

Saving Marion Island's Seabirds™
The Mouse-Free Marion Project



QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER



The Mouse-Free Marion Project

A 'Royally' good start to 2023

Welcome to No. 5, the first Mouse-Free Marion Quarterly Newsletter of 2023



Photo: Anton Wolfaardt

The first three months of 2023 have been a fast-paced marathon for the Mouse-Free Marion (MFM) Project Team. We have been working enthusiastically to facilitate several exciting new developments for the project, including coordinating new fundraising initiatives and progressing numerous logistical aspects of project planning.

The year started with a note of optimism. We received the fantastic news that young MFM Project supporter Romario Valentine was able to more than double his target for his Romario's Seabirds Christmas Gift Campaign fundraiser ([read more](#)). We also reminisced about the vast numbers of soaring albatrosses experienced during the Flock to Marion cruise to the Southern Ocean a year previously. 'Albatross Thursday' was celebrated on the 27th of January, the day we arrived at the Prince Edward Islands in



Above: Romario Valentine holds his Certificate of Appreciation and a book on Marion and Prince Edward Islands sent in grateful thanks for his sterling fund-raising effort

January 2022 aboard the *MSC Orchestra* and witnessed the wonderful spectacle of the island's remarkable albatrosses and other seabirds.

On that momentous voyage in 2022 was renowned seabird expert, author and illustrator of seabird identification guides, Peter Harrison MBE. In February, we were pleased to announce that Peter had agreed to become the first Patron of the MFM Project. Peter, who has devoted his life to observing, photographing, painting and writing about the seabirds of the world, is an ardent supporter of the MFM Project. His first book, the critically acclaimed *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*, published in 1983 and illustrated by himself, was long considered to be the bible of seabird identification. *Read more on Page 16.*

Not to slow down by any means, in March three of the MFM Project Team members headed to London to attend our first international reception at South Africa House, the South African High Commission. It was co-hosted by the MFM Project and the South African High Commissioner to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, His Excellency Jeremiah Nyamane Mamabolo. In addition to sharing details of the project with a new audience in the Northern Hemisphere, the event was an opportunity to announce the patronage of His



Above: Peter Harrison MBE aboard BirdLife South Africa's Flock to Marion in January 2022

Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh. The Duke emphasised the importance of the MFM Project and he presented an award to Dr Frederik Paulsen for his generous support and dedication to the project.

The event and the Duke's patronage received international media coverage, in newspapers

Below Left. From Left: Dr Lisolomzi Fikizolo, Mark D. Anderson, the Duke and Keith Springer
Below Right. Keith Springer (MFM Operations Manager) with Andrew Smith.



in over a dozen countries and in at least eight languages, including in [The Guardian](#), [The Telegraph](#) and the [Smithsonian Magazine](#). In addition to the print media publicity, Keith Springer, Project Operations Manager, was interviewed on World Radio, a public radio international broadcast from the United States ([listen here](#)). *Read more about the event on Page 6.*

The MFM Project looks forward to the support it will receive from the Duke, Peter Harrison, and future patrons in ensuring that Marion Island once again becomes a safe haven for the Southern Ocean's seabirds.

Keeping momentum going, some of the MFM Project team will once again be heading to Marion Island in April 2023 on the month-long annual relief voyage to continue the fine-tuning of the planning needed for the eradication exercise. Anton Wolfaardt will be joined by MFM Project Researcher, Camilla Smyth who will spend the next year on the island as part of the 80th Marion Island over-wintering team. She

will continue the long-term monitoring work currently being undertaken by Elsa van Ginkel, the 2022/23 MFM Project over-wintering researcher. Elsa, who will be returning home, has spent the last year conducting bait trials and, in partnership with the University of Pretoria, collecting pre-eradication data on plants and invertebrates to inform a post-eradication monitoring programme for the island. Follow the MFM Project's social media pages for updates about the 2023 Marion relief voyage.

