

*Island life, doing things on Marion Island*

# ***The Wanderer***

Seal Gallery

Salty Sealers &  
their Secrets

Tribulations  
and  
Triumphs

 Yoga poses  
for the field

Hut Yoga

Killer Whale  
Observations

What it's all about



**SANAP**

South African National Antarctic Programme

*Understand, develop and conserve*





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KYLE LLOYD

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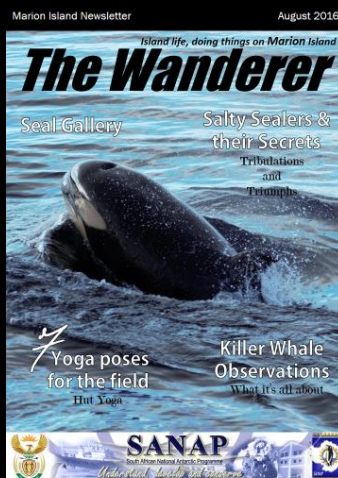
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Cover: Peanut the Killer Whale  
Photographer: Nasreen Khan



KYLE LLOYD

SYNDNEY TSHILINGALINGA

Sept 2016 |



# Letter from the Editor



Photo by Jessie Berndt

There are 24 Birthday candles in a pack, which seems a tad unfair to those who have just passed the mark. Purchasing another pack for an additional candle or two seems such a waste. However, the number 24 was probably carefully calculated by the producers to ensure consumer protection. It turns out that once you reach 25, Birthday's become a bit of a fire hazard! Jess and myself discovered this fact in Kildalkey hut on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, the eve of my 25<sup>th</sup> Birthday. With four team members celebrating birthdays in the month of September (Travis, Albert, Sydney and John) we were sure to spread the candles out for safety purposes!

CAMILLA KOTZÉ  
EDITOR

## NEWS FLASH

Photo by Makhudu Masotla



### Gentoo Penguin Chicks!

The only penguin species on the island to breed in the winter, the Gentoo's chicks are the first of the new babies M73 will be seeing this year.

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### Tooth-Fairy goes to Dentist

Even the tooth-fairy needs to see the dentist. On dress-up Tuesday, the fairy had her pearly whites checked during Dental Week, which was topped off with a fluoride treatment. OPEN WIDE, AAAH!





# ***Tropicalis, Gazelle or Elephant?***

Asking the sealers which of the three seal species is their favourite resulted in much debate and deliberation. It is a tough question to ask a pinniped lover. This is what each of them said...

## **Tall Sealer, Kyle Lloyd**

*Arctocephalus tropicalis*. I love everything about the species. I love the males with their mohawks and big eyes. I love how they prance around on the beach acting like they own the place. Some young males try to act all mucho, but if they get in the way of the females, they bolt like a dog with its tail between its legs. I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of a male fur seal at Mixed Pickle whom I called Big Boy. He trusted me to such an extent that I could walk right passed him without receiving a growl from him. I have also witnessed a *tropicalis* bull win a fight against a *gazelle* bull.



## **Big Sealer, Sydney Tshilingalinga**

Elephant seals; they are fascinating big creatures that few people get a chance to work with up-close in their natural habitat. Throughout my career, I had never had a chance to work with big mammals like the elephant seal. At varsity it was all about mice, cockroaches, ants and other bugs. So having a chance to gain hands on experience working with such an amazing mammal on Marion Island has been a dream come true for me. Now that the bulls have started claiming the beaches, as it is breeding season for them, just being around them has been made that much more interesting.



## **Little Sealer Killer, Nasreen Khan**

This is a difficult one, first, the fur seal (*Arctocephalus tropicalis*) pups have captured my heart, they are fat, fuzzy furballs, which sometimes appear larger than their mums in girth. Second, the terribly smelly elephant seals (*Mirounga leonina*) with a massive set of teeth, a great big muzzle and head, including the notorious inflatable proboscis of an elephant seal bull made me really appreciate the relentless predatory skill of this species. Those guys can smell you a mile away. They are highly specialized aquatic carnivores and I often wish I could witness their true potential come alive underwater. Third, I recently spotted a leopard seal in the ocean (*Hydrurga leptonyx*). I got a good view of its eel/serpent-like appearance, elongated head, spotted coat and massive jaws, I was captivated! I am conflicted by these really fascinating pinnipeds and have not yet fully decided on my favourite.





