



# Gough Bunting

May 2009



Welcome to our Monthly Newsletter....

Enjoy the Read...



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## ICARUS

Most of us know the story of Icarus, the young Greek and his father Daedalus, a talented craftsman that tried to escape imprisonment by making both for him and his son wings out of wax and feathers. Before taking off from the Island Crete, Daedalus warned his son not to fly too close to the sun or too close to the sea, but overcome by the giddiness that flying lent him Icarus soared too close to the sun, which of course melted the wax. He kept on flapping his wings but soon realized that he had no feathers left and was flapping his bare arms. Icarus fell into the sea which bears his name as result; the Icarian Sea, the sea near Icaria, an Island southwest of Samos. (Ref: *Wikipedia*)

There are many different variants of the story, some more realistic e.g. that the escape was actually by sail boat and that Icarus fell overboard, however, I choose the 'super wings' version!

Now before you all worry let me make myself clear; yes there are some resemblance, we are on an island also, but we are not in exile as result of some wrong's, we are actually here because we qualified to be on this expedition out of own will! But this brings me to my topic; Icarus, the wonder of flight! There is a proverb; 'once you've experienced flight you will always walk the earth with your eyes towards the sky'



Daedalus dons his son's wings — Oil Painting by Frederic Leighton—1869 (copyright expired—Wikipedia)



Pictures of young Wandering Albatross learning to fly (taken on Marion Island by myself—Nov 2006)





What motivated Icarus and his beloved father, was it the fact that they would sit like us on an Island, watching the seabirds wandering above, or was it just mankind that burned with desire within, or maybe a little bit of both? Do you identify with this, for I do!

No, just if you're wondering, I don't intend to pluck all the wandering Albatross feathers, collecting all the candles asking Vincent our own craftsman on the Island to make me an Icarus outfit!

I've been there, in quenching my thirst for flight I've taken on the wonderful sport of recreational skydiving back in 1998. I have started off on a humble note, doing the conservative freefall progression course at Pretoria skydiving club, advancing into a licensed category two skydiver. My skydiving career lasted a full 4 years and 130 jumps, and came to a sudden and almost tragic stop when I got it all wrong, hitting a thermal at roughly 300feet and crash-landed as result thereof. Injuries sustained were fractured tibia and fibula, which healed miraculously under the capable operative hands of Doctor Gerry Capaert of Montana hospital, what a great orthopedic surgeon! Like they say; 'any landing you can walk away from was a good landing', However, I did not walk that day or the next two months at least! This was human error, as most of skydiving injuries and fatalities are accounted for, but as I always say; 'no regrets, I have seen more, tasted more, experienced more, I am an true adventurer who take full accountability for what I have done, and yet by Gods grace I will keep exploring and serving in rather astonishing ways as a deposit of memories into my pension fund!'

*by Tom Mc Sherry...*



Exiting Pilatus Porter in modern Icarus style, this was happy days!!



Free falling, checking my altitude meter at roughly 4000ft over Wonderboom, Pretoria



## FLU FLY FLOW!

On Tuesday I woke up with a wonderful day ahead of me. I drove to work, singing in my car like no pop idol can sing. I was full of joy and looking forward to achieve some goals. As the day progresses I felt my throat getting dryer and dryer. It felt as if someone has stuck a roll of barbwire down my throat.

Later the afternoon I couldn't function properly anymore. I felt the flu creeping up on me like a thief in the night. I wanted to stop this bug that was eating me alive. Why did the hundreds of oranges that I ate not prevent me from getting sick? Why why why?

On Thursday I was a dead lost. I couldn't lift my head from the pillow. The flu won. I was totally lost for my work, my household and my family. Sleeping and moaning was the only thing left to do.

My mother always used to say "Elsabé, dress warmly in the winter". Now with our children we do the same. In winter we want them to overdress so that they do not get sick, but the amazing thing is that you do not get sick from the cold.

When I was at Gough Island, we sometimes wore short sleeve shirts and walked outside when the weather conditions didn't actually allowed us to walk like that. We became wet when it was raining, going in and out of the building where the temperature was nice and warm.

Guess what? We didn't get sick. A friend told me once that it is not the cold conditions that makes you sick, but the germs in the air. This really makes more sense to me, because I have seen people walking around with short sleeve shirts the whole winter and they never got sick.

So, next time you see me, I will be conquering the cold without a jacket. For now I must just get over this terrible flu.

It is times like these that I really miss Gough Island!