There are many more exciting developments on the horizon for the MFM Project with new faces, new initiatives and continued progress in project planning. We look forward to sharing the challenges and exciting happenings of the MFM Project over the course of 2023.

Robyn Adams, Heidi Whitman and the Mouse-Free Marion Project Team

The Duke engages with attendees at the reception in London. From left: HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, Mark D. Anderson (CEO BirdLife South Africa), Tanya Bascombe (European Outdoor Conservation Association), Madeleine Whitman and Michael Riffel (Caring for Conservation Fund)





His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh is flanked by Mark D. Anderson (CEO, BirdLife South Africa; left) and Keith Springer (Mouse-Free Marion Project's Operations Manager; right) at a reception at South Africa House in London on 20 March 2023

and thanked him for his generous support of the project. The 0.8-m high bronze sculpture by [Robbie Leggat](#) was especially commissioned by the MFM Project. Dr Paulsen will also receive a painting of two Wandering Albatrosses by acclaimed South African artist, [John Meyer](#).

Keith Springer, the MFM Project's Operations Manager, in his presentation said "I've seen first-hand the capacity of island species to rebound from predation. Once predatory rodents are removed, the breeding success of seabirds and abundance of invertebrates are quickly evident. This is a once-off intervention and, with the removal of House Mice from Marion Island, we can anticipate a rapid improvement in ecosystem functioning. We saw this, for example, on South Georgia, where South Georgia Pipits and South Georgia Pintails rapidly increased in numbers following the eradication of rats from the island. It is now 12 years since the removal of rabbits and rodents from Macquarie Island, and as I observed on a visit there last month, the island is unrecognisable from

what it was like in the early 2000s."

Guests at the reception included Patricia Zurita, CEO of BirdLife International, and Beccy Speight, CEO of the UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). Also present were Professor Tony Martin, who led the successful South Georgia Habitat Restoration Project, ridding that island of its invasive rodents and the RSPB's Andrew Callender, Director of the Gough Island Restoration Programme, that worked towards clearing Gough of its introduced House Mice in 2021. Other guests included MFM Project supporters Dr Michael Riffel and Tom Riffel of Caring for Conservation, Tanya Bascombe of the European Outdoor Conservation Association and well-known cycling commentator and BirdLife South Africa supporter, Phil Liggett MBE, along with his wife Trish.

The South African Government was represented at the reception by Dr Lisolomzi Fikizolo, Deputy Director-General, Oceans and Coasts of the South African Department

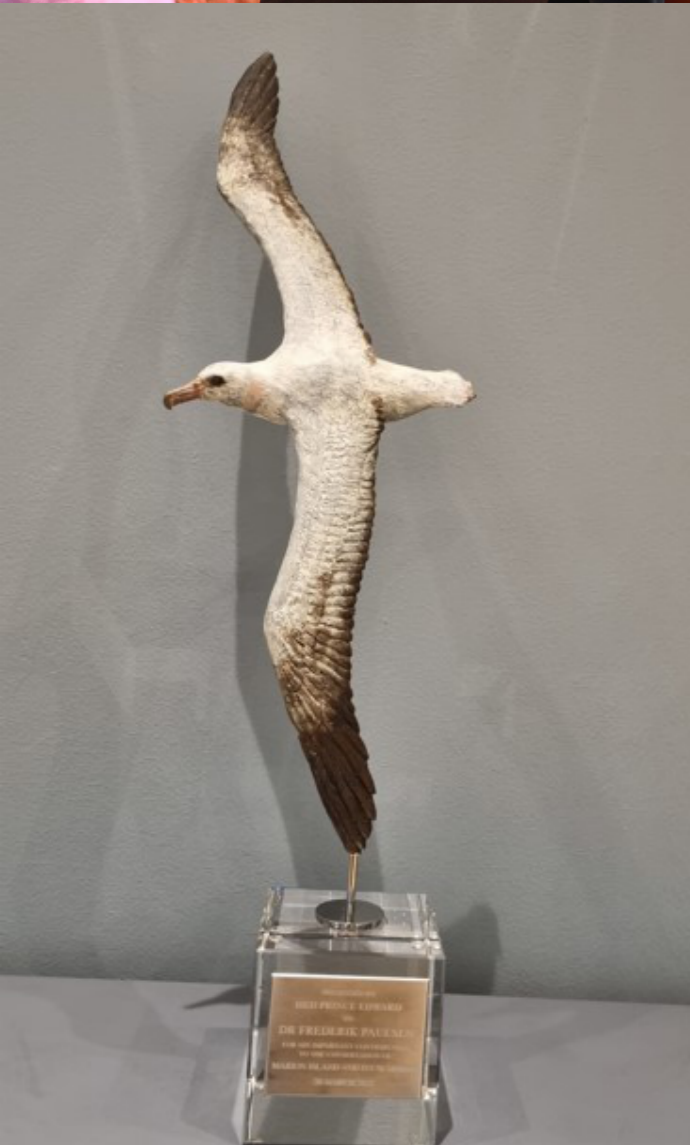
His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh becomes the Royal Patron of the Mouse-Free Marion Project