During my Master's degree, a classmate of mine gave a presentation of his experiences as a sealer on the island. I was spell-bound and an old desire of mine was rekindled. As a naturalist and scientist, I wanted to immerse myself in a pristine environment where ecological and evolutionary processes are so evident. As a young man, I wanted to test and refine my character in nature, solitude and physical exertion. As a Christian, I wanted to behold and marvel at God's great creation and grow in my relationship with Him. The only thing holding me back was leaving my beautiful fiancée for a year. But she gave me her blessing and support which continues to strengthen me in my job.

# Marion's Call

KYLE LLOYD

I can honestly say that being a sealer on Marion Island is one of the most difficult field researcher positions in existence. We work every day. We go outside almost every day, regardless of the weather. We walk for kilometres and work with dangerous animals. But being a sealer is definitely the most enjoyable job in existence. In fact, it is more of an adventure than a job. We see huge elephant seal bulls fight with each other, we see cute fur seal pups doing hand-stands in the rock pools, we see elusive leopard seals resting on the shore and we see killer whales breaching within 5m of us.

**"...an elephant seal nearly bit off my balls"**

Working outside everyday also allows you to experience Marion in her entirety. I have fallen into a rock pool with an elephant seal that nearly bit off my balls, I have been chased by fur and elephant seal bulls, I have petted fur seal pups and given them names, I have laid next to fur seal moms whilst their

pups suckle, I have seen killer whales hunt and play in pods of up to 14 individuals, I have seen and held a diversity of birds, I have watched wandering albatross chicks grow as I walk passed them every day, I have been air lifted by gale force winds, I have been pelted by ice pellets, I have been soaked to the core in rain and sea water, I have had ice cover my beard and hair and freeze the water in my water bottle, I have witnessed the most colourful sunsets from snow-capped peaks to rolling hills, I have drunk from the most beautiful waterfalls this world will ever know, I have gazed at the stars on the clearest of nights during my time in the huts, I have spent 12 consecutive days in complete isolation, I have not bathed for 18 consecutive days (one starts looking forward to when it rains), I have searched the deepest recesses of my mind, I have been able to think and pray without distraction, and I have had the privilege of living with and getting to know 20 people for an entire year. I love my job. It is truly an experience like none other and breeding season has not even begun. I cannot wait to see what comes next...



# 4 QUESTIONS for the BIG SEALER

SYDNEY TSHILINGALINGA

## What is your academic background?

For the love of nature, I have always dreamt of working with wild animals since high school. My favourite subjects were life science and natural science, and even though I did not enjoy mathematics that much, I did it because I was interested in pursuing a career in the biological sciences. My interest for biological sciences grew more when I got a chance to visit my uncle at the local University on numerous occasions while he was studying there. The University was just 4km away from the high school I was attending. During Matric, I had found the information I needed on what I was going to study the following year.

I matriculated in 2009 at Thoyandou Secondary School and the following year I enrolled for B.Sc. in Botany and Zoology under the school of Mathematics and Natural sciences at the University of Venda. I obtained my degree in 2013 and decided that it was time for a change and exploring new things. I then moved from the University of Venda to the University of the Western Cape to further my studies there. As my interest in conserving nature kept on growing, I enrolled for B.Sc. Honours in Biodiversity and Conservation Biology in 2014 and completed the same year. After this M73 expedition I am still going to further my studies and enroll for a M.Sc. degree.

## What has been your toughest day on the Island so far?

Twenty three June 2016 was the toughest and also most memorable day for me on this Island. Everything started well with me arriving at Mixed Pickle the previous day to relieve Kyle who had been there for 10 days already. The following morning we had to do pit tagging on fur seals, before Kyle hit the road to do TAPs. We normally do 5 pairs a day for tagging, that day we had done 6 and we were about to do the last one (7<sup>th</sup>) as time was still on our side. Now it was time to weigh the individual, the moment we picked up the net containing the fur seal, her teeth had gripped my leg. I managed to get her to let go with the help of Kyle, whom performed first aid on my wound soon after. The following day, I had to face the same individual again, who made my day hell as TAPs needed to be done. After everything, I realize that it was nothing personal, C015 (the tag number of the female fur seal) wanted me to pay more attention to what I do all the time when I am around wild animals. Thanks C015, lesson learned.