*by Chaplain Elsabé Francis*







## WINTER MONTHS

Now that its winter, going up to the mountain is not as pleasant as in the past summer months, but it's a beautiful sight.

We had our first snow for our winter on Gough and its was very cold, especially when you on the mountain 500—800 meters above sea level. Me and Henk went to do some work as usual in the mountain and Tumi and Vince went along. We were almost on top when it started snowing and not an hour went past before it was white all around us.

It is fun to see all the beautiful sights, but it can be very unpleasant for your hands and feet and also to sleep in a tent, but you get used to it.

The most interesting thing for me is that we as humans, have 3 layers of close on, gloves enc., but the birds, especially the chicks sit in the snow as if it is just another island day.



Albatross chick in the snow...



Vince, Tumi, Henk, Paul...

The albatross blends into the white colour of the snow so you almost can't see them.

Whenever, on Gough and on Marion , we worked in the field and it was unpleasant, I just say to myself, this Island is for the Birds not for man.

I still enjoy being here and still have the whole winter in ahead of us with a lot of work, so we might as well enjoy it!!





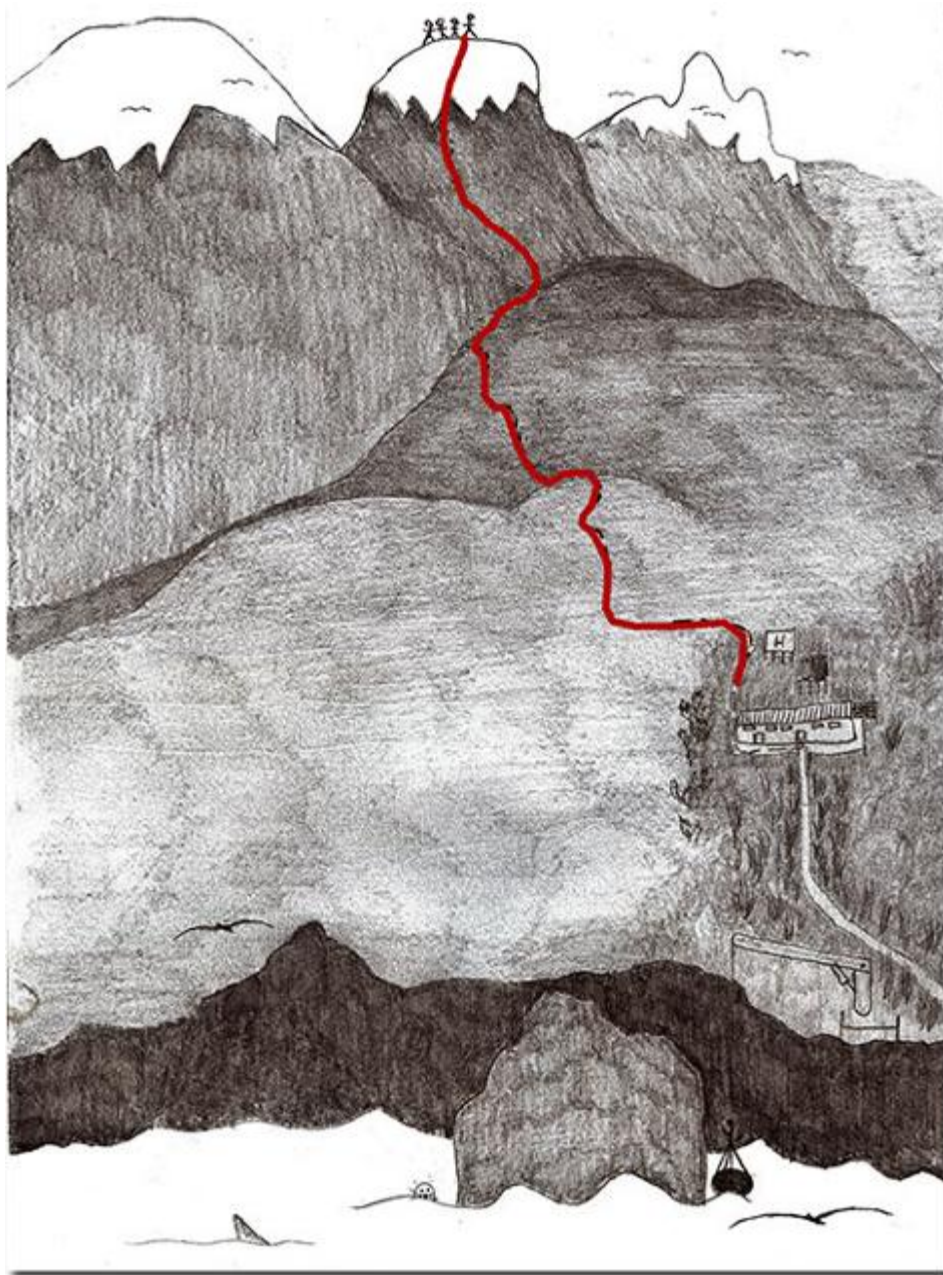
Well camouflaged Adult Tristan Albatross

The view of Tafelkop covered in snow...



