



# Gough Bunting

July 2009



Welcome to our Monthly Newsletter...

This is a journey, enjoy the read...



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## The Extra Mile...

It's Friday the 24<sup>th</sup> of July and two excited team players meet for coffee at 6 am in the kitchen. Today will be the first Goney dale visit for me; the rest of the team has already been up there. As they say 'different strokes for different folks'! I have spent most of my free time in good weather on the rocks down at either 'Diesel point' or 'Snoekgat' with a fishing rod in the hand, chasing that big one! We didn't get much sleep; we were so excited about this trip and packed backpacks with everything from a sleeping bag, dry clothing, emergency chocolate and some medical supplies. Why would one need a sleeping bag and an emergency pack for a day trip? Well actually a very logical answer, this is a volcanic Island and there are therefore many caves, cliffs and potential dangerous places, same reason why we never hike alone. For those of you who are divers, what is the well preached slogan?... 'If you dive alone, you die alone'! Therefore there are very little limitations on adventure, we abseil, we hike, we fish, as long as you do it with a team member.



So Vincent knew what was lying ahead, and he didn't try to pull out which gave me hope although this was a crazy idea to do such a long trip with loaded backpacks in one day. Dries joined us in the kitchen, and we were glad to get a head up regarding the weather forecast for the day. 'It seems like a nice day, you will have rain most part of the day but it will be soft rain and a bit windy and misty on the mountain' (Spot on!) Hmm...cold, wet and fog, seems perfect don't you think? I have always looked for an excuse to do this trip, a sensible excuse....and maybe I thought in the subconscious mind that it will never surface, but it did! Paul and Henk were both on the mountain for an 8 day period doing some research (or so they say-'giggle') and we decided to boost the moral, keep the spirits high and take them

some nice traditional 'vetkoek an mince', prepared by Dries and Chantal and some 'karate water' to help keep them warm during the cold nights!



Visibility was fair at 07:00 am and we left the base, Vincent leading the way and I'm following in his muddy footsteps. Ten minutes into the hike Vincent took the wrong turn and we stopped, backtracked for a while, took another footpath, backtracked again...I probably gave him some sort of an annoyed look, so he said; 'trust me to get us lost, you wait here and I will quickly scan the area for the right track'! Shortly after his disappearing act he reappeared from nowhere through the vegetation and gave a confident kick. After our first real incline I suddenly realized that if we were going to make it a one day trip, we'll





have to put in some effort, but my backpack was just too heavy loaded and Vincent bravely volunteered to take some more weight, on condition that I never ever ...oops slip of the tongue (family issues, trust me on this!),, but she's so sweet Vince, please don't be so stubborn! Well in all honesty, we did well with the uphill approach, way better than downhill which was something like 'slip sliding all way'. As we reached the first Tristan Albatross right on the edge of Gonedale I asked Vincent to go ahead and do the delivery to the guys at the container. I needed a short break and was ready after about 15 minutes. I met him as he turned back from the container, roughly a 100m away. The guys were not there, so we walked around a bit, blew the whistles but no joy in meeting them today! However, Vincent put their 'package' in the container and a cold one on top to point out in which bin the rest of the stuff was, for we knew that they would return back to the container for rations. They gladly did afterwards and discovered the goodies from friends at base! This was the most challenging 'Mr postman' yet, and still we needed to go back down the mountain!

What made it worse was that neither of us had our wrist watches on this trip. Sometimes you have something which is just too special to risk in extreme conditions. So I told Vincent about my experience with the sun, and used it as our watch. It was a bit difficult through the low cloud, mist and rain. He was very surprised when he later found that my calculations were not far off! We stopped a lot on the way down, the legs were taking strain, you all know by now that I have a low centre of gravity, something like a meatball on tooth sticks! Every now and then when I fell in a bad spot, Vincent reached with a firm grip, helped me back on the 'Dunlop's' and on we go! Must say he had a few gracious 'landings' in front of me, but according to him all planned to do some plant root examination..?? When we reached 'Swemgat' both sat down, got lazy and as result the last 300meters to base was way further in the mind. Dries and Chantal saw us coming down and met us right at the main door.