## What book/music album kept you going during your extended 18day TAPS mission to Mixed Pickle?

A book that kept me going at mixed pickle hut during my stay was titled "I WAS BORN FOR THIS" by Bruce Wilkinson. In terms of music, a couple of house and hip hop music albums were enjoyed with Nasreen when she took-over from me were (MICASA, CASSPER, MPUMI, KWESTA and EMTEE).

## What is your favourite hut meal?

When I'm alone its rice and canned fish, otherwise, its chicken curry and rice prepared by my sealer sister, Nasreen; "I'm Indian, I can't go 18 days and not cook a mean curry!"



# LITTLE SEALER

They say that you shall never work a day in your life if you are passionate about the work you do. Working on Marion Island as a Sealer/Killer Whaler is a wonderful privilege and has been one of my longest standing dreams.

Marion has far exceeded all my expectations and no matter how tough the schedule is for a Sealer, it still feels like I am taking a vacation on Marion, playing with seals and being in the company of magnificent killer whales.

Marion is a magical paradise, but magic is illusory and paradise surely comes with a hefty price...

the fauna, the elements and the terrain chisel you down to your very core, and flaunt your worst fears in front of you, but despite it all Marion has the most incredible beauty imaginable!

## The Price of Paradise

### An encounter with "Fury"

Marion's temperamental 50+ Knot winds, "Fury" fondly named by Chief Sealer, Nico de Bruyn leaves her mark on anyone who encounters her. Sydney and I witnessed her wrath at Johnny's and Johnny's Teeth, when she created a vacuum and funnelled us between the two scoria's. It felt like we were given a knockout-hook in a boxing match. We got up again, bodies bent, heads down, pushing forward, but no luck. One tiny step forward, resulted in many careless steps backward. We decided to crawl through the madness, which didn't work. We were stuck, now 15 minutes gone and unable to make progress, we locked arms to lessen the surface area...

...big mistake! as 'Fury' capitalised on our imbalance. Sydney was first thrown to the ground with me flying on top of him, he took the blow on jagged black lava and cut his hands. Inch by inch we crawled out of the fray. For Sydney and I 'Fury' shall always be respected after that battle of patience and fortitude.

From this, and other challenges on the island, I've realised that solid characters are moulded in steel furnaces, and we only achieve greatness when we embrace all things difficult with open arms.

I commend all Marionites present and past, for having survived Marion. In many ways we all have gone through various soul-grating experiences, which are often very similar. Nothing can prepare you for Marion except Marion itself.

I believe that Marion Island is one of South Africa's greatest assets, and gives young researchers the ultimate opportunity in science. Working and living on unspoiled land and being able to witness animals flourish in their natural ecosystems without being compromised by human-hands is incredibly rare and is any conservationists dream!

NASREEN KHAN



# Mu culture. Mu Heritage

(Happy Heritage month from Marion)

By Nothando Mhlongo

iNtombi YomZulu YaseLangeni

Spending my first heritage month/celebrations away from home is a little sad especially for a Zulu girl☺. This time of the year is the most hyped and exciting time since we celebrate our heritage in the most colourful way there is. In the Zulu culture we have *Royal Reed Dance* which happens once a year, in the heart of South Africa's Kingdom of the Zulu. Thousands of people make the long journey to one of His Majesty's, the King of the Zulu nation's royal residence at eNyokeni Palace which is situated in Nongoma (KZN). Early every September month, young Zulu maidens take part in a colourful cultural festival, the *Royal Reed Dance* festival- or *Umkhosi woMhlanga* in the Zulu language.

This is a joyous and precious time for every woman that participates; as they will sing, dance and receive blessing from King Zwelithini Zulu (Bayede yena Wendlovu). I started attending the dance when I was 12 years old and from then on it become part of my life, as it would for every woman that participates. Being on the Island is a blessing but sometimes you miss out on a lot back home; weddings, new babies of the family, celebrations etc., being here with my people though tops it all as we are a family ☺.

In honour of our heritage Sanele and I dedicated our Round Island to everyone who celebrates heritage month and to our families. We called it the Heritage Round Island, work was done and fun was had☺.







Altamate

# Accessories

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY CAMILLA KOTZÉ

## The cat on the hat

Adorning Elana's perfectly styled curls is a cat inspired beanie. A wonderful counterpart to the mouse beanie donned by our ECO in the first issue. The Altamate accessory is almost as adorable as she is as she soaks up the Spring sunshine, much like a cat would in fact.