The Mouse-Free Marion (MFM) Project hosted its first international event at a reception, along with the South African High Commissioner to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, [His Excellency Jeremiah Nyamane Mamabolo](#), in South Africa House, London on 20 March 2023. At the reception, attended by 80 invited guests, Mark D. Anderson, CEO of BirdLife South Africa and Chair of the MFM Project Management Committee, announced that [His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh](#), who was in attendance, had very kindly agreed to become the Royal Patron of the Project. The Duke is the youngest brother of the United Kingdom's King Charles III. Mark noted that Marion Island and the nearby Prince Edward Island together make up the Prince Edward Islands. He also noted the Duke's love for the natural environment and his commitment to conserve seabirds and other biodiversity. It is most fitting that the Duke is supporting the MFM Project in an island group that was named after his sixth-generation ancestor and namesake, Prince Edward, Duke of Kent and Strathearn (and Queen Victoria's father) by the British explorer Captain James Cook in 1776.

The Duke presented a sculpture of a Wandering Albatross in flight to [Dr Frederik Paulsen Jr](#), one of the MFM Project's most important benefactors and a Director of the MFM NPC Board,

From left, Beccy Speight, CEO of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Duke and Patricia Zurita, CEO of BirdLife International, at the reception at South Africa House





Above : The Duke (right) presents the Wandering Albatross sculpture to Dr Frederik Paulsen Jr. Marion Island supports no less than a quarter of this iconic species' global breeding population

Left: The Wandering Albatross sculpture on its crystal base

of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE). In his address, he expressed the warm regards of the Department's Minister, the Honourable Barbara Creecy, to the guests and conveyed her sincere apologies for not being able to attend. He noted that the South African Government's commitment to biodiversity conservation and the control of alien and invasive plants and animals have been championed by Minister Creecy. He went on to say that "This has led to a venerated partnership between our Department and BirdLife South Africa which was formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding in 2020. The MFM Project is a product of that partnership, and I would like to commend the project team on the tremendous progress that has been made thus far as they prepare to rid Marion Island of its mice. To that, and all their future efforts, we say Amandla!"

The Duke is the MFM Project's second Patron to be announced; the first being the well-known

From left: Dr Lisolomzi Fikizolo, Dr Frederik Paulsen, his wife Olga Litviniuk, Mark D. Anderson, the Duke and Keith Springer

seabird expert and author and illustrator of seabird identification guides, Peter Harrison MBE.

With thanks to Art Lewry and Morag Wood,

[Culture Communications Collective](#), for use of photographs taken at the reception.