Another great experience shared by a team who are considering each others needs, now Vincent and I can honestly say, we walked the extra mile....!!

**Mission accomplished!**

*by Tom Mc Sherry..*



Vincent resting at Swemgat...



Fledging Albatross chick...



The Home stretch - Gough House...





## The Thought wanders across the waters...

Since it being the last two months before we return to South Africa, I thought I would insert a section on what it is I am looking forward to in the motherland and at the same time expressing what I have missed the most while here on Gough Island. Maybe a bit different but it truly is what islanders start thinking at this point and it forms a very integral part of one's thoughts down here.

My first thoughts do take me back to Bloubergstrand as it has always been a big part of my character, to go to the beach and stare out into the blue, get my feet nestled into the white sand and feeling the whisper of the south eastern on my face. Watching the sun set behind Robbin Island and looking onto table mountain as it lights up in the night, the night sky illuminated by the street lights and the taste of a Steers burger in my mouth. All of this perfectly rounded of at the end by ice cream cone and as your stomach is filled with the sweet tastes, your ears are filled with the sweet sound of the calming ocean and your nose with the fresh smell of salt and washed out kelp.



The "vaalies" always look at us with one eyebrow raised when we talk about our mountain, Table mountain that is, and well what can I say, which Cape Tonian is not proud to be part of such a landmark. It's strange the feeling one gets when you imagine Cape Town without it, as I've always seen it as a watchman looking over the Cape. I remember when we came back from a holiday up north as kids, my father would say that once you can see Table mountain, then you know you are home and truly that is the feeling I had when I returned from Marion. This time will be no different, with tugs guiding our path into the harbour and sea-gulls spectating as always, circling above the ship.



There is something about the smell of the strandveld fynbos along the coasts of cape town. Maybe its the herbal smell of "kooigoed" or the distinct smell of the bietou or blombos bush? The best is when you get off the pathway and into the raw material with your

shorts and bare feet. Generally you come out with scratches and cuts but to me its part of the experience to feel the veld as well, not only to look at it. It's a sense of the small things around you in the strandveld. There are no stumbling onto a black rhino or elephant, but rather a water mongoose or watching an otter float thru the river systems.

Family and friends do come first though, unless I can share these moments with them, that would be the ultimate and something really exciting on the horizon.

by Henk Louw...





# Gough Bunting - July 2009



Birds and Feathers...



by Paul Visser





## My Gough Experience...

Make no mistake, this is serious. Our time is running out the front door underneath the Gough Base sign down the cat walks and over the cliff into the sea. Our space is in danger of being displaced by the voices and opinions on its way in the belly of the Red Beast. We'll have to share our air with the boiling masses of maintenance and research. That's correct, as I write the belly of the Red Beast is being stuffed with next years' supplies (I hope). Soon it will swallow lots of new conversations and stories and plow the oceans to our door step.

Therefore, I will perform a pre-emptive pen strike and write about a couple of my experiences during the past year. For me, the most surprising occurrence as we freeze our days through the grand finale of winter, was how good the weather was in summer. Balmy beautiful days and nights perfect for hiking or lounging in the jacuzzi with the best view on earth. At that stage the Island was lush green and although it makes hiking a little difficult it was also very beautiful from the Bar landing. Christmas day, after the ubiquitous Christmas lunch the whole team lounged on the grass in front of the base in the sun and participated in a concerted, orchestrated, systematic effort to put a serious dent in our wine supplies but mostly managed only to get hart-burn and sunburn. It was a great summer and excellent Christmas.

Another surprise was the beauty of the bird life. I would not describe myself as an avid bird watcher or "Ticker" as the binocular book touting pencil wielding ones apparently are called. However, seeing a Yellow Nose and Sooty Albatross close up was a privilege. They truly are elegant birds and mostly not afraid of humans therefore much more relaxed than the insane Skuas who enjoy flying into your head more than I enjoy getting hit in the head by a squawking neurotic meat bomb. Then there was the first encounter with a Wandering Albatross... awe inspiring. They are big, huge, massive, stately, placid, feathered monsters. My brain struggled valiantly to make the connection between the insanely large bird standing in front of me and the majestic swooping beast effortlessly skimming centimeters above the waves. Although the aforementioned may be the head liners there is also the strange sight of the tiny Bunting that simply looks much too petite compared too the rest of the monsters on the island and the entertaining Moorhens that can be embroiled in a end-game-bare-talon-death-match one second and stand contentedly pecking grass the next. In my opinion Moorhens may suffer from extreme attention deficit disorder that probably saves the species form suicide. Maybe we can learn from them.