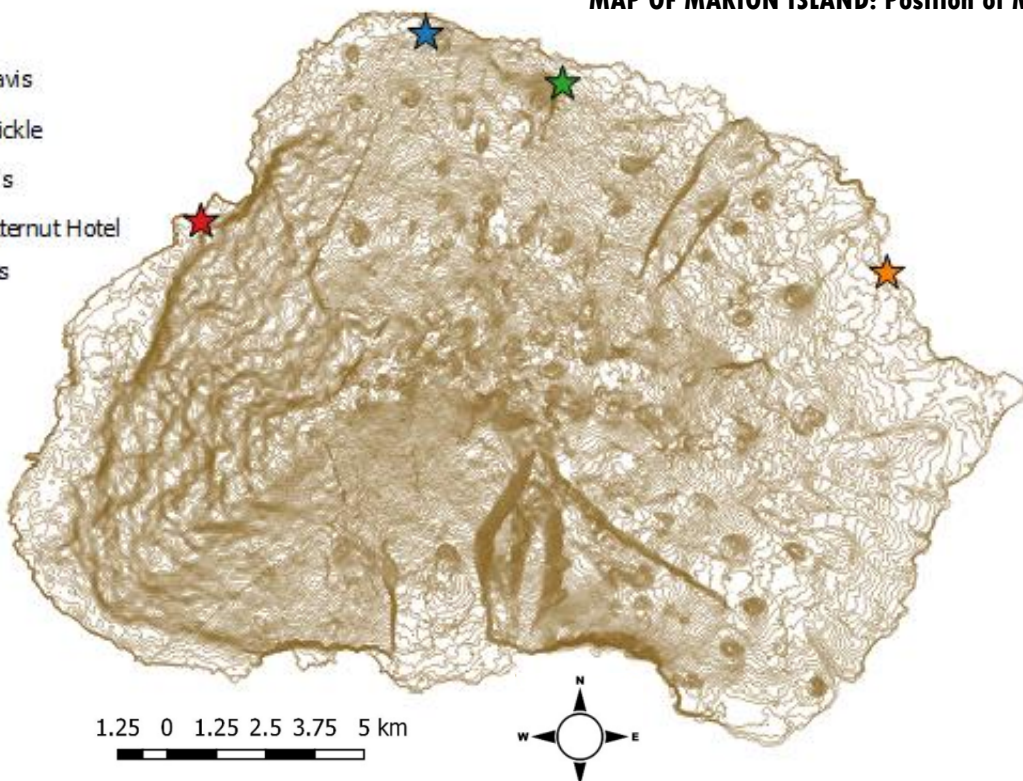


## Readers' Round Island

### LEGEND

- ★ Cape Davis
- ★ Mixed Pickle
- ★ Repetto's
- ★ The Butternut Hotel
- Contours

MAP OF MARION ISLAND: Position of Mixed Pickle







Text by Camilla Kotzé & Nasreen Khan

## THE SEALERS' BEACH COTTAGE

PUPS & THE HUT. Kyle Lloyd

Mixed Pickle derived its name from one of the very first recognised biologists, Robert "Bob" Rand, who roamed Marion Island during 1951. During this time, he came upon a hut (probably used during the early part of the 20th century by seal hunters) containing old bottles of food, including mixed pickles which were still edible, and so the name was born. Mixed Pickle has always been and remains popular with the sealers, particularly during winter when at least one member of the mammal researchers stays an extended time period for *Tropicalis* Attendance Pattern studies (TAPs).

**Mixed Pickle, is also known as the "Huisie by die See" due to its close proximity to the ocean. From the hut, waves crashing against the rocky crags can be heard amongst the calls of fur seal pups for their moms.**

TAPs involves monitoring selected study-beaches twice daily for the presence of marked females and their suckling pups. Assessing shore visit frequencies and durations of each female independently can aid in the prediction of the mean foraging trips and parental investment for the species populace. This study also gives insight into pup development and energy procurement. TAPS is also linked to pup weighing on selected timelines at designated study areas. Pups are weighed up to the age of 300 days when they are close to weaning. Pup weight is an indirect measure of maternal onshore attendance behaviour, at-sea behaviour and milk composition. Furthermore, temporal and seasonal variation of growth can give insight into prey abundance and distribution. Growth-rate patterns can be used as puzzle pieces to determine negative effects on the population, for example; if rising sea-surface temperature in the Southern Ocean has manifested in food shortages and lower reproductive performances. That's TAPS in a nutshell.

