazellas* suckle for only four months, compared to the 10-month suckling period of *tropicalis* pups. Thanks for the memories furries!



A perusal of PENGUINS

TEXT BY DAVID GREEN

BIRD FAMILY OF THE MONTH

The 10th and final Marion bird family is arguably the best known – family Spheniscidae, commonly known as penguins. This tiny speck of land in the southern Indian Ocean is home to four species of penguins that range in size from the tiny Southern Rockhopper Penguin (*Eudyptes chrysocome*), through the larger Macaroni- (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*) and even larger Gentoo Penguins (*Pygoscelis papua*), to the giant King Penguin (*Aptenodytes patagonicus*).

WOBBLY FEET. King Penguins might be clumsy on land, but their long flippers propel them through the ocean at great speeds.

There are few birds that can be so easily anthropomorphised as penguins. Their inability to fly, upright stance and cumbersome walk are characteristics that make them easy to identify. Indeed, it is quite easy to envisage them as miniature humans. Over the years, popular culture has reinvented the penguin as a 'cute and cuddly', and an often clumsy creature; an image that makes them ideal protagonists for numerous children's movies. Unfortunately, this anthropomorphism is a bit misleading and we lose sight of penguins for what they truly are - remarkably specialised seabirds.

Masters of the sea

Morphologically, penguins are built for the water, in which they spend approximately half of their lives. Every aspect of their shape and form, and overall plumage stands testament to their adaption for marine living. Their rotund shape gives them incredible streamlining to cut through the water while propelled by wings modified into flippers. The alternate colouring of black and white on the dorsal and ventral surfaces keeps them camouflaged from marine predators, and the thick plumage of short stiff feathers (the densest of any bird) serves to trap air close to the skin, keeping them warm in even the coldest water. Sadly, as penguins are generally observed while they waddle about on land, this specialisation does not show. This is best illustrated by the King Penguin, which is the most ungainly of Marion's penguin. As it stumbles and



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falls over the rocks of the beaches, the King comes across as a graceless species. However, just one sighting of this magnificent bird in the water quickly changes how it is perceived. Seen from a high vantage, they shoot through the water like bullets, and execute tight twists and turns like a seasoned race-car driver. When really energetic they may even burst forth from the surface in dolphin-like leaps, becoming airborne for a fraction of a second. Witnessing a king that stumbles into the waves, instantaneously transformed from an awkward beach dweller into an agile predator, is truly unforgettable. Penguins



forage by pursuit diving for prey, which includes to varying extents, krill, squid and fish and are capable of diving to considerable depths. Of the four Marion species, the King holds the dive record, with a maximum of 318 m. In terms of speed however, the Gentoo is the fastest swimmer, with a maximum speed of 36 km/h. Their specialisation for the aquatic life does however come at a price. Every year, penguins are forced to leave the water for a few weeks in order to undergo what is termed a 'catastrophic moult'. During this

time they simultaneously shed and replace every feather on their body. This is an energy expensive process, and because they cannot forage during this time, they rely entirely on fat reserves gained during intense pre-moult feeding. Penguins that are unable to gain sufficient fat reserves run the risk of starving, or having to return to the sea before their plumage is fully waterproof.

Big city life

The popular image of a cute and cuddly penguin is really shattered during the breeding season, when many pairs (often numbering in the thousands or even tens of thousands) collect at colonies to mate and lay. This is a tense time for

these birds as they are extremely territorial and highly aggressive. Many are involved in relentless and violent disputes over nest sites, in which they will bite and hit at any available part of their counterpart's body. Some of the largest colonies resemble bustling metropolises, with busy highways of birds coming and going from the sea. The surrounding air is filled with the constant braying of birds advertising their nest-ownership rights, the nagging calls of chicks waiting to be fed, and the pungent aroma that accompanies the concentration of so many lives.



