

WANDERER

Marion Island newsletter
September 2015



FROM THE TEAM LEADERS OFFICE:



Hi to all our committed readers,

When I look at time that is passing by in a flash, I recall the events that brought us together at V & A Waterfront when we all met for the first time to form M72. Saturdays on the island is a freestyle day which means that every member has a chance to cater for themselves or they can form groups to prepare and share a meal. It's always interesting to see what the kitchen brings about on a Saturday apart from the traditional braai but the team works in unison and whips up a yummy meal which is shared with tales of how we got here and the events that led to the final departure from Cape Town harbour. Everyone of us has a special tale to tell and that makes for good team building as we get to know more of each other as half the contract year has passed. September has been a month of no birthdays so the bar which is our birthday venue has been clean for a month....but not for long!

On that note I will hand you over to our editor who has a bomb packed edition again this month with a sizzling recipe that is finger licking good
Keep safe and remember "Safety First"

Cheers!

Sherwin Hiralall

Team Leader and Medic

Meet the meteorological team or as we know them the metkassies

Gerard (Boy) Oppel



What are you most likely to run out of before the end of the year?

“Patience ;) I do not think I will run out of anything I have prepared well; being that it is my second time to an island....and **ICE-CREAM!!!**”

What are your hobbies?

“Mostly Computer gaming, but I also love to gym and play guitar. “

What has been the best meal you have had on Marion and who was it prepared by?

“Spare ribs, prepared by Mpho”

Name 3 things that are on your bucket list before you return home

“Go to Kattedraal, make a proper snow angel and learn to play one proper scale on my electric guitar.”

What is your favourite thing in the whole world

“Computer gaming, it is a dimension in itself. **GAMER FOR LIFE**”

What do miss most about SA?

“Nothing, I only miss my little niece.”

If the ship could bring 3 people to stay with you for the rest of the expedition, who would they be?

“Not really sure, but I think my mom, dad and little niece.”

What do you do on the island?

“I am a Met Technician; I do hourly weather observations and data gathering.”

You have been to Gough and Marion island, which is your favourite and why?

“Gough is my favourite, the team is smaller and the walking is easier there.”

Where is home for you?

“Springbok, Northern Cape”



Nkoane Jack Mathabatha

What is your job on the island?

"Assistant Meteorological Technician. Weather observer sounds easier, which is what we do, observe the weather."

This is your fifth over wintering expeditions to the islands and your third on Marion. What keeps you coming back?

"I guess I should say it's a job, hahaha. Once a pirate..., sorry, once an islander..."

It's a totally different world from where I come from, the flying, sailing, weather, abundant wildlife we can get very close to, fishing at Gough, meeting a lot of people from all walks of life, some very amazing. There's just so much I can do on the islands that I wouldn't be able to do at home."

What is your most cherished memory on Marion?

"I can't think of one particular moment or occasion. This being my 3rd with each being totally different from the others, there's been very good times, the good times and the so not good times."

What are three things on your bucket list still to do on Marion?

"-Top of the list: summit Mascarin

-A round the island without skipping any hut

-Fishing. Just kidding. I wish we could though. I can't think of anything else without breaking the rules"

Where is home for you?

"Since the mid nineties, I've always thought of both Ga-Mathabatha and Pretoria being my homes and they'll always be."

What do you do to pass the time?

"I don't have anything specific although I would be happier if we could play soccer and/ volleyball at least once every week. I do a whole lot of things, watch movies, series (including anime, hahaha). I'm not a games person but found myself playing chess on the lap top several times lately. "

What is your favourite animal on the island?

"Mmmm... that's a tough one. Well, since I've to pick one, I'll go with killer whales. They are not just pretty but amazing."

What are you most likely to run out of before the end of the expedition?

"Well, I used to buy a lot of toiletry as I was afraid of running out but would end up returning home with enough to last for another four months or so. This time I thought I was cutting costs but realised that I could run out of bath soap/shower gel and lotion/body cream but fortunately there are those who have bought more than enough and are generous to donate. "

What is your most favourite thing in the whole world?

"If jazz music is a thing then it's it. I grew up listening to jazz, an influence from my uncle and my father"

You have been called the ultimate honorary sealer and birder. What do you think about this? Do you enjoy helping the field assistants and why?