*by Paul Visser...*





The route to Goneydale via Tafelkop when Paul, Henk, Tumi and Vincent got caught up in a sudden snow storm...

*Illustration by Vincent Rademeyer.*





Summary of Vince's Birth-day...by Paul Vijsser...

Vincent van Gough... Drawing by Rupert...

Motorcycle figurine, by Tom





## SUPERSTICIOUS MINDS

I never really consider myself as a superstitious person and generally I do believe that there is a certain structure toward how things occur in life, there is a reason for everything that happens around us and with us, whether it be so that we learn something out of it, or maybe it was just meant to be.

Many people believe in Horse shoes, the four leaf clover and even in those sms's that apparently tell them the lotto numbers for Saturday nights draw. Some people even thread their shoe laces in certain way, some wear their respective team's jersey and some carry the old rabbits foot, but one thing is certain, in some way we all tend to believe in some transcending way of being that might make our lives just a little more exciting.

I do however remember that throughout my Rugby career that I had a couple of superstitious ways. I believed that I would not perform at my best if one of my socks weren't dropped to my rugby boot and the other one drawn up as it should be up to my knee. I also had to have tape around my rugby boots and preferably red. Before I went onto the field, the only thing I surrounded myself with was looking down at the grass and creating a space bubble where I ran through the general game plan and no matter what, nothing was going to take me out of that, not even my friends' and girlfriend's chants. It was a ritual basically, and it worked for me, but as my rugby the ritual also came to an end.

These days, I tend to do more or less the same in that when I walk up to the mountain, I have my preferred walking pants and boots, I have my cap and my walking stick still has a hair elastic from when my hair was still at length, but now its just a "lucky charm" as they say. Pity that my walking stick always keeps breaking on our way up. I guess, being on Islands so long have moulded me into a routine, I have discovered what works for me and now its once again like a little ritual and if its not 100% as I want it, then I either tend to forget something or the day starts of at a slow pace.

But to get back to my first paragraph; I was sitting in the lounge the other day watching the series show called, My name is Earl, and the story is about this bloke who has done so much bad things in his life that Karma (the law of moral causation) decided to teach him a lesson by hitting him with a car, he also won \$100 000 and with this he then decides to turn his life around and rectify his wrong doings.







Now recently it has started to rain quite a lot here on Gough, and from the beginning of the year its been a problem with rain seeping through the roof and leaking into the base, generally into the kitchen. But just the other day it started leaking in the passageway in front of my room door, leaving a mush watery stain on the carpet the size of a small coffee table. So as we generally walk in base either bare feet or with socks on especially if doing work around base as we just slip on the boots when going outside and there we go, I was walking on my socks and was fortunate enough to step in the same puddle of water with the same foot not once but three times in a row, leaving my one sock wet. Now this didn't faze me much, but it was a bit of a thorn in my side. It got me thinking though. So last night I found myself lying watching a movie and suddenly from nowhere, without any precipitation for the whole day, a droplet finds itself on my chest, and then another one and then yet another. Is that Karma telling me something, or have I just been watching My name is Earl once too many...



*By Henk Louw...*



# BLUE BULL SUPER 14 CHAMPIONS

The Blue Bulls are the Super 14 Champions and wow, what a match! Technology is to be thanked by our Islanders, how it evolved through the years! As recent as 2006 on Marion Island we were sitting in the radio room, each rugby supporter with his beer listening to the crackling voices of the commentator over HF radio, missing some moments and would stare at each other with big question marks between the eyes; 'did my team score or not, and what is the score?' I managed a satellite radio sponsorship for the year team just to learn that the signal cuts somewhere between Tristan da Cunha Island and us! But thanks to the ever evolving technology we are now listening to radio RSG over the internet streaming device! I was the only Bulls supporter, but I'm not one of those pain in the \$%#@ type of supporters that try to run every other team down, the arrogance that our bulls supporters are so commonly accused of ! I don't mind when people playfully make remarks about other teams, but it all changes when it become personal which is just so unnecessary! However, the Bulls deserved this trophy and proofed to be the undisputed winners of the most challenging cup in my judgment!