Tough as nails

One characteristic that never ceases to amaze is the hardiness of penguins. Being flightless, there is little need to maintain a light flight-friendly frame, and consequently they are compact and solid. However, their build is tested to the limits when they negotiate the often violent surf that separates the sea from the shore. Macaroni- and Rockhopper Penguins, particularly those on the western side of the island, are forced to swim through wide swathes of churning white water where they are repeatedly lost beneath wave upon pounding wave. After each wave, mere moments after disappearing beneath the boiling surface, they appear again, closer to their target. When they eventually make it to the shore, many are thrown bodily onto the rocks where they scramble for purchase as they begin the long ascent to their nest. They are incredibly resilient birds, capable of recovering horrific injuries such as seal bites. Penguins frequently fall prey to fur-seals, which



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grab and tear at the birds as they make their way to and from the colony. In some cases the bird is able to escape, though often with horrendous and surely mortal wounds. Yet in some cases, a few weeks later the same individual may be found with the injury completely scabbed over and showing definite signs of recovery.

Vagrants

In addition to the four breeding species, a further three have been recorded at Marion. The most commonly encountered is the Royal Penguin (*Eudyptes schlegeli*), with a few individuals that breed with Macaroni Penguins, although there is some debate as to whether these are indeed separate species. Chinstrap Penguins (*Pygoscelis antarctica*) have been recorded on three occa-

sions (twice during this expedition), and a single Magellanic Penguin (*Spheniscus magellanicus*) has been seen at Funk Bay in February 2006.

Penguins under threat

As with so many seabirds species, many penguins are under serious threat. Reasons for population declines, while complex and interlinked, are probably driven largely by climate change, and in many cases over-fishing. On Marion, the populations of Gentoo-, Macaroni- and Rockhopper Penguins are decreasing. Whether seen as loveable characters from a children's story, or as birds supremely adapted to life in water, the loss of penguins from the marine world would be sorely felt.

LEFT TO RIGHT.

A King being killed by a Antarctic fur seal; Royal-; Chinstrap-; Megellanic Penguin; a subadult King Penguin.

OCEANS & COASTS

BIRDERS

GENEVEIVE

ZUKO

DAVID

Interview

LAB RATS. The O&C birder trio in the lab busy with weighing, measuring and ringing a Salvin's Prion after night birding.

DAVID

David Green is not only a passionate birder, but also master of the violin (and beard). Geneveive Moroke asked him a few questions.

1. Give us a brief background of yourself.

I grew up in Port Elizabeth and studied at NMMU. I have had a long standing interest in seabirds and both my honours and masters degree research projects focused on Cape gannets breeding at Bird Island in Algoa Bay.

2. What led to your decision to apply for the expedition?

I've always had a fascination with seabirds, and the polar explorers. I first heard about Marion when I started with my BSc, and knew immediately that I wanted to join one of the expeditions. Six years of hard work later and here I am!

BRONZE. David claimed 3rd place in this year's boot throwing competition.

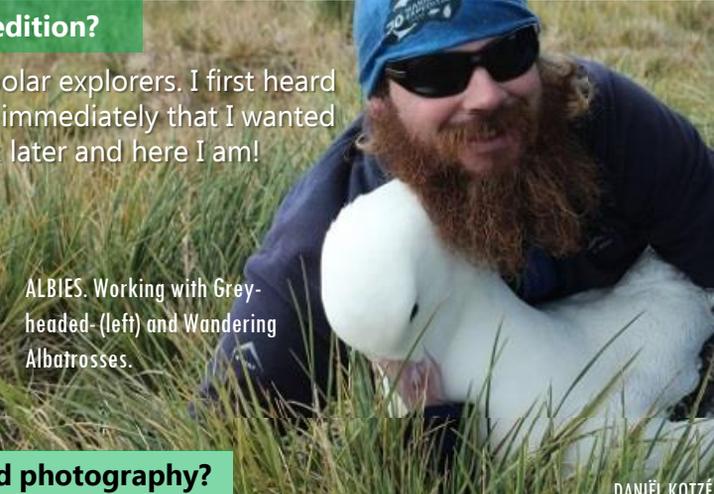


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ALBIES. Working with Grey-headed- (left) and Wandering Albatrosses.



