



The Beauty of hut life

Don't you wish you were here?



Where is Marion Island anyway?

Not near Durban.



Katedraal our home

The Gogga scientists being very possessive of the hut on-top of the island.



Gentoo Madness

What is a Gentoo?



Happy Birthday

Social happenings.



The Beauty of hut life

Mia Wege

Your day has been long and tiring. Fighting head-on winds that keep pushing you back. Your Gore-tex seems as if it has cracked under the pressure from the constant bombardment of rain, you're now soaking wet. Your legs cramp – “not another uphill”. Your back aches – “why did I pack so many things in my bag?” Then, through the mist appears something white & beautiful. The rain suddenly stopped & the sun shines directly onto it. It is as if you can hear the collective voice of a 1000 angels going “aaaaaaah!” No, I'm not talking about something supernatural. I'm simply referring to the glorious moment you see the hut after a day that has tested every last part of your being. You scrape together your last bit of energy. You run (or just walk briskly) step onto the catwalk & sigh: “Aah, I have made it.”



Everyone has their different routines when they first reach the hut. Some switch the gas on immediately and go straight for the heater. Others might first open the door to see if someone else is also occupying the hut. Myself? Well, I open the door, stumble in, chuck down my bag, plonk my bum down on the bench & reflect. “Wow! What an amazing day Marion has given me!” Then I go and switch on the gas, the heater, take off my gumboots and wet clothes and into my dry hut clothes I go. Whatever your routine, whether you're a sealer, birder, gogga or whoever, your routine always ends in the inevitable hut coffee. Those of you who have been to a hut on the island will of course know what I'm talking about. Those of you who haven't...I'm sorry. I cannot divulge the secret recipe of hut coffee. The recipe can only be shared and passed on inside a hut. What I can tell you is that it is a magical warm drink that'll make your toes curl up with pleasure and leave you feeling refreshed and re-energised. Whether it was your most challenging day on the island so far, hut coffee will make you feel it was all worth it. Hut coffee's magical powers can only be fully appreciated inside a hut.

After you're dry & warm and you've had your hut coffee, what next? Well, you can start thinking about what you are going to eat. Two minute noodles? Some tinned breyani? Perhaps you carried some fillet steaks with you from base (no wonder your back was taking strain today). After you prepared your glorious meal, stuffed yourself, did the dishes and made yourself a last cup of Rooibos for the night what next? If it is already 7 o' clock its time for comms with base – if that particular hut has comms. After that? What next? Well, that's just it! In the hut there is no “I have to go enter data”, “I have to reply to all my hundreds of e-mails” or “I have to do my internet banking and pay my bills.” That's the beauty of hut life! In a hut there are no have-to's, got to's and other obligations. All you really have to do is the basics of living. Eat, clean-up, sleep and of course answering when nature calls. You finally have time to read that book you've always wanted to but

never seem to have the time for, or just listen to some music on your I-pod. It is a simple life with none of the hustle & bustle us modern folk has become so accustomed to. That is why the sealers, when each of us has to spend a week at Mixed Pickle, we call it our "sealer holiday time." At 8 o' clock it is usually time for bed. Your day has been long and tough, filled with adventures. Now at the end of it you can relax to wake up refreshed and ready for another unique adventure-filled day on glorious Marion Island. Now, don't you just wish you were here?



Our Sponsor for the Month:



Where is Marion Island anyway?

After I told my friends where I was going to, it took, on average, about 37 seconds before that question came up. And it came up without fail.

So, for all of you who still wondered, here it is:

Marion Island is a small sub-antarctic island about ± 2000 km south-east of South Africa. It is an dormant volcano about 24 km long, 14 km wide and 1231 m high (Mascarin peak). It lies next to the Southwest Indian mid-ocean Ridge. It is in the path of the most exciting weather on the planet: The roaring 40's. And it is far away from everything and everyone. Our nearest neighbour is the french island of "Ill de la Possession" ± 1000 km away.

Here are no cellphones, no banks, no cars, no taxis, no cafes, no shops of any kind.

We are properly in the wilderness. This causes a few problems sometimes.

No, it is not because we've run out of something. (bet you thought it was) No, it is always some bank clerck or telemarketer which causes problems. "Sir, could you please tell Mr So-and-so go to his nearest branch/outlet/agency to so we can get his ID/signature/assesment/papers/etc." That is about when I hang my head and say to myself: "Here we go again." And then I start explaining, patiently & slowly, what the situation is. Some get it, some don't. The ones who don't; always asks "But you have a Cape Town [phone] number..."(so you must be lying to me.) And then you need to explain to them about Satellite systems and telephone networks. I'm SOO lucky to have a very friendly & understanding bank manager, unlike some of my colleagues.

