



# ZS8M January News Letter

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ITU Zone: 57    CQ Zone: 38    46 54 S / 37 05 E

Grid: KE83wc    IOTA: AF-021



**Prince Edward Island on a clear day**

**Greetings,**

**Welcome to the ZS8M January 2010 News Letter.**

**I sincerely hope you have all recovered from the Christmas season and that your credit cards are also recovering.**

**Due to many requests for some history of Marion Island, I have included it in this month's news letter.**

**Basic Information:**

Location: (46°52'34"S, 37°51'32"E). The Marion Island is situated in the Southern Atlantic Ocean, and is built on an active volcano.

**History:**

Marion Island was first discovered in 1663 by the Dutch ship Maerseveen. The discovery was accidental, and they made no landing on the island. After about five years Captain Cook also saw the islands, but he couldn't make a landing due to bad weather. The first recorded landing on the island was in 1803 by a group of sealers, but they found signs of earlier occupation.

In late 1947 and early 1948 South Africa took possession of both Marion and Prince Edward islands. The two islands were annexed under the command of Lieutenant-Commander John Fairburn and the South African flag was raised.

**Science:**

Space and Atmospheric physics, Biological studies on mice, birds (penguins, petrels, albatross, gulls and a few more), penguins and seals. There is also an important meteorological station on the island.

**Other Information:**

Five domestic cats, including a castrated orange striped male tabby and a black and white female together with three kittens were introduced during 1949 on Marion Island. They were brought to the island to help exterminate a mouse problem in the base. The cat population exploded and their appetite changed from mice to birds. Because of this, in the 1980's cat extermination teams were sent to the island. Today, there are no cats left on the island.

Marion Island was formed by volcanic activity. It is actually a mountain built up from the ocean floor. Only the mountain peak can be seen from the ocean surface.

If the volcano is measured from the ocean floor, it is about 5000m high. Until 1980, many people thought that the volcanic activity has stopped, and the volcano was classified extinct. In that same year, it erupted, and because of this it is now classified as an active volcano.

The islands lie directly in the path of eastward-moving depressions all year round and this gives them an unusually cool and windy climate. Strong winds blow almost every day of the year and the prevailing wind direction is north-westerly. Annual rainfall averages from 2,400 mm (94.5 in) up to over 3,000 mm (118.1 in) on Mascarin Peak.

It rains on average about 320 days a year (about 28 days a month) and the islands are among the cloudiest places in the world - about 1300 hours a year on the sheltered eastern side of Marion Island but falling to around 800 hours away from the coast and on the wet western sides of Marion and Prince Edward Island. Summer and winter have fairly similar climates with cold winds and threat of snow or frost possible at any time of the year. However, the mean temperature in February (midsummer) is 8.3 °C (46.9 °F) and in August (midwinter) it is 3.9 °C (39.0 °F).

#### **The Cat Eradication Program:**

Five domestic cats, including a castrated, orange striped male tabby and a black and white female together with three kittens were introduced during 1949 on Marion Island. These felines were brought to the island to help eradicate a mouse problem in the base. As cats do they soon multiplied and the first feral cat was seen in 1951. By 1975 the population had increased to more than 2 000 cats feeding on thousands of burrowing petrels, a much easier prey than the mice they were supposed to hunt. In 1975 alone the cats ate just under half a million birds and species such as the Common Diving Petrel, the Soft Plumage Petrel and the Grey Petrel became extinct on Marion Island. With other remaining bird species also at risk it was decided to initiate the Marion Island Cat Eradication Program. In 1977 the entire cat population was estimated around 3 405 individuals. A few animals were infected with the highly specific disease feline panleucopenia. By 1982 there were an estimated 615 cats remaining. During the spring of 1986 a secondary control measure in the form of nocturnal hunting was initiated on full scale. For three summers, eight two-man teams using battery-operated spotlights and 12-boreshotguns killed approximately 803 cats in total. The progressive decrease in hunting success and the sighting rate of cats suggested that hunting alone was no longer sufficient in reducing the numbers. Traps were used and between 1989 and 1991 the remaining cats were removed.

During the 12-month period post April 1991, only eight cats were trapped and three trapping teams recorded no sightings. It is now believed that complete eradication of feral cats on Marion Island has been achieved after 19 years.

#### **Discovery and annexation:**

Marion Island was first discovered in 1663 by the Dutch ship Maerseveen. The discovery was accidental and no landing was made on the island. More than one hundred years later, in 1772, it was seen again by Frenchman Marion du Fresne, who was looking for Antarctica when he came across the island group.

Thinking it was part of Antarctica, he spent 5 days trying to make a landing before he discovered it was only two small islands. They left and never returned. After four more years, Captain Cook also saw the islands, but could not make a landing because of bad weather. The first recorded landing on the island was in 1803 by a group of sealers, but they did find signs of earlier occupation. In late 1947 and early 1948 South Africa took possession of both Marion and Prince Edward islands.