DANIĚL KOTZÉ

3. What inspired your love of birdlife/birding and photography?

Ever since I can remember I have been passionate about birding. When I was growing up there was something about seeing the freedom of a bird in flight that gave me a thrill; and that thrill just hasn't gone away. Photography initially started out as a way of backing up my bird list, but I soon began to enjoy it and now I never leave home without my camera.

DIGGING DEEP. Looking for White-chinned Petrel.



DANIĚL KOTZÉ

5. Any other hobbies?

I enjoy playing the violin, and am a member of the regional philharmonic orchestra at home.



DANIĚL KOTZÉ

BOGEY. Ringing a Soft-plumaged Petrel in the lab.

4. Favourite bird species on Marion?

I'm torn between the Black-bellied Storm Petrel and the Soft-plumaged Petrel. The Black-bellied is a firm favourite because of its handsome appearance and its ability to cover thousands of kilometres in spite of their diminutive size. The Soft-plumaged Petrel, also a really good looking bird, was until recently a bit of a bogey bird for me. I have wanted to ring one for months, but was unsuccessful at downing any until March when we downed four in just two night birding sessions!

6. How do you spend your free time on the island?

When I'm not in the field I enjoy relaxing in the braai room with some friends and looking out at the beautiful views of the island.

7. What keeps you motivated?

There is just so much to see here. The idea that there is a finite amount of time to see it all makes one realize that there's simply no time to waste.

8. What will you take from this Marion Island overwintering experience?

I have learnt and grown a lot over the course of the expedition, and made some really good friends. It has also been incredible witnessing first-hand what the human body can achieve when faced with extreme weather and long distances of trying terrain.



GENEVEIVE

Geneveive Moroke might be the smallest M71 team member, but her size 4 boots have treaded where few others would dare. Zuko Nkomo compiled a few questions for the female member of the O&C trio.

1. Give us a brief background of yourself.

I was born in Bloemhof, a small town in North West Province. I always had a passion for animals, but mostly I get the inspiration from my dad who is an animal health technician. I studied BSc (Zoology and Physiology) at UNISA and I was a seabird intern at the DEA before coming to Marion.

ON THE EDGE.
Geneveive at
Amphitheatre.

JOHN SKELETE

2. What led to your decision to apply for the expedition?

On the first day as an intern, the DDG gave a talk to us and the mention of 'Marion Island' stayed on my mind ever since. I had never heard of it before. Later that day we went to the Oceans and Coasts offices in Cape Town, I remember it was as if we were taken behind the scenes of a National Geographic documentary. I knew that I also wanted to visit this spectacular island. I was exposed to a lot of marine research undertaken in the branch. I have always been an adventurer at heart so when this opportunity came past I didn't hesitate.

4. Favourite bird species on Marion?

As an aspiring birder this is a difficult question since I'm only getting my bird list in order, however, the Wandering Albatrosses caught my eye first. Back at the O&C offices next to my cubicle was a Wandering poster and I still hold that picture dear to my heart. Apart from being the largest seabirds in the world, long-distance flyers and fearless creatures, they are almost the same height as me and I do not mind the comparison, at all. After all they are tough, beautiful and majestic.

7. Advice to future birders?

Be yourself, be open-minded to others, ask for assistance if needs be, bandage your knees to avoid 'Marion-knee' (it worked for me) and make the best of your experience. If you get bored, start a new hobby, island style!

3. What is the toughest and best part of your job?

Working in unfavourable weather conditions (which comes with the job) is tough and yet overcoming this makes it worthwhile. The best part is getting up-close and personal with different species of birds.