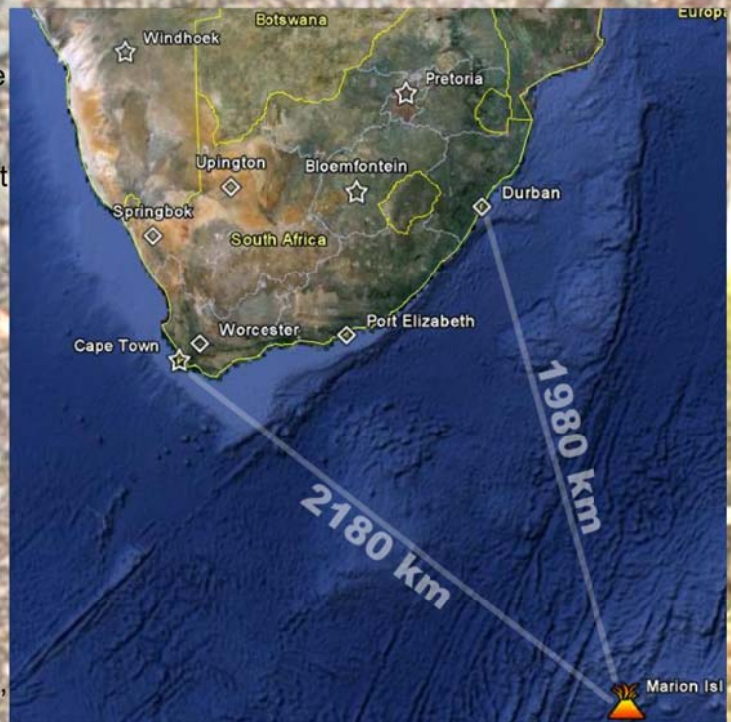
Then the next question always is:

Why?

It is beautiful here. Where else would a king penguin walk up to me to within an arm reach. Where else would I go to see 4 ton elephant seals basking in the sun. When will I ever get the chance again to film killerwhales from 3 meters away without getting into a boat. I can look at dolphins at breakfast, be weighing 10 kg Albatrosses at tea time, and go up to 1000m by late afternoon to watch the sunset over the snowy peaks of the island.

Fantastic. The real question is: Why did I wait so long?

-Johan Hoffman



Katedraal our home

What a nice sunny day it was as James & I went out for our Temperature Data Loggers. Went up First Sister and wow! Beauty, that is all I saw & I was left speechless by our view.

It was James' first time to the home of Gogga and Geomorphologists. Therefore, you can imagine his excitement as we went up the hill. I was so tired that he decided to climb up the hill in a mission to wait for me but I was admiring what I had behind me.



Picture by James Wilshere

Tafelberg, Junior's kop & Base were under a blanket of a low cloud. I could only see the pick of Prince Edward Island's structure. Speechless, did I say... Yep! I was and I forgot about how tired I was. We made it to the hut and James was speechless.



Picture by Asanda Phiri

Gentoo Madness

This month the birders started with Gentoo Penguin monitoring. We are trying to get an idea of their breeding chronology, meaning the dates when they arrive; start laying eggs; eggs hatching; chicks start to crèche and when they leave the nest. So each day since the first of June we have been going to Ship's Cove (a 40 minute walk on average from base) to count the number of Gentoo's hanging around on the beach and those that are nesting. This may sound easier said than done. There are days where you have to battle the wind, rain, and ice pellets, cross raging rivers and then there is still the mist where you can not see more than 10m in front off you.

But it is not all bad, there are fun moments. Like when Delia made friends with a Skua. Delia tried very hard to chase the skua away but he wouldn't give up, kept following her very closely, ignoring everyone else. At times it looked like he really wanted to eat her. But the skua is camera shy, cause just as soon as I finally got the camera out he flew off. Then there are always the penguins, watching how they gather their nesting material, sometimes stealing some from another's nest, or chasing other penguins or Sheathbills around on the beach.

The Gentoo's are slowly arriving, with 13 nests so far at Ship's Cove and a few more Gentoo's at other sites.