This article then supported with a cartoon clip by Vincent to honor the Blue Bull Super 14 Champions!!

It was quite a day of celebrations; it was also Vincent's 35<sup>th</sup> Birth day! No arguments here, South African sport are well and alive!



*by Tom Mc Sherry...*  
*Cartoon by Vincent Rademeyer...*





## OBSERVING ABBREVIATED WEATHER

It's an appropriate time to write about the Meteorological (MET) component of our expedition. A heavy intermittent downpour is drenching the already soaked island. If this were to be cats and dogs it would have been Surprised Lions and Ungreatful Danes... and I blame hyperbole on strong black coffee and claim no responsibility if a large dog falls on the island.

The South-African Base on Gough Island (GI) is run mainly as a weather station from where we gather and disseminate real time MET data for the South African Weather Service (SAWS). This data is used in the analysis of current and prediction of future weather conditions world wide.

In order to predict weather you need an accurate model, a description of the physical mechanisms involved in dynamic atmospheric systems from global to local scale and a complete description of the initial state of the atmosphere. We on GI are part of a global network of observers striving to provide the most accurate initial state. We can, however only strive, since it is actually impossible to describe anything absolutely since Brother Heisenberg (BH) went and messed up physics for everybody.

SAWS provide an Automatic Weather Station (AWS) that records the main MET parameters in five second intervals. These are temperature (T), humidity (RH), pressure (p), rainfall (RR), wind speed (WS) and wind direction (WD). Proprietary software developed by SAWS derives further parameters like pressure tendency(ppp), sea-surface pressure(QNH), dew-point temperature ( $T_d$ ) and so forth and compiles and transmits a METAR (MÉTéorologique ["Weather"] Aviation Régulière ["Routine"]) on the hour augmented with visual observations(obs) made by, "The Observers". METARS are aviation products mainly used in preflight briefings.



Type 2, Low cloud - Cumulus Congestus... Captured after the snow storm...



Every 3 hours starting at 0000 Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) a Synop (synoptic observation) is produced. A Synop is a more detailed obs of present weather (ww) and past weather(WW) conditions. The 6 hourly Synops is called "The Main Synop" (SM) (0000, 0600, 1200, 1800GMT) and includes RR measurements. All other Synops are called "Intermediate Synops" (SI) (0300, 0900, 1500, 2100GMT).

Visual obs involve cloud (cld), visibility (vis), ww and WW conditions and manual sunshine (SS) and RR measurements. Cld is reported in terms of amount, height and type. We report cld in three levels, low ( $C_l$ ), middle ( $C_m$ ) and high cloud ( $C_h$ ), each level comprising 9 possible types of cloud. Although the Island is terra-mostly-firma we use marine codes in reporting vis. This is simply a set of codes relating to specific distances. There are 100 ww codes for all types of ww conditions. For instance, at the moment we have a RR rate of 9.5mm/h (it has calmed down since earlier), it is continues and the drops do not freeze when it settles therefore it would be code 63 - "moderate continues RR, not freezing". Finally we report WW, significant weather since the previous SM, an abbreviated code-set consisting of only 10 codes. An important consideration in accurate reporting is knowledge of Met cause-and-effect. Only certain type of precipitation is possible from certain cld types. Your vis needs to correlate with reported ww which needs to correlate with synoptic conditions and show consistency in reporting for it to inspire any confidence. You can learn all the codes by hart but it remains an experience based skill to make an accurate observation.

The, possibly, most important but definitely most thorny part of our duties are the Upper Air Ascents. This entails an electronic device, radiosonde(sonde), being tied to a hydrogen filled balloon that is allowed to rise through the atmosphere, the sonde recording p, T and RH with WS and WD inferred from Global Positioning System (GPS) data. Two ascents are done daily. The balloon should be released at exactly 1030 and 2300GMT. This allows the ascent to complete, be compiled and sent out by noon and midnight. The balloon usually ascends to around 30000m continually expanding due to the falling pressure eventually bursting after compiling an extremely valuable profile of the atmosphere. The importance of Upper Air in forecasting can not be over stated. The ascents afford us a three dimensional (3D) view that is crucial in modeling one 3D global atmosphere. Unfortunately it is an expensive exercise (EE). Each ascent cost around R2500. Twice daily at multiple locations 365 days a year... do the math.