Under the command of Lieutenant-Commander John Fairburn the two islands were annexed and the South African flag was raised. The first expedition to the island was a meteorological team, led by Allan B. Crawford. Meteorologists have occupied the island ever since, joined in later years by scientists conducting research on the environment and ecology. One of the first documented records of biological observations on Marion Island were those made by Richard Harris, who observed and collected seabirds during a British sealing expedition in 1830. There are two major chapters in the history of Marion Island - sealing activities and the introduction and subsequent eradication of cats. Both had major impacts on the current state of the island and its wildlife.

#### **Sealing:**

During the 19th century elephant seal oil was the primary natural resource collected on the island. This was done by boiling the seal blubber in large tri pots either on the beach or on board the ships.

Harvesting of fur seal and penguin skins for gloves also occurred on the island. Some remnants of these days still scatter the beaches. Remains of huts can still be seen but most sites are protected and the artefacts stay undisturbed in their wet, cold graves.

The earliest documented evidence of sealing relates to the landing of a gang of sealers from the Catharine, Henry Fanning as captain, in December 1803 or January 1804. At that time the Islands were an important rendezvous for sealers. Sealers of different nationalities including American, French and British exploited the Islands.

The second half of the 19th century saw a rise in the number of Norwegian sealers as well as sealers based in Cape Town. The first Cape Town based sea elephant oil industry on the Prince Edward Islands was established in 1833.

Large-scale sealing occurred until November 1930 when seal numbers had dropped too low to be commercially exploitable. The ship SS Kildalkey made the final sealing expedition to the Island and took about 1 450 seals on this last trip. Today sealers still roam the Island, not carrying clubs and guns but tagging equipment and scales. Harvesting of seals has been replaced by research of these wonderful creatures.

#### **Generator problems:**

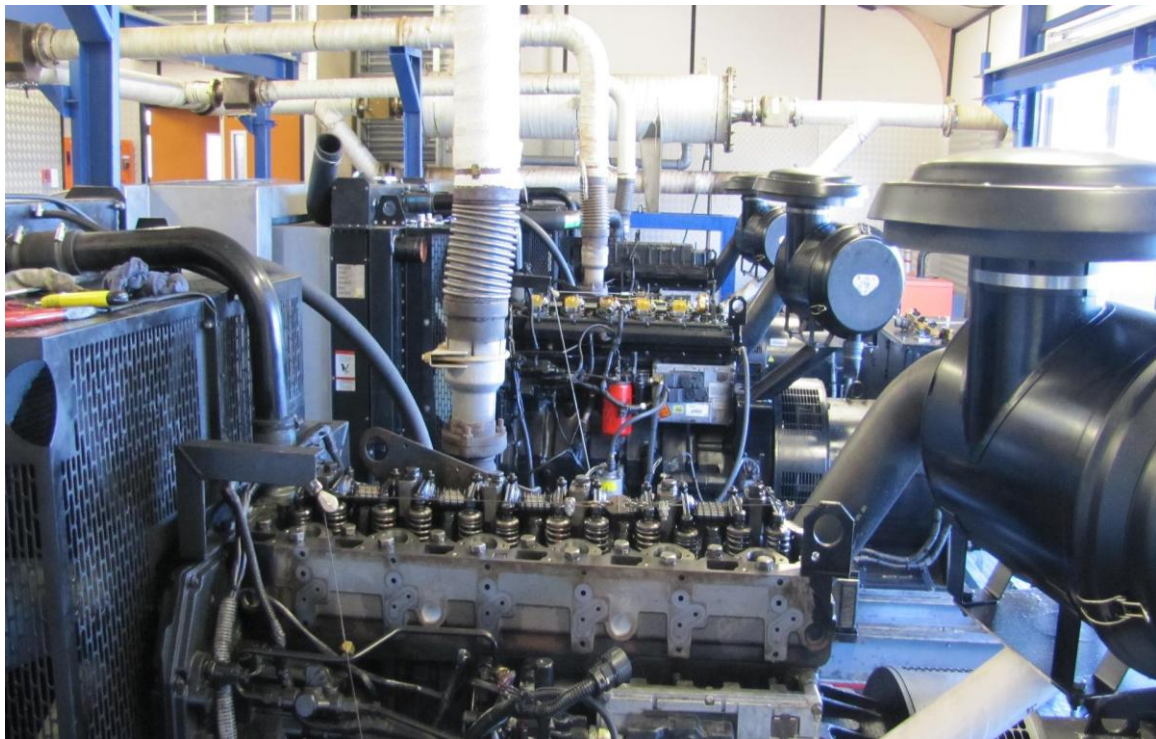
The new year brought new challenges to our team. Sadly we lost the use of two of the three main generators. Due to a lack of spare parts, we aren't able to really open them up, find the problem and repair them. Our technical team had to make some quick decisions and get the 'old generator at the old base' connected up to the new base. Luckily we have the expertise and knowledge at hand.