Our first evening on the Island the sky was clear and quiet with a full moon. The following night, it was overcast... and there welled up from the bowls, of what sounded like Dante's Purgatory, an evil wailing that momentarily scared me into constipation. It sounded like we were in the midst of a billion very unhappy souls, sort of what I would imagine an English pub sounded like after the previous RWC final. Turns out it's the burrowing birds, Shearwaters and Prions, returning from their daily sojourn at sea. These days it's mostly soothing, listening to the cacophony at night although you do stand the chance of getting hit in the head by a Prion while doing your 0600 Observation at the Stevenson screen. That's probably one way to sum up my year, the year various species of bird flew into my head.





Walking on the island at any time is great fun. You fall over allot. And sometimes you fall face first into a little stream and your back-pack pushes your face down into the mud and no doubt a wide variety of bird faeces and you jump up, spitting muddy rotting plants wildly punching the wind... if you're not the one that fell, it's entertaining, apparently. However, the five times you feel like having a heart attack while climbing a mountain is absolutely worth it once you stand at the top and see the view for the first time. Actually, few things that involve walking on Gough Island are easy to do, but all are worth it.

Finally, although the above is but a tiny glimpse at the past year, there also was the team experience. We are appointed for our job skills, not social compatibility, which inevitably leads to wide range of views and opinions amongst team members. This is great since the process of getting to know each other forces you to listen to all the diverse opinions and to adapt and change your own views if necessary. It keeps things interesting. From team members' reactions while killing zombies on a Playstation to reactions while watching zombies kill people on the big-screen, never a dull moment. Lazy conversations in the kitchen, welcome insanity in the bar, four different types of pounding music as you walk from one side of the Base to the other with one exceptionally passionate Playstation rugby game in the middle while a short walk on any path outside gives you silence, if that's what you want.

This year flew by. All of us look forward to going home, which is healthy. When Frank Zappa asked the dog what his conceptual continuity was, the dog answered, the crux of the biscuit is the apostrophe. That's a smart dog, or at least that's my story until I figure out what it meant. However for me, my conceptual continuity is experience, and this was a good one.[Dries]







## Sushi...

The taste surrounds my every taste bud  
as the slight sting make my eyes water.  
A light white wine to round off the taste  
and some ginger before the next treat.

california rolls and salmon hand rolls are  
my choice  
and yes I struggle to eat with chopsticks,  
but alas I give it a go, as the wasabi grips me  
and all else fades during the sensation on my  
tongue.

A small Asian dude bring us some more  
sushi  
this time some eel sandwiches,  
A slippery sensation indeed  
But I must refrain from eating with speed.

Its not just the raw fish or avo, its not only  
the wasabi and soya  
Its the working of these components in har-  
mony  
that cause the explosion of delight!

by Henk Louw...







## Tristan Skua...



Gonzalo and Maxine proclaiming their territory.

Close relatives of the seagull, but belonging to a family of their own, are the skuas. The species that breeds on Gough Island is the Tristan Skua (*Catharacta hamiltoni*). Although it is quite similar to Subantarctic Skuas found elsewhere around the southern hemisphere, the individuals at Gough Island are sufficiently distinct to warrant their recognitions as a separate species, locally known by the Tristan islanders as the Sea Hen or Dirt Bird. The Tristan Skua is not unique to Gough island, but is confined in geographical distribution to the Tristan da Cunha group of islands.