Although the sealers all agree that the ten days or more of total isolation facilitated by TAPs allows much needed introspection, it still leaves even the most sane beings seeking seals for company. Lucy, a seal pup, being the most sought after, especially by Nasreen.



# The Hike from Cape Davis Hut

Azorellakop. Just the name strike fear into the hearts of many a Marionite, or at least conjures up some not so very fond memories, particularly during those early months on the island when we were all getting used to the punishing terrain. Although the walk to Mixed Pickle a very long one, starting the day with a steep, often misty, climb is never fun. Many theories surround the best route to take, but from personal experience, I suggest you aim high, that way you cut out many of the tiresome ups and downs closer to the coast. You may miss the the view of Triegaardt Bay, but you will still be greeted by an equally amazing one of the hut and bay from the slope adjacent to Neville's Kop above Mixed-Pickle territory.



VIEW FROM THE TOP: Kyle Lloyd



PUP POOL: Nasreen Khan



SLEEPING QUARTERS: Kyle Lloyd



HUT AT DUSK: Nasreen Khan



Being on the Western Side of the Island, Mixed Pickle Hut is famous for the best Sunsets on Marion.

MIX-PIX SUNSET: Nasreen Khan



View from The back



# HUT RECIPE OF THE MONTH

## THE SEALERS SNACK

By Kyle Lloyd

### Ingredients

- Salticrax or Provitas
- A dollop of mayonnaise as a base
- A chunk of sardine (in vegetable oil)
- A slice of gherkin
- A sprinkle of coarse black pepper
- A drop of Red Pepper Tabasco Sauce

### Something extra

- A bit of grated beetroot
- Replace Red Pepper Tabasco Sauce with Green Pepper

# SAWS STATS

## August

Photo by Camilla Kotzé

MAXIMUM WIND GUST	139 km/h
TOTAL RAINFALL	158 mm
HIGHEST IN 24 HOURS	25 mm
TOTAL DAYS WITH RAIN	26 days
TOTAL DAYS > 1 MM	16 days
TOTAL SUNSHINE	86.5 hours

	AVE	MAX	MIN
TEMPERATURE (°C)	4.3	10.4	-2.5
PRESSURE (hPa)	1004	1028	977
HUMIDITY (%)	84	100	51



# Gallery

A selection of excellent photographs taken by our team members



**WINNER**

'Skat Man' by Kyle Lloyd

The placing of the skat with the *Tropicalis* bull in the background is comical, as he impudently glances over his shoulder as if to claim it.

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2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>  
'Leopard Seal' by Kyle Lloyd







**Highly commended**

TOP: 'Seals in the Snow' by Kyle Lloyd

BOTTOM: 'Games in the Waves' by Kyle Lloyd







**Highly commended**  
TOP: 'Yawn' by Kyle Lloyd  
BOTTOM: 'A Bulls Beam' by Kyle Lloyd







**Highly commended**

TOP: 'Graceful *Gazelle*' by Kyle Lloyd  
BOTTOM: 'Pompous *Tropicalis*' by Kyle Lloyd







**Highly commended**

TOP: 'Fur-ball' by Nasreen Khan

BOTTOM: 'One-eyed Jack' by Nasreen Khan







**Highly commended**

TOP: 'Paddling Pups' by Nasreen Khan

BOTTOM: 'Pup Playgroup' by Nasreen Khan







**Highly commended**

TOP: '*Lazy leonine*' by Nasreen Khan

BOTTOM: '*Sleep and Smiles*' by Nasreen Khan





# Hut Yoga strengthen

TEXT BY CAMILLA KOTZÉ  
PHOTOS BY JESSIE BERNDT



warrior two

Use this to strengthen your legs for hiking those steep slopes, often requiring long, lunged steps.



tripod headstand

Goal: Endurance



tree

Be the tree, imagine that the foot on the floor has roots growing out of the bottom and visualise your torso as the stable trunk. Use this to improve balance, learning to stand on one leg will help on those extra windy days!



crow

Use this to strengthen your arms, which are frequently used to break falls on the island. Engaging your abdominals, shift your weight forward until your feet are lifted.