"Hahaha, ultimate, I didn't know. I am honoured. I appreciate the opportunity to get closer to the wildlife and to get to work with all these amazing people. It feels good to be out there, to enjoy nature."

Jerry Ramonyai



What do you do on the island?

“I work (Meteorological Technician)”

What lead you to apply to come to the island?

“Uhm... a lot things”

If the ship could bring you any 3 items right now, what would they be?

“Nothing, absolutely nothing”

What did you do before coming to the island?

“I was working”

What do you do to keep busy on the island?

“Internet, books, movies, series... that sort of stuff, except the is no TV here – true story.”

What has been your greatest challenge so far on the island?

“People minding my business”

What did you cherish most when you were 10 years old?

“Uhm... yoh that was long back...”

What is your favourite memory on the island so far?

“Obvious...”

What do you miss most about SA?

“I miss the rush. So much to achieve, very little time”

Describe your average day on the island

“Googling, I google everything under sun. Oh ya, above the sun too.”

Weather on Marion for month of September 2015

By Gerard (Boy) Oppel

Five months in and believe me, time has really passed by quickly. Every day just fades into the next day the longer we stay here. The weather has started to change a bit, with some days a bit colder than we are used to, but we did have a few sunny days with the wind nipping at our ears. It might sound strange if you are not from Marion, but we did have a few days that required sun block too, you might not believe it, but we do get sun burn here. The highest temperature for the month was 15.4 °C, which was a nice warm day and the coldest temperature we experienced for the month was -0.8 °C. We had one day that it was really windy, wind gusts reached to 52.5 m/s 189km/h. Days are slowly starting to become warmer looking forward to some nice days in October.

Weather stats for September

Ave Max Pressure	1015.1 hPa
Ave Min Pressure	1004.6 hPa
Ave Pressure	1010.0 hPa
Max Pressure	1033.9 hPa
Min Pressure	992.7 hPa
Ave Max Temp	8.3 °C
Ave Min Temp	3.1 °C
Ave Temp	5.7 °C
Max Temp	15.4 °C
Min Temp	-0.8 °C
Ave Humidity	82%
Max Humidity	98%
Min Humidity	22%
Max Wind Gust	52.5 m/s 189km/h
Total Rainfall	86.6mm
Highest in 24 Hours	24.4 mm
Total days with rain	16 days
Total days > 1mm	12 days
Total Sunshine	108.3

NGP Round Island

By Janine Versteegh

The Northern Giant Petrels (NGPs) started laying eggs from about the 9th of August. Us Fitz birbers (Stefan and I, Janine) have three NGP monitoring colonies near base, in which we closely monitor their breeding success, and we also do a round-island count of the NGP incubators (breeding partners with eggs) at the beginning of September.

Our round-island trip was a four day (three night) expedition which started on 2 September. Thanks to Tegan (NMMU birder) for all her help on day one, finding nests up to and around Kildalkey hut.

On the last day we walked back to base from Mixed Pickle hut and after a one day break resumed our count in the areas closer to base. In total, we walked about 100 kms in 7 days and counted over 400 NGP nests. If we weren't fit before, we definitely are now!

The coastal walks also gave us a glimpse of a few elephant seal bulls returning to the island for the looming breeding season. Also back in numbers are the Grey-headed and Sooty Albatrosses which will keep us busy from October onward. It's hard to think that, by the time the Grey-headed and Sooty chicks fledge, we will all be back home again...



Marion mollymawks

Photographer and author Stefan Schoombie



No, this is not something you mop the floor with, it is referring to the smaller albatrosses collectively also called mollymawks. There are three species of mollymawks breeding on Marion Island: the greyheaded albatross (*Thalassarche chrysostoma*), the light-mantled albatross (*Phoebastria palpebrata*) and the sooty albatross (*P. fusca*). The greyheaded albatrosses have the larger breeding population on the island with between eight and nine thousand pairs breeding annually.

All three of the Marion mollymawks are a joy to watch, as they gracefully navigate the winds while making you laugh as they come down (not so gracefully) to land screaming at anything in their path to get out of the way! The sooties also perform a distinct synchronised flight .



We also have a single black-browed albatross (*T. melanophris*) that comes to Marion Island some years, sometimes breeding with a greyheaded partner.