John Cooper, News Correspondent, Mouse-Free Marion Project

Below: Mark D. Anderson with Trish and Phil Liggett



PEDDLE POWER

Team Gauteng Trappers cycles 105 km and triples its target to raise R15 000 for the Mouse-Free Marion Project



Team Gauteng Trappers poses before the bike race with the Mouse-Free Marion banner. From left: Arend de Beer, Leandri de Kock, Jurgens Wicks and Jeandre Rademeyer

MFM News has written before on Team Gauteng Trappers and its plan to raise R5000 for the Mouse-Free Marion Project by entering and completing a 105-km cycling race in Gauteng, South Africa ([click here](#)). We were pleased to learn that the four intrepid team members all successfully completed the race and in so doing raised three times their target to contribute R15 250, equivalent to

sponsoring 15 hectares, towards the costs of ridding Marion Island of its invasive House Mice. The amount raised was received from 28 separate donations made via the GivenGain non-profit foundation.

Team member Leandri de Kock, who has spent a year on Marion Island, has written enthusiastically to MFM News after the bike race on behalf of her team:

"Team Gauteng Trappers has cycled to raise seabird awareness in Gauteng! We completed the 105-km [GROOTfm 90.5](#) Groot Trap 2023 cycling race on the 2nd of April. It was a cool day in Gauteng, perfect for cycling. The course included lots of rolling hills, some long flat sections and a few killer climbs. Everyone had a good ride and enjoyed the day out. We are so proud that we completed the big challenge! Even though we could not find Wandering Albatross socks (a species which is attacked by mice on Marion Island), we wore socks with another South African threatened seabird, the African Penguin, on them.

Even greater is the fact that we could raise awareness and funds for the Mouse-Free Marion Project. We are grateful to everyone who has contributed to our campaign. Your support motivated us to train harder and to keep going on race day. We know that our contribution to the MFM Project is greatly appreciated. We have raised funds to sponsor 15 hectares of

Marion Island, which is three times more than we expected to donate. We hope that our campaign inspires others to also raise funds for the MFM Project while doing something they love."

The MFM Team is most appreciative of Team Gauteng Trappers' efforts to support the MFM Project, both on their bikes and through their sponsorship. Several of us have ridden bike races in South Africa more than just a few times and so we know full well the sustained effort required to pedal 105 km non-stop. We stand ready to engage with any other enterprising individual or group of people who wish to raise funds to help rid Marion Island of its killer mice.

With thanks to Mark Anderson, BirdLife South Africa, for facilitating the loan of the MFM banner.

John Cooper, News Correspondent, Mouse-Free Marion Project

*Below left: After the race the team proudly displays their finishers' medals. From left: Jurgens Wicks, Arend de Beer, Leandri de Kock and Jeandre Rademeyer; photograph by Nardo van der Merwe
Below right: With no team jersey, Team Gauteng Trappers opted to wear matching African Penguin socks instead; photograph by Jurgens Wicks*





Marion Island and the plague of the UNINVITED GUESTS

How eliminating an invasive rodent pest will contribute to South Africa's continued global commitments to halt biodiversity loss, restore ecosystems and ensure species resilience in the face of climate change.



The beginning of the austral summer marks the start of the hatching season for many of the breeding seabirds on Marion Island, South Africa's sub-Antarctic territory. Despite the warmer weather, hatchlings on this remote island will face harsh environmental conditions. However, it is not the howling winds and chilly conditions that hinder the safety of defenceless chicks, but rather a diminutive yet voracious predator... the House Mouse.



Accidentally introduced to Marion Island in the early 19th century by sealers, invasive house mice have had a devastating impact on the ecology and biodiversity of Marion Island. Having greatly reduced the native invertebrate population and, in the absence of other food resources, these tiny predators have resorted to devouring live seabird chicks. Invasive species, especially mammalian predators such as rodents, are considered to be one of the leading causes of species extinctions on islands. Invasive species are responsible for 86% of recorded species extinctions on islands across the planet. At Marion Island, 19 of the 28 breeding

seabird species are impacted by mice and are under threat of local extinction, directly as a result of mouse predation. It is clear that, in order to protect these species, including a quarter of the world's population of Wandering Albatrosses, an urgent intervention is required. Otherwise, they may be lost to Marion Island forever.