# and lengthen



downward facing dog

Use this to stretch out the entire body after a long hike.



butterfly

Strengthens abs, back, biceps, knees, ankles and stretches inner thighs.



one legged king pigeon

Strengthens legs, stretches shoulders, chest, hip joints and thighs.

full split



"yoga is an essential part of hut life on marion island".



half split

After a long day in the field, use this pose to stretch out your entire leg, as well as loosen that tight hip. NB. flex the toes to deepen the stretch.

Although Jess might be considered a hippie by most of the team, yoga is not exclusive to that stereotype, nor to the naturally flexible. Just one session can lower cortisol levels, relieve back pain, while at the same time increase strength and improve on sleep. With all these benefits, more and more field assistants are finding it hard to resist. There is nothing better than a divine stretch after a long day in the field! Yoga is, therefore, an essential part of hut life on Marion Island.



# Killer Whale Observations

**KILL POINT:** A coastal outcrop a few 100m from base where killer whale observations are carried out daily.



Dot



Agent 25



O'Neill



Max



Seabiscuit



Valentine

The Marion Island killer whale program has been in existence since the 70's, with a dedicated program initiated in 2006 to form part of the Marion Island Marine Mammal Programme which is run by the University of Pretoria's Mammal Research Institute.

Dedicated killer whale observations are conducted weekly, with two 10-hours sessions and two 3-hour sessions a week during the month of September. Opportunistic sightings from other Marionites around the island are also recorded and forms an integral part of data collection.

During Killer whale observations, individuals are identified using dorsal fin and saddle patch characteristics. Killer whales can be found near Marion's inshore waters throughout the year with an increase in numbers directly proportional to the seasonal peak of their prey from September to December. Their prey consists of elephant seals, fur seals and penguins, whereby killer whale hunting-behaviour has been sighted metres from the shore. Data on any cetacean studies and particularly this program have two field methods of data collection, this being; 1. Shore based tissue biopsy sampling and 2. Satellite linked telemetry, data of which is difficult and sometimes impossible to obtain by any other means.

1. Biopsy samples are used for a range of analyses; stable isotopes, fatty acids, contaminants, genetics, and trace elements. These help researchers understand animal health, diet and provide important information on population structure.
2. The satellite tag helps understand movement and distribution, and highlights the habitat use of cetaceans. The collated data brings forth any anthropogenic issues affecting the population, and can ultimately assist with conservation efforts, if needed.



Poseidon



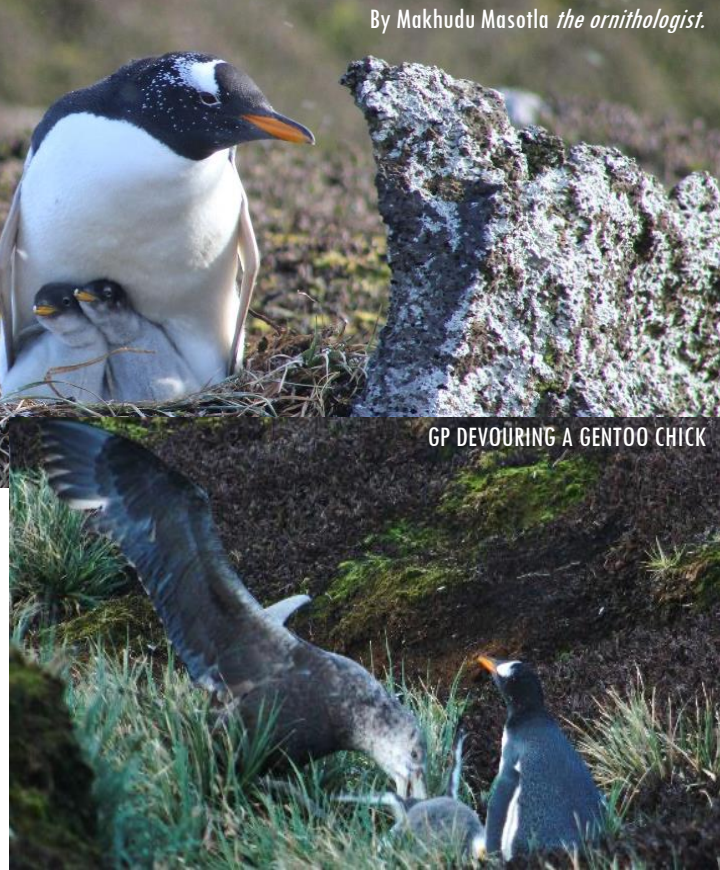
# On the road to extinction

Is there hope for this fragile little species? Facing pressures of predation and the need for survival from left to right. They are protected by the Antarctic treaty with their conservation status already in jeopardy (IUCN), they are the perfect example of "stuck between a rock and a hard place" scenario.