Albatrosses are one of the most threatened bird families in the world with both greyheaded and sooty albatrosses listed as endangered with population declines mostly attributed to fisheries related mortality of adults. These birds are attracted to baited hooks and can be killed or injured when hooked or struck down by cables. There are currently several studies being done on Marion Island to determine where these birds go to forage, how this overlaps with fisheries and what we can do to protect them.

Recipe for September

GLUTEN FREE CORN STARCH CAKE

By Janine



I found this recipe in the old *Kook en Geniet* recipe book in the kitchen while looking for a basic sponge recipe. I've tried a lot of gluten free sponge recipes, but this one takes the cake! This recipe makes one layered cake or 18 cupcakes.

Ingredients:

4	eggs (separated)
5ml	vanilla essence
125ml	sugar
187ml	corn starch
5 ml	cream of tartar
2.5ml	bicarbonate of soda
A pinch of salt	

- Grease two 20cm cake tins and line the bases with baking paper. Preheat the oven at 180 °C.
- Whisk the egg yolks and gradually add the sugar. Whisk until light and frothy then add the vanilla essence.
- Sift the dry ingredients and add to the egg yolk mixture.
- Whisk the egg whites until stiff and fold into the mixture.
- Pour the half the mixture into each of the prepared tins (or spoon into prepared cupcake tins) and bake for 10 to 15 minutes at 180 °C.
- Place the cakes on a cooling rack and leave to cool before icing (I used caramel treat in between layers and vanilla icing on top).

On Character Building and the Icy Southern Wind



“In the mountains is where we burn the fat off our souls.”

Those words are written on the white board of Katedraal hut, even though it is wrongfully attributed to Mr. Hemingway. There is a lot of truth in those words. Especially the climb from the bottom of First Red, on the days Marion tries to shake you off like a dog does to a flea. When the mist makes you cuss so loud it almost counters the deafening wind and the silencing sleet. The only feeling you are one hundred percent sure of is that your legs ache and your face burns from the cold. On these days even your walking stick conspires against you, tripping and slipping at every opportune moment. Every single step becomes a reminder of the thousands before, and of the thousands to come. If you could hear anything besides your drumming heart in your ears, you would hear the cackle of rocks and skuas, laughing at your glassy gaze. Just waiting for you to stop.

At this time you have two options. Give up or go on.

One of my teammates describes these days, not as “@\$@” or “#&**@^&!”, but as character building. Everybody who has spent a few weeks on this Island knows about character building. I have spoken to people who have described their Character Building days as follows:

“A penguin bit me on the lip. If it was lighter I would have dropkicked it straight into hell.”

“Yr.no lied, so I walked out into the Apocalypse.”

“Azorella Kop really does try to kill you some days.”

“If I fall into one more mire...”

“I couldn’t stop swearing at the wind...”

“If that damn paddy moves my PG stick one more time...”

For one of my character building days, I have walked up to Katedraal. The weather that day could be described as ‘sub-optimal’. My body was wracked by the cold, it felt as if my blood might just freeze. I was wind-worn and ice seared. I was emotionally smeared over the stretches of snow covered black lava, where unseen hands dragged me into every hole the ice could hide. The only snippet of bliss that walk offered was the white and green shine of the hut. I sat down in the hut, not even lighting the heater. I spent half an hour, staring into space, contemplating. My mind tried to rationalise the decision to go up to the hut on such a day, almost convincing me that it was not worth it. It enquired how could this tired and worn person ever feel that this is worth it?

“In the mountains is where we burn the fat off our souls,” the whiteboard proclaimed. I smiled and then I ate some ham with salticrax. It was a wonderful meal. I went outside and switched on the heater. The warmth was soothing and assuring. Even the game tasted better with melted snow.

This island provides a stoic education. It tells you every time you leave the catwalk that today you might learn a lesson only the sub Antarctic can provide. That in the gale we shave off the weakness that comfort brings. In the rain we remind ourselves that your body does not remember pain, only triumph. In the mire you are reminded that your weight to shoe size ratio is too high and you probably shouldn’t eat all that ham and salticrax.

Each walk just reminds you that old Marion saying is right:

“If you can’t walk, crawl. Whatever you do, just keep moving. You might learn something.”

WHY MARION MATTERS?