The Upper Air on GI is kindly sponsored by the United Kingdom (UK) Met Service.

Finally, we are charged with maintenance of Met instruments on the Island. Under these stormy and very wet conditions instruments fail on a regular basis. We replace and repair where and when it is needed. Unfortunately some of the equipment can not be repaired safely on the island. There are ships from time to time that come this way so if it is possible we have spare parts sent via them and are obviously very grateful for their help. I must also mention the good work done by Vincent and Chantal who provide the Base systems (power, communications etc.) support for our operation.

The Southern Hemisphere consists of vast expanses of ocean broken by mostly poor developing countries continually afflicted by acronyms and international debt. Qualified personnel, AWSs' and drifting weather buoys are financially out of reach of most southern hemisphere nations. When you struggle for daily survival gathering of weather data is not a high priority. Therefore the few trusted data points south of the equator like GI become globally important especially in data sparse areas like the South-Atlantic. (It also helps to motivate when you rationalize your own importance while doing your last Obs at 0300, Fr. evening while others debate world affairs in the recreational area or when you get up at 0500 for day shift on a dark rainy Saturday morning after a Fr. evening birthday party and you're lucky to be getting up since others are still standing or while you wrestle 1m<sup>3</sup> hydrogen outside in 50kts wind 5cm from your ear and you realize you've still got your polar fleece on and its generating beautiful static electricity that you can feel tickling your beard... ) [Dries]



Metkassies hard at work!

(For more information and 3 hourly weather updates visit [www.gough.co.za](http://www.gough.co.za))



## GOUGH MOORHEN

### DESCRIPTION

The Gough moorhen is a medium-sized, thickset, almost flightless bird that resembles the common moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) but is smaller, stockier and with shorter wings. The head, neck and underparts are a sooty-black, while the mantle is brown and the tail is tipped in white. Unlike the common moorhen, the white plumage on the flanks is either missing or reduced. The beak is yellow at the tip, changing to red at the base of the bill, which continues up between the eyes to the forehead. The legs are red to orange in colour with greenish-yellow blotches.



Moorhen in the river.

### RANGE

Originally endemic to Gough Island. However, seven birds were also introduced to neighbouring Tristan Island in 1956, where this species' close relative, the Tristan moorhen (*G. nesiotis*), had become extinct at the end of the 19th century. In 1983, the Gough population was estimated at 2,000-3,000 pairs and, in 1984, the Tristan population was estimated at around 250 pairs and increasing. It has been disputed whether the birds living at present on Tristan are descendants of introduced Gough moorhens or in fact part of a recovering remnant population of the original Tristan moorhen, classified as extinct. Current opinion is generally that the former is the case.

### HABITAT

On Gough, the moorhen is found near the coast in boggy areas and close to streams, commonly in fern-bush but sometimes in tussock grass. On Tristan, where no tussock remains, the bird is found in fern-bush

### BIOLOGY

The Gough moorhen is a monogamous species, forming breeding pairs that defend a territory together. Breeding occurs from September to March, peaking between October and December on Gough. Both sexes construct a cup-shaped nest in the grass, made from sticks, into which two to five eggs are laid. The eggs are incubated for approximately 21 days, also by both sexes. Two broods are possible in a year and, if managed, the first brood will help with the rearing of the second.





This species feeds on vegetable matter, seeds, invertebrates and carrion, and scavenges petrel carcasses and garbage (basically anything!). Invertebrates are often foraged for in abandoned and active albatross nests, as well as petrel burrows. Interestingly, it actively hunts mice and preys on unattended eggs of burrowing petrels.



## THREATS

Although stable or even increasing in numbers, its occurrence

This is one of our courtyard resident Moorhens (Adult)

in a restricted habitat on only two islands makes this species extremely vulnerable to chance events such as fires, hurricanes and disease epidemics. Additionally, despite surviving with introduced rats on Tristan, the accidental introduction of predators to Gough remains a risk. Indeed, it is likely that the Gough moorhen's close relative, the extinct Tristan moorhen (*G. nesiotis*), disappeared from Tristan as a result of predation by the black rat (*Rattus rattus*), though this may have been in combination with feral cat predation, habitat destruction and hunting by islanders.