Gentoo penguins (*Pygoscelis papua*) are known for their dashing looks and cute cuddly chicks. They're affectionately called "lady penguins", a term befitting, given their flame orange lipstick and feet (a perfect match). It makes them stand out from their drab looking habitat. Like all other penguins, Gentoo's are awkward on land, but graceful underwater. They have a bi-parental care and both parents form long lasting bonds, participating together in all aspects of the breeding cycle.

## "...parent Gentoo watches helplessly as its chick is devoured"

Here on Marion Island, the Gentoo population is struggling to subsist. Adults are the favoured prey menu for most monsters patrolling the seas (*Orcas*, leopard seals etc.). Their anti-predatory mechanism is in shock from cunning and malicious predators such as Giant Petrel's (GP) and Skuas on land, snatching chicks effortlessly. There have been numerous sightings of GP's and Skuas bravely snatching chicks off their nests while the ill-equipped parent Gentoo watches helplessly as its chick is devoured. So far, all the colonies around the island are facing this predicament.



GP DEVOURING A GENTOO CHICK

One of the chick's limited forms of protection is to form little crèches which creates "the Doppler Effect" for the predators, which will give the little that's left a fighting chance for survival.

For now as birders our duties are not to interfere, but monitor and collect data which will help with the implementation of a management plan in the near future for the conservation of this species. Pray for the Gentoo.



SKUA DEVOURING A GENTOO CHICK



A CRÉCHE OF GENTOO CHICKS



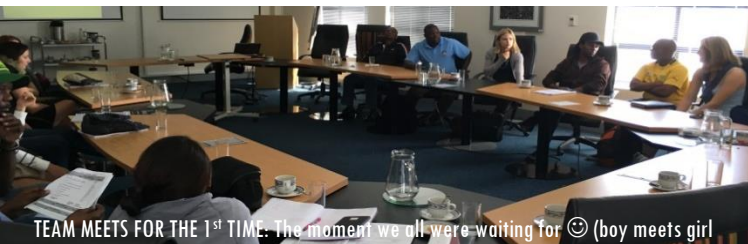
# THANDO'S THROW BACK

## Before Marion



Before we knew who likes telling tales a lot, or dance (booty popping or wiggling). Before we knew who likes the taps closed a certain way or who likes things spotlessly clean. Before we knew who was a little crazy, sweet, kind, or short tempered. Before we knew who loves parties and who is the party itself☺. Before we knew the (big, chief, and madam) sealers, space monkey, mad medic, Inyangaz, A-team (name given to Gerald and Morgan as the 'rescuers' in case of emergency), Fifa and bored games addicts☺. Before Marion, we were different individuals brought together by our professions, and now we are this big family who have each other's backs.

Being born and raised in Kwa-Zulu Natal made it difficult for me to even think about moving far away from my family. Before I left Durban, Travis was the first team member to arrive at the ship, emailing us about how cool the ship was expressing his excitement to meet everyone. Then the time came when I had to board my flight from Durban King Shaka airport to Cape Town. My driver was waiting for me, he was hilarious and we sang Rihanna's Work song all the way to the VNA Waterfront, so much fun☺. The next day I met the whole team which was awesome, my nervousness disappeared when I saw what amazing human beings they were. We bonded with every activity we had, and from that day on we were a family.



TEAM MEETS FOR THE 1<sup>ST</sup> TIME: The moment we all were waiting for ☺ (boy meets girl kind of moment)



CLOTHING ISSUE



COOKING: You got to be tough for little girl ☺

When departure day came we met even more amazing people. We played games on the ship to keep us sane with the ship moving and sometimes feeling like we were in a giant roller coaster. Mind you it was my first ship ☺ experience. This is where it all started, my family M73...



BYE CAPE TOWN



CAUGHT IN THE ACT: Thando and Elana's last

Happy meal ☺



BONDING SESSION: The Inyangaz (Botanists)