The Birds are very common to Gough Island, probably because of the abundance of prey in the form of nesting petrels and penguins. Skuas are keen-eyed and constantly ready to swoop on any unattended

eggs or other morsels they suspect to be edible (even if these are pieces of human clothing or useless artefacts). They are real robbers, to the point that they annoy individuals of other bird species until they regurgitate their food, of which the skuas then make a meal. Generally however, besides the wide variety of items included in their diet, a large portion of their food consists of burrowing petrels. The petrels are not usually taken at sea, but on land where they are awkward and vulnerable, particularly when emerging from their burrows.

The night birds like prions and petrels are particularly vulnerable in low visibility conditions like mist, together with bright lights, which disorient the birds and lead to bird strikes. When a bird strikes the base or any other structure it is usually quite stunned and will sit still until it recovers. It is at this time the skuas will take advantage of the grounded bird and can rapidly learn to depend on this source of food. We generally switch off all outside lights at night and close the window blinds to minimise bird strikes.

We have two skuas that occupy the territory that includes Gough House. Gonzalo (the male) has held this territory continuously since before he was banded together with Goose (the female) in 1985. They defend their territory from all other skuas and even have a controlled airspace. Each year they return faithfully to their home, some time in June or July. Last year Gonzalo returned with a new female partner which we named Maxine. In September Maxine laid two brown, speckled eggs which hatched around the end of October. Both chicks do not always survive, and if both eggs or young chicks are lost, a replacement clutch will be laid.



Maxine and her two chicks.





We were fortunate to witness up close how they successfully raised two chicks and also witness both of them fly for the first time. The parents will still feed them for a while after which they will abandon the fully fledged chicks to fend for themselves. It was quite sad to watch them during this time as they frequently "cried" for food. They were also very used to us as they were raised directly underneath the anemometer mast, and almost instantly turned towards begging for food. Skuas are intelligent birds. For this reason, they rapidly habituate to being fed. We therefore have a very strict policy against feeding or interfering with the birds. They stayed close to the base for a few weeks and then took off to join all the other young skuas.

Skuas have no natural predators and are known for their great hold on life. In my personal opinion they are like fighter jets, extremely quick and agile in the sky and to watch their aerial battles are quite astonishing.



*Skua in flight...*

- Resources:**
- Gough Island a Natural History—Christine Hänel, Steven L. Chown, Kevin J Gaston.
  - A complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife, The birds and Marine Mammals of the Antarctic Continent and Southern ocean—Hadoram Shirihi.
  - Gough 49 Team article.

*by Chantal Steyn...*





## A story to tell...

It is strange how much time, effort and money we spend preparing for an expedition. From the time we sign the contract until we see Table Mountain fading behind us. You do research about the island, trying to conceive and prepare for what you're getting yourself into, the months of individual training and weeks of team training to ensure that you will adjust, survive and succeed in this environment. You spend a lot of money and most of us overspend to make sure that you have all the right equipment and enough toothpaste to last you through the next 14 months. You invest in hobbies, studies and a million other extras to prevent procrastination once the excitement of your arrival on the island settles. Apart from all this, the back of your head is constantly preparing for isolation, wondering what it would be like and how you will fit within this small group of people, what will your role be? It is a very busy and quite difficult time for most of us with a rollercoaster of emotions to deal with, the excitement of a new adventure, the fear of the unknown and the sadness of loosening your ties with the environment you know and leaving loved ones behind.

On the big day of departure, you walk up the gangplank and all of a sudden, with your close friends and family witnessing your ascent, you find yourself on an unstable surface with home soil and solid ground behind you and there is no turning back. The big "Red Taxi" blows her deep, loud horn three times and a flood of emotion, almost unbearable, rises up through your body and you feel proud to be part of it all, and you think to yourself.....the next time you see this picture you'll have a great story to tell.

As Table Mountain turns into a coffee table and eventually just a speck on the horizon, you feel yourself too becoming smaller and smaller, so insignificant and vulnerable at the mercy of this powerful, roaring and unpredictable Southern ocean. During the next 9 days of sleeping till you're hungry and eating till you're tired, you get to know your team a bit better, together dreaming and contemplating the year ahead. A vague glimpse of what may be land manifests through the mist. Awe and a sense of wonder engulfs you at the site as the rock grows into a mountain and you feel kind of silly that your first reaction is to look for dinosaurs! Jurassic, rugged and remote..... This will be home.....