By *Abuyiselwe Nguna*

In the previous issue of the Wanderer, we started things off with a brief introduction of the Island and how life on the Island can shape brilliant scientists. This month we will focus on the physical environment and animals on the island. With September to November being the busiest months for the Sealers and Birders because of the hectic breeding season which requires a daily monitoring of the sites during this period. Oh such fun times.

The Island is volcanic in origin, representing the peak of a shield volcano, the bulk of which still lies below the ocean. Geologically speaking very young. The oldest surface rocks have been dated at just 450 000 years old and the island probably first rose above the ocean less than a million years ago. Considering there are rocks in South Africa that have been dated at more than a billions years old, the Prince Edward Islands are very young. These Islands are found roughly between the cool temperate regions and the extreme environments of the Antarctic Continent, and are termed sub-Antarctic. Marion and Prince Edward Island are, in fact among the most remote islands on the face of the planet.

With Marion and Prince Edward Island being found in an area known by mariners as the 'Roaring Forties' together with other islands within the Southern Ocean, form part of a complex and productive ecosystem that has far-reaching influences and needs to be studied extensively. From the jagged edges and sometimes unbearable black lava fields, to the many red scoria cones (over 130 and one tuff cone) that dot the landscape, these volcanic origins are responsible for some of the most strikingly natural and raw features of the island like the pahoehoe and aa lava flows found in an area locally known as "The Green Mile" or "Toffee Lava" very close to Cape Crozier.

In the midst of the latter, despite the small size and the harsh climate, the island is an important haven for wild life. The rich and diverse Marion ecosystem which is largely driven by productivity from wind induced mixing and melting sea ice in Antarctica, includes millions of seabirds and seals, which need to come onto land to breed and in some cases moult each year. Marion Island and other islands within the Southern Ocean, are crucial to the survival of these marine animals. Marion and Prince Edward Island are globally important breeding sites for a diversity of seabirds and seals. Marion and Prince Edward Islands are home to over 40% of the world's largest flying bird, the Wandering Albatross, as well as teeming colonies containing thousands of penguins. Seals are also abundant, with two species of fur seals (*Arctocephalus tropicalis* and *A. gazella*) and the Southern Elephant Seal ashore mainly during the summer months. The field assistants are very wary of this season and with that the Island just comes alive. With many birds coming back to the island for breeding, the beauty of seeing all of them at one go just chokes you up. And the mere fact that you cannot explain this feeling to anybody who has not been here just says it all.

This series will continue as we try to engage, showcase and inform people out there why these islands matter and how important they are to the wildlife that calls them home. Next issue we give you more reasons to Why Marion Matters!

For more info see:

Marion and Prince Edward Africa's Southern Islands by Aleks Terauds, John Copper, Steven L Chown & Peter Ryan.

AND

The Prince Edward Islands: Land – Sea Interactions in a Changing Ecosystem by Steven L Chown & Pierre W Froneman



The white cross above boulder beach commemorates petty officer J.G. Bold

By John Cooper, Antarctic Legacy of South Africa project, Stellenbosch University

For many years I have often been asked who (or what) the white cross without an inscription that is embedded in a bank above Boulder Beach close to Marion Island's old base commemorates. Inquiries of old team members by the Antarctic Legacy of South Africa have not borne fruit other than to discover it has been there at least back to the 1960s.

ALSA is now pleased to report that the problem has been solved with the help of the South African Naval Museum in Simon's Town. The museum is in the process of digitizing its collection of photographs, a number of which cover the first decade of Marion's occupation by South Africa when navy frigates undertook relief voyages.

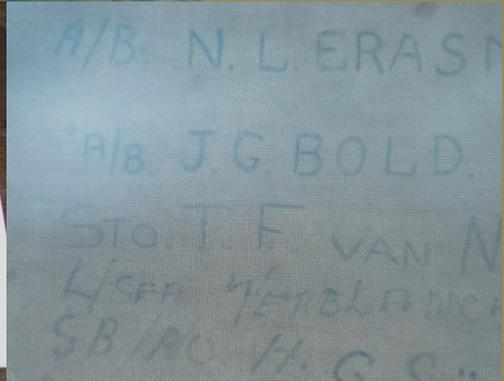
In April 1956 the HMSAS *Transvaal* undertook the 12th Relief of Marion Island, taking down the 13th South African Expedition (M13) and bringing off M12. Shortly before the ship's departure from the island rough seas in Transvaal Cove off Boulder Beach on 10 April caused the ship's motor boat to capsize, throwing its crew into the sea. Petty Officer John George Bold, who was in charge of the boat, got into difficulties in the water and although an attempt to rescue him was made he was not alive when brought ashore. The Public Works then had to pitch in to repair the badly damaged boat to allow the *Transvaal* to take aboard those leaving the island.