Conservation measures that mitigate threats to pelagic seabirds are difficult to implement as these wide-ranging species ignore country boundaries, foraging widely across the vast open ocean, where they are exposed to a range of threats. Globally, seabirds are facing compounding threats from climate change, mortality at sea due to interactions with fisheries, and the impacts of invasive species. Indeed, seabirds are the most threatened group of birds in the world. At Marion Island, increases in the densities of mice are being driven by climate change, as a warmer and drier climate has allowed mice to extend their breeding season. The increasing population of mice on

Marion Island is leading to increased predation on seabirds and invertebrates.

In isolation, these threats are a serious risk to species survival. But when these threats accumulate, the risks that these seabirds face become far greater. By removing or mitigating any one of these compounding threats, the seabirds will be more resilient in the face of climate change and other threats that impact their survival.

Removing invasive species from islands is the most tractable threat to address completely. In conservation terms, it is a highly effective intervention. Once invasive predators are removed, that threat is eliminated, and the species that have been impacted can start the process of recovery. Hundreds of eradication operations on islands around the world have shown the incredible rebounding of native seabirds and other biodiversity following the removal of invasive species.

Below photo: A pair of Wandering Albatrosses in the midst of a courtship dance on Marion Island, Photo: Tom Peschak



The Mouse-Free Marion Project provides an opportunity to reverse the negative impacts caused by mice; an opportunity to turn back the clock. With many threatened species at risk on this globally important island, it is clear that safeguarding South Africa's sub-Antarctic territory is a conservation priority.

Nations around the world have committed to halting biodiversity loss, restoring ecosystems and mitigating the impacts of climate change. In November 2022, world leaders, policymakers, civil society representatives and climate activists gathered in Egypt to find and implement solutions to the climate crisis at the annual United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference (COP 27). Later that year policymakers gathered to discuss and implement solutions to halt global biodiversity loss at the UN Biodiversity

Conference (COP 15) in Montreal, Canada. One of the more ambitious targets for COP 15 is the 30 by 30 pledge, the aim of which is to conserve 30% of the earth's land and water surfaces by 2030. Previous targets, agreed at COP 10 in Aichi, Japan, have not been met, so there is renewed pressure to put in place the financial and political support needed. The stakes are high.

South Africa is a signatory to the Convention of Biological Diversity and has been part of the ratification of a number of conventions aimed at halting anthropogenic warming, including the Kyoto Protocol. With the Prince Edward Islands designated as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance, South Africa has committed to conserving and restoring its Southern Ocean territory.

Recognising the risks to seabirds, an ambitious eradication operation is being planned for Marion Island that aims to eradicate mice from the island. This will ensure millions of seabirds have safe breeding grounds in the future. However, the mice are impacting much more than the seabirds, and eradicating mice will help restore the ecological integrity of the island.

There is an urgency to eradicating mice on Marion Island. Since the first record of mouse predation on seabirds in 2003, the mouse population has been expanding and the frequency of predation on seabirds has increased.

The Mouse-Free Marion Project needs to raise the majority of the funds needed for the eradication operation to proceed. This is surely the most important seabird

conservation project that South Africa has ever undertaken. It will be a one-off intervention that, if successful, will immediately make a tangible difference to the breeding success of seabirds, and leave a significant conservation legacy.

The restoration of Marion Island's ecosystem will be a key component in ensuring that South Africa honours its commitments to halting biodiversity loss, restoring crucial wetland ecosystems and increasing species resilience in the face of the climate emergency.

Robyn Adams, Communications Officer and Project Assistant

Below: By eliminating mice on Marion Island, we can change the future of Grey-headed Albatross colonies from the image on the left to a healthy and resilient one. Photographs; Ben Dilley (left) and Michelle Risi (right).