Almost 12 Months have now past since the day we were "abandoned" by civilization. We've come to know and respect the rhythm of the Island, its creatures and characters and the ocean and weather guarding it.... so untouched. We have come to trust in our fellow team mates and developed a strong camaraderie as islanders. Living in such close proximity to each other can sometimes lead to conflict and small battles can escalate into a war in no time, but this is not Survivor and you can't vote someone of this Island! So we are forced to compromise, find reason and resolve these issues and ultimately understand and respect one another. With every bar and dinner conversation, you learn a little bit more about each other, stories from the past and dreams about the future. We stood by one another through hardship and happiness. We have adopted new ways, opinions and skills.... We have grown.....The Island has finally changed us.







It is, with mixed emotions, that we now have to wake up from this dream and slowly return to reality. The reason I called our preparation for an expedition strange, is in the fact that we hardly ever prepare for our return. All you think about are seeing your family again and stopping at KFC for some chicken or stuffing your face with fresh salad! Although going on an expedition to an unknown world requires a lot of preparation and a new mindset, going back home will be an even greater adjustment. Most of us will have to find a new job, a new home, a new car..... start a new life. You have to get used to speed as the island speed limit is about 3km/day. You don't even know what money looks like anymore...let alone paying for anything. Seeing the same 7 faces everyday creates a sense of comfort and safety you will now longer experience. These are just to mention a few.

While we were gone, the World has changed! For a year, your only connection to this World has been through family, but for the most part you fed on Media sensation via the internet. The lives of family and friends moved on without you. And once again the back of your head starts racing.....what will it be like and how will you fit within this World? What will the world make of what you have become?



On the big day of arrival, a vague glimpse of what may be land manifests through the pollution. Awe and a sense of wonder engulfs you as the coffee table grows into a Mountain and the site of this familiar scene warms you and wakes up all the butterflies that lay dormant in your stomach since the day of your departure. The final approach feels like an eternity. All of a sudden people scatter in all directions to find a private spot on the ship as news spreads like a wild fire that the first Vodacom signal bridged the gap over the ocean. It has begun.....you once again loosen your ties with your current surroundings and start saying goodbye to your new found friends.

The big "Red Taxi" blows her deep, loud horn three times and a flood of emotion, almost unbearable, rises up through your body and you feel proud to have been part it all.

You walk down the gangplank and all of a sudden, with your close friends and family witnessing your descent, you find yourself on stable surface with home soil and solid ground beneath you, and you think to yourself.....Now I have a story to tell.

*by Chantal Steyn.*







## Photo Competition...

The photo of the month for June as voted by you:



*Floating Bubble...— Photographed by Paul Visser.*

**Please vote for your favourite photo:**

Phone: 021 405 9470  
Fax: 021 405 9474  
Email: [gough@sanap.ac.za](mailto:gough@sanap.ac.za)

**To see more photos or learn more about the island, please visit our websites:**

[www.sanap.ac.za](http://www.sanap.ac.za)  
[www.gough.co.za](http://www.gough.co.za)





1.



2.



3.







4.



5.



6.







# Gough Bunting - July 2009



## Weather...

### PRESSURE

Ave. Max Pressure	1017.2 hPa
Ave. Min Pressure	1008.5 hPa
Ave. Pressure	1012.7 hPa
Max Pressure	1027.9 hPa
Min Pressure	992.8 hPa

### TEMPERATURE

Ave. Max Temp	13.4 °C
Ave. Min Temp	8.4 °C
Ave. Temp	10.9 °C
Max Temp	18.5 °C
Min Temp	3.1 °C