## CONSERVATION

A cat eradication programme on Tristan in the 1970s was highly successful, helping to protect the Gough moorhen and other endangered native birds. Unfortunately, as an introduced species to Tristan, the Gough moorhen is considered alien, and therefore not protected there under the Tristan da Cunha Conservation Ordinance. The bird's stronghold on Gough, however, is well protected, with the island being a nature reserve and World Heritage Site. Gough Island is the least disturbed major cool-temperate island ecosystem in the South Atlantic Ocean, and hosts one of the most important sea-bird colonies in the world. Indeed, with 54 bird species, 22 breeding species and four threatened species, the island will probably continue to be well protected indefinitely, preserving this rich biodiversity and protecting the Gough moorhen for many years to come.

by Chantal Steyn

Sources: IUCN Red List (December, 2008) <http://www.iucnredlist.org>; BirdLife International (December, 2008) <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species>; Twycross Zoo Animal Information Sheet (December, 2008)



## PHOTO COMPETITION

THE PHOTO OF THE MONTH FOR APRIL:



The view from my Office! This is such a familiar site, I photographed it a million times, but each photo is different. On this day we had strong winds and heavy showers with a rainbow appearing every now and then. I will never get tired of this view...

Please vote for your favourite photo of the month:

Phone: 021 405 9470

Fax: 021 405 9474

Email: [gough@sanap.ac.za](mailto:gough@sanap.ac.za)

And for more information on Gough Island or the Islanders please visit our websites:

<http://www.sanap.ac.za> (Official Sanap website)

<http://www.gough.co.za> (Team's personal website)





## PHOTOS FOR MAY...

1



2



3



4



5







6



7



8



9





## WEATHER

### PRESSURE

Ave. Max Pressure	1005.5 hPa
Ave. Min Pressure	994.8 hPa
Ave. Pressure	1000.3 hPa
Max Pressure	1023.0 hPa
Min Pressure	977.8 hPa

### TEMPERATURE

Ave. Max Temp	14.4 °C
Ave. Min Temp	9.9 °C
Ave. Temp	12.2 °C
Max Temp	20.8 °C
Min Temp	3.0 °C

### HUMIDITY

Ave Humidity	80 %
Max Humidity	97 %
Min Humidity	53 %

### WIND

Max Wind Gust	37.0 m/s or 133.2 km/h
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### RAINFALL

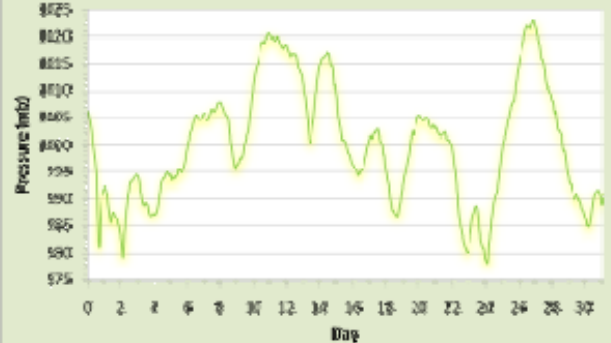
Total Rainfall	562.6 mm
Highest in 24 Hours	169.6 mm
Total days with rain	27 days
Total days >1mm	21 days
Total Sunshine	76.1 hours

Very WET!

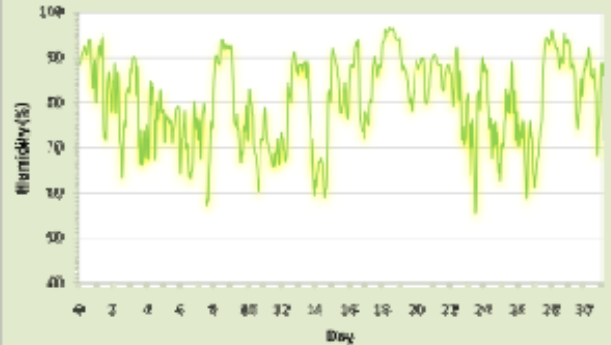
Windspeed - May 2009



Pressure - May 2009



Humidity - May 2009



Temperature - May 2009





## SPONSORS

**GOUGH 54**

ISLAND INTO THE TERN LIFE @ GOUGH WEATHER SPONSORS CONTACT US

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**WEATHER**

May 2009 to 06 Nov 2009

High 14.0  
Low 11.0  
Wind: 10.0  
Max: 11.0  
Min: 10.0

Period: 10.000000

Personal Weather Station: Wind speed, direction, pressure, humidity, air temperature, cloud cover, visibility, and rain.

8 HOURS BACK    1 HOUR BACK



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