The Mouse-Free Marion Project announces its first Patron

The Mouse-Free Marion Project is pleased to announce its first Patron. He is Peter Harrison MBE, author and illustrator of seabird identification guides. Peter has devoted his life to observing, photographing, painting and writing about the seabirds of the world. His first book, the critically acclaimed *Seabirds: An Identification Guide*, published in 1983 and illustrated by himself, was both a handbook and a field guide, long considered to be the bible of seabird identification. It has now been superseded by his latest work, *Seabirds: The New Identification Guide*, published in 2021. Comprising 600 pages with 239 completely new full-colour plates, this book contains more than 3800 illustrations plus full-supporting text, maps, and identification keys that describe and discuss the world's 435 species of seabirds.

In recognition of his work in natural history and his global conservation efforts, Peter was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the Queen's Honours list in 1994. He was also awarded the UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' Conservation Gold Medal in 2012.

British born, but now largely domiciled on the USA's west coast, Peter accompanied BirdLife South Africa's [Flock to Marion 2022](#) voyage on the MSC Orchestra in January 2022, acting as one of the specialist seabird guides for the 1500 bird watchers aboard and as a highly appreciated lecturer. Peter has stated that the many albatrosses seen from the vessel when sailing close to the island made for one of his best seabird-watching days ever. As a co-founder of the



Proudly sporting his BirdLife South Africa beanie, Peter Harrison leads an Apex Expeditions voyage along the Antarctic Peninsula in February 2023; photograph by Shirley Metz

global travel company, Apex Expeditions, Peter continues to lead expeditions throughout the world, from the Arctic to the Antarctic, sharing his passion for seabirds and advocating for seabird conservation.

Peter writes: "I had the privilege of visiting Marion and Prince Edward Islands in 1983 as a guest of the South African National Antarctic Programme and the University of Cape Town's FitzPatrick Institute of African

Ornithology. Now, nearly four decades later, as its first Patrons, I am pleased to offer my support toward the Mouse-Free Marion Project that will help conserve the albatrosses and petrels which desperately need our protection and stewardship."

The Mouse-Free Marion Project welcomes its first Patron and looks forward to working closely with Peter as it prepares to eradicate House Mice on the largest island ever attempted in a single operation.

Selected Publications:

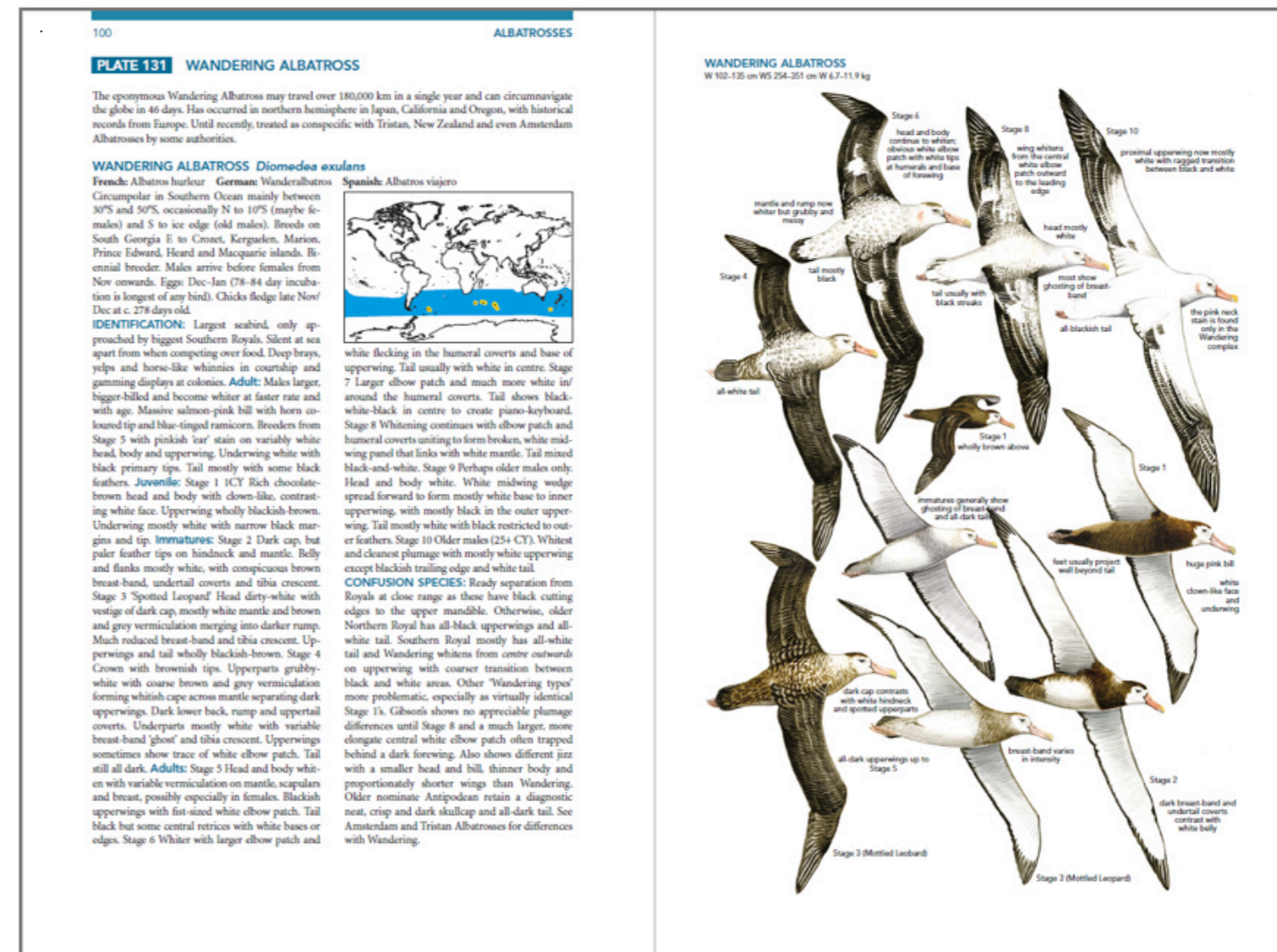
Harrison, P. 1983. *Seabirds an Identification Guide*. Beckenham: Croom Helm. 448 pp.

Harrison, P. 1987. *Seabirds of the World. A Photographic Guide*. Bromley: Christopher Helm. 317 pp.

Harrison, P., Perrow, M. & Larsson, H. 2021. [Seabirds. The New Identification Guide](#). Barcelona: Lynx Edicions. 600 pp.

John Cooper, News Correspondent, Mouse-Free Marion Project

The Wandering Albatross plate and accompanying text from Seabirds. The New Identification Guide





Sooty Albatross feeding, photo: Otto Whitehead

Get involved and help make a mouse-free Marion possible!

- For more information on the Project, visit our website at mousefreemarion.org or contact us at: info@mousefreemarion.org
- To make a gift of any amount or support the project by sponsoring a hectare (or more) visit our website or contact Heidi Whitman, Chief Philanthropy Officer: heidi.whitman@mousefreemarion.org
- Stay up to date: follow us on Facebook (Mouse-Free Marion) and Instagram (@mousefreemarion) or sign up on our website to receive project news alerts

Cover Photo: Wandering Albatross chicks. Ben Dilley

Saving Marion Island's Seabirds™

The Mouse-Free Marion Project



forestry, fisheries
& the environment

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Mouse-Free Marion Project is a registered non-profit company (No. 2020/922433/08) in South Africa, established to eradicate invasive albatross-killing mice on Marion Island in the Southern Ocean. The project was initiated by BirdLife South Africa and the South African Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. Upon successful completion, the project will restore the critical breeding habitat of over two million seabirds, many globally threatened, and improve the island's resilience to a warming climate. For more information or to support the project please visit mousefreemarion.org