### HUMIDITY

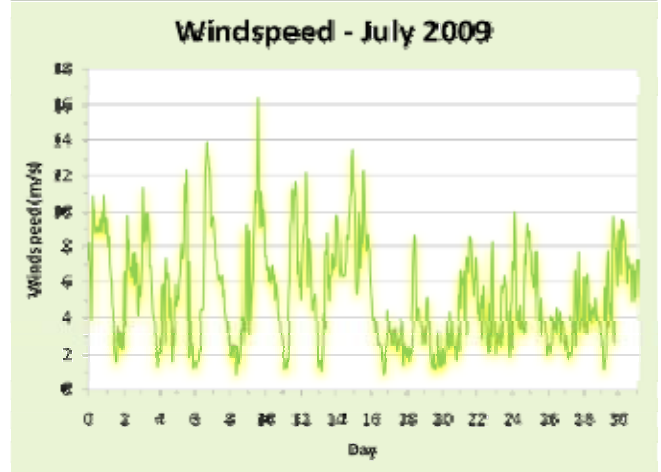
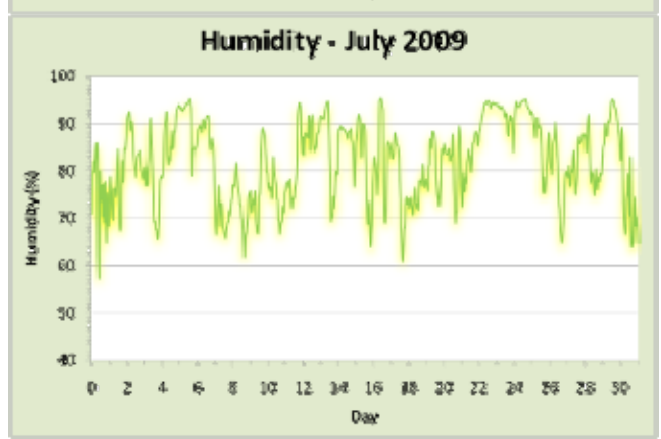
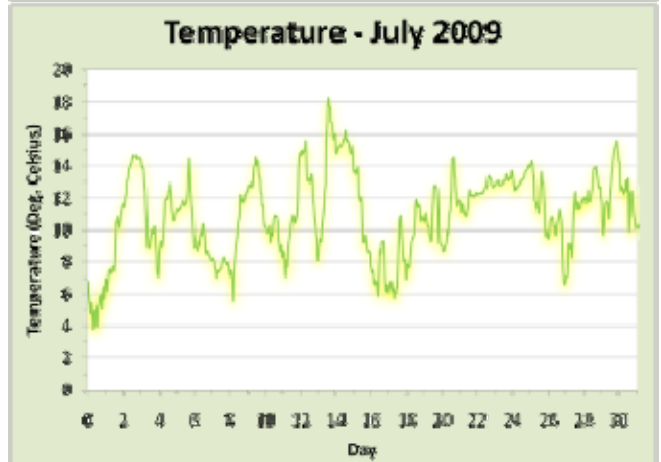
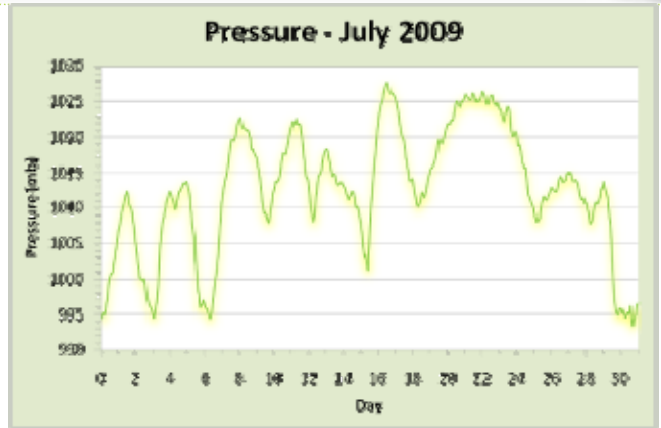
Ave Humidity	82 %
Max Humidity	95 %
Min Humidity	53 %

### WIND

Max Wind Gust	37.6 m/s or 135.3 km/h
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### RAINFALL

Total Rainfall	278.2 mm
Highest in 24 Hours	49.6 mm
Total days with rain	22 days
Total days >1mm	21 days
Total Sunshine	69.7 hours





## Sponsors...

*We just want to thank all our sponsors once again for giving us that little bit of home comforts on the island!!*

If you or your company are interested in sponsoring future expeditions, doesn't matter how small or in which way, please contact us, it will be greatly appreciated...

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