Petty Officer Bold was buried at sea with full naval honours on the return voyage to South Africa. He was the second of three persons to drown due to small boat mishaps off Boulder Beach since South Africa's occupation of the island group. Jacob Daniels, who drowned shortly after the island's annexation in January 1948, lies buried near Trypot Beach. In 2011 a new cross made by the NDPW was erected over his grave to replace an earlier one that had rotted. The third drowning was of Joseph Frank Wheeler, Chief Electrician of the R.S. *Africana II*, on 13 April 1963. Unlike Jacobs and Bold before him, Wheeler's body was returned to South Africa for burial.

An intriguing fact is that it was not P/O Bold's first visit to Marion Island. He, then an Able Seaman, was a member of the 14-man occupation party that stayed ashore from 4 to 29 January 1948 under canvas on Gunner's Point after the *Transvaal* had annexed the islands and departed for South Africa. It was considered essential in terms of international law to maintain an unbroken occupation of the island until ships could return with material to build the first base and the first Marion team to live in it.

During the 2014 relief I looked closely at the Boulder Beach cross but could see no signs of it ever having had an inscription. However, the Simon's Town museum has unearthed a photograph of the cross with Bold's name painted on its landward side: mystery solved! The Antarctic Legacy of South Africa project is now discussing with the South African Naval Museum how best to replace Bold's name on his cross during next year's relief, 60 years after he drowned. As part of this his service record will be sought from the South African National Defence Documentation Centre in Pretoria and efforts will be made to search for any next of kin. So far we know his Regimental Number was 280809 and that he was born in Queenstown on 2 June 1925, making him only 31 years old when he died. Consideration should also be given to commemorating the drowning of Frank Wheeler. One fitting way to do this would be by way of mounting a plaque bearing the names of Jacobs, Bold and Wheeler in the new base.

With thanks to Commander Leon Steyn, Officer in Charge, South African Naval Museum, Warrant Officer (Submarines) David Harrison and Warrant Officer (retired) and previous museum curator, Andre Wessels for their help and interest in South Africa's Antarctic legacy.



Row 1: (1) The Boulder Beach Cross in 2014 (Photo: John Cooper); (2) The Boulder Beach Cross, thought shortly after erection (Photo: Public Works Department); (3) The Boulder Beach Cross bearing J.G. Bold's name (Photo: South African Naval Museum)

Row 2: (1) Jacob Daniel's Cross in 1948 (Photo: Alan Crawford); (2) Jacob Daniel's Cross, the second, in 1987. (Photo: Graham Clarke); (3) Jacob Daniel's third Cross in 2014 (Photo: John Cooper)

Row 3: (1) The Occupation Party before disembarkation aboard the HMSAS *Transvaal*. Then Able Seaman J.G. Bold is standing sixth from the left (Photo: South African Naval Museum)

Row 4: (1) The Occupation Party Flag with their names, now in the South African Naval Museum (Photo: John Cooper); Able Seaman J.G. Bold's name on the Occupation Flag (Photo: John Cooper)



Elephant seals

During September the beaches on the island became full of life and activity as the elephant seals hauled out to give birth and to mate.



The males can weigh up to an outstanding 4 tons. Whereas, the females, midgets in comparison, only weigh between 200-900kg.



Major battles break out all over the islands as the males fight for the sole rights to the beach and its harem of females. It is quite a spectacular sight to see.



PHOTO CORNER



Sub-Antarctic brown skua, thought to be posing for a photo, when actually the beast is wondering whether it could eat you

Lesser black-faced sheathbill or better known as a paddy



King penguins – one of a thousand

Curiosity killed the cat? Or made for an awesome elephant seal photo?



Some activities during the month

Night birding



Collecting beach debris



Cat hunter's memorial



Fun in the sun