QUICK GENTOO PENGUIN FACTS:

- **Scientific name:** *Pygoscelis papua*
- **Description:** They are black and white birds, but what make Gentoo penguins look different from other penguins is the distinctive white "cap" that extends over their head, from one eye to the other and their orange-red bill and orange-yellow feet.
- **Size:** They are between 61 and 76cm tall. Female Gentoos are generally smaller than males.
- **Weight:** They can weigh between 5.5kg and 6.4kg.
- **Life span:** Exactly how long they live for is not sure, but it is estimated that they live for about 15-20 years.
- **Where are they found:** Gentoo penguins are found mainly in the sub-Antarctic. They are found breeding on the islands Marion; Prince Edward; Crozet; Kerguelen; Heard; Macquarie; Staten; Falkland; South Georgia; South Sandwich; South Orkney; South Shetland Islands and the Antarctic Peninsula.
- **What do they eat:** Their main food source is krill (small shrimp like organisms). Small fish species (such as Rock cod and Lantern fish), amphipods and squid make out a small portion of their diet.



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- **Breeding age:** It is said that they can start breeding as young as two years of age (unlike other penguins), but the average age is 3-4 years old.
 - **Breeding season:** On Marion Island they start breeding in winter, usually around June/July.
 - **Number of eggs:** The female lays 2 eggs, the second egg about 3-4 days after the first.
 - **Incubation period:** Both parents take turns to keep the eggs warm. It takes about 35-36 days for the eggs to hatch.
 - **Conservation status:** Near Threatened
 - **Swim speed:** Gentoos are the fastest of all the penguins reaching a speed of up to 36km per hour. They usually cruise at a speed of 7.5km per hour.
 - **Dive depth:** They can dive as deep as 210 metres but mostly they only dive to 70-100 meters deep. Diving trips can last for 2-5 minutes.
 - **Threats:** In the water they are eaten by Seals and Orcas. On land they do not really have predators, but Skua's and Giant Petrels may steal some eggs or young, unattended chicks.

FUN FACTS:

- ❖ They are the third largest penguin after the Emperor penguin and the King penguin.
- ❖ When they dive they reduce their heart rate from 80-100 beats per minute to only 20 beats per minute.
- ❖ Their nests are made of stones, pebbles, grass, sticks, feathers and anything else they can get hold of.
- ❖ They are the only penguin with such a prominent tail.
- ❖ Once chicks are older and able to move around confidently they will chase the parents around the colony during feeding time. A feeding chase can take them as far as 300 metres from their nest. This is a way for the parents to make sure they are feeding the right chick.
- ❖ Gentoo's breed at different sites each year and will walk far inland to find a suitable breeding site.

That's all from the birders side for now. Until next time! From Marlene

Happy Birthday

This month started with a big surprise, early one morning when we were preparing our breakfast with some of the early birds. There was a ship sailing towards the base, after so many confusions that it was a “ching chong”, we could finally identify the young lady(Sarah Baartman).



This month has been packed with activities. Midwinter was celebrated and we received some invitations from other Islands, thanks to all. We planned to have a trolley race on the cat walks, but it turned out to be a collection of the cat walk grids to be placed on top of our unstable roof, thanks to strong winds.

On the 28th I celebrated my birthday. A carrot cake was prepared for me , it was so delicious and I really enjoyed it. Thanks to the professional chefs that we have at the Island. I received presents from the team, lots of creativity from the Islanders.

That's all from this month, Cheers!!!

Kholekile



Climate Stats: Jun 2009



Pressure

Maximum	1027.5 hPa
Average Maximum	1010.6 hPa
Average	1004.8 hPa
Average Minimum	998.4 hPa
Minimum	970.4 hPa



Temperature

Maximum	11.0 °C
Average Maximum	7.2 °C
Average	4.9 °C
Average Minimum	2.6 °C
Minimum	-1.9 °C



Humidity

Maximum	99%
Average	83%
Minimum	27%



Wind

Maximum Gust	37.5 m/s (133 km/h)
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Rainfall

Total	144.8mm
Highest in 24 hours	18.0mm
Total days without rain	5 days
Total days >1mm	19 days



Sunshine

Total	56.2 hours
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Marion 66 team members:

Asanda Phiri – Field Assistant (Gogga)

Ben Dilley – Field Assistant (Birder)

Delia Davies – Field Assistant (Birder)

Derek van der Merwe – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Dianah Mabizela – Meteorologist (snr)

James Wilshire – Field Assistant (Gogga)

Johan Hoffman – Radio Tech (deputy leader)

Kholekile Cita – Medic (team leader)

Mark White – Diesel Mechanic

Marlene van Onselen – Field Assistant (Birder)

Martin Postma – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Mia Wege – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Mpho Koalepe – Meteorologist

Nangaadzishumi Nefhere – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Nkoane Mathabatha – Meteorologist

Sponsors:



Thank you guys for giving us a little bit of home to take along to the unknown.