5. How do you cope with the long distance hiking?

I knew there would be hiking, just not this much! The terrain changes with every destination, which could be a good or a bad thing. Sometimes I listen to music, other times I prefer the natural sounds that Marion always offers. We walk so much sometimes we don't even realise it, eventually it becomes the norm.

6. Favourite Penguin colony on Marion?

It has to be the magnificent Amphitheatre, a slope filled with thousands of Macaroni Penguins row after row going downhill until the beach, on the west side of the island. They say the west side is the best side and I totally agree. Plus there is no need to wait too long for the birds to come back from foraging so diet sampling always goes smooth.

BEACH BELOW. Geneveive at the top of Ship's Cove.

ZUKO

When Zuko Nkomo is not speed walking around the island counting birds, he does not idle. You'll find him playing pool, table tennis or soccer or just jamming to his hip hop tunes. David Green had a talk with him to find out more.

1. How did you first hear about Marion?

I happened to peruse the South African Network for Coastal and Oceanic Research (SANCOR) site as usual and I came across the seabird research assistant vacancy on Marion. At first I was quite ignorant about Marion, but now that I am here I salute the Man above.

2. What did you do before you came to the island?

After completing a Bachelors degree in Environmental Management at CPUT, I was job hunting and sometimes volunteered on the *R.S. Dr Fridtjof Nansen*, a Norwegian vessel doing a West Coast Demersal BCC Survey from South Africa to Namibia.

WINTER WARRIOR. Zuko tackling thick snow close to Trypot Beach.

3. What is the most rewarding part of your work here on the island?

The collecting of diet samples from different penguin species.

4. What has been your most memorable moment here?

I think the very first day of our first round island trip. The hiking to Kildalkey was memorable indeed. I was super exhausted to the extent that I felt like I could drink sea water. The mires were making life hard.

5. Most difficult experience during the expedition?

The unexpected change in weather conditions, the long cold winter and short cool summer. Collecting data under extreme and harsh weather condition whereby you can't even feel your hands is challenging.

6. Favourite bird species on the island?

The skua is one of my favourite species here, in spite of its scavenging tendencies. They chase gulls, terns and other seabirds (regardless of their size) away to steal their meals.

7. What is the most beautiful part of the island?

Probably the Crawford Bay area (remarkable cliffs but beautiful view!). Lately, with the ship on its way, every part of the island seems to be stunning.

8. What do you have planned for after the expedition?

I will be doing job applications even though I am planning to do one or two short courses that are relevant to Environmental Management such as SAMTRAC or NOSA. My plan for 2016 is to enrol for an M-Tech in Environmental Management.

FEATHERED FRIENDS. Research included the ringing of Soft-plumaged Petrels (LEFT) and the weighing of Macaroni Penguins.



DANIEL KOTZÉ



BARBER SHOP. Zuko is also M71's expert barber.

GENEIVEE MOROKE

JOHANNES MASINGI



LOUISE GADNEY



LIEZLPRETORIUS

Frank's Zef Party

Team leader and metkassie Frank Venter turned 29 on the 3rd of March. He decided on 'Zef Jeff' as theme for the party and team members were dressed with as little class as possible. Frank went all out and agreed to shave his head, leaving only a stylish mullet. He was not the only one that went all out. Liezl's costume included a swollen tummy! Low made a potjie and Vonica baked a special F-shaped cake. Entrance to the party was a photo to add to the photo board, an initiative to give some character the bar. What a great night! We salute our leader!

Johannes' Birthday Braai

Johannes Masinge, one of M71's metkassies, also celebrated his 29th birthday on the 19th of March. It was celebrated with a semi-formal braai. The grid was manned by braai expert Alexis Osborne, while a very professional looking cake was baked by Mpho. As usual the games room was alive with competition. Congratulations Johannes and the best of wishes!



LIEZLPRETORIUS



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LIEZLPRETORIUS

TEAM COLLAGE

COMPILED BY DANIËL KOTZÉ

What has M71 been up to this month?

Around the island