Gerhard, our new base engineer, getting the cables coupled.



These are the three Perkins generators in the new base. Vincent, our diesel mechanic, has been hard at work trying to get them back on line, but without adequate spares this is a difficult task.



**Generator Control Panels**

### **Propagation:**

Propagation seems to want to come alive every now and then. Just when I think that the ionosphere has collapsed, it suddenly comes alive and provides us all with some decent propagation. How much longer it will be before this cycle recovers, is anyone guess.

I still get comments that certain hams can hear certain beacons in ZS-land, or that they the band is open to ZS....remember I am not in ZS-land. I am at least 2500km from the nearest coast of South Africa. My propagation is different. The only antenna available is broadband military dipole compared to those who have a Yagi. This makes a big difference.

**Antenna:**

The main HF antenna is currently a broadband dipole made by Radiant Antennas. It has a frequency range of 2.5 to 30MHz and is rated at 125Watts continuous. I hope to upgrade the current antenna at the base with an upgraded version of 500 Watt and a freq range of 1.8 to 30MHz once the ship arrives with the new team on board. This antenna has a very good radiation pattern and is one of the leading military tactical HF antennas in the world today. I do recommend it. One of my best contacts was on PSK while working a VE2 and only using 20 Watts!

**QRM / RFI:**

The RFI / QRM issue is still a massive problem in the new base and will hopefully be sorted out when the ship arrives in April. The equipment that is causing the RFI is made by Danfoss and is prone to causing RFI.

I have had similar RFI problems back in South Africa with the same manufacturer. They also produce 12Vdc compressors for the mobile fridge / freezer industry.

**Pirate:**

I still notice the odd pirate using my call sign. I heard him for the first time a week ago. He sounds as if he could be Russian. If you are unsure if you worked me, please feel free to email me to confirm the QSO. I doubt if he has a valid license, hence the thrill of pirating. Please forgive him, for he knows no better!

**Blacklisting**

Seeing that I am busy with a negative topic, how about the brain dead who continue to cause QRM, talk all over others who are trying to work a DX station, not listen to the frequency, call continuously even if they can't hear the desired station? Oh YES!!! We still have these brain dead, cluster spotter, CB mentality operators who believe that; have 5kw amp, 7 Element Yagi and a microphone – can also make a noise just like my neighbours. Yes friends, they live mostly in Southern Europe and Russia and they place themselves on the blacklist of every serious DXer or Dxpediton.



When will they ever listen and learn to behave? Do not dare to take them on and tell them that they are wrong....OH NO!!! They are right and we are wrong. Did their parents never teach them manners? This does not mean that everyone I have categorised in these regions is guilty. You know who I am referring to, so please DO NOT email and accuse me of anything. I am addressing the guilty.

I have stated my blacklisting policy on the qrz.com site as well. Don't entertain the fact that I will be answering emails to defend myself. You place yourself on the blacklist! If you have the time to email me and complain, then you have the time and effort to operate professionally as well. Wake up and smell the DX!

I ask myself; why do the English, Germans, Dutch, French, Japanese, Americans, South Africans, Namibians, Canadians, etc, NOT behave like this? If you wish to entertain me with similar stories, drop me a mail. Thanks to all those who already sent me similar stories. I find them extremely entertaining. The emails from the blacklisted operators protesting their innocence are just as funny.

I am calling on my friends in Southern Europe and Russia to take this matter up directly in your countries and within your amateur radio communities. There is a culture of bad behaviour in your community and this has to be changed. Only you can change it. Beware the day when a Dxpedition places a notice on the cluster and says '**CQ Europe....*NOT Italy or Russia***'. It is going to happen...BEWARE!!!

I will be publishing my blacklist towards the end of this expedition; do not cry if you are listed. Remember, you placed yourself on this lists!

## **Humans and seals do not mix!!**

Humans and seals do not mix, especially not during breeding season when the seals become extremely aggressive. The males will protect their harem and the female will protect their pups!!! This attack was made by a female Fur Seal on one of our bird specialist when the seal tried to protect her pup. The seal probably assumed that her pup was in danger. Luckily the walk back to the base to get medical attention was not too far. The long tear was made when the bottom canine ripped the flesh. 25 Stitches later!



Simon: Team Leader and Medic applying the stitches.



**Innocent, but dangerous**

**Additional photos from around the island;**



**A young female Elephant Seal.**





Yes, a toilet with the best view in the world. One of eight over night huts. The left cubical is the pantry and the right is the living quarters. This type of hut sleeps 4 people.







A docile Elephant Seal during moulting season. The author can be seen in this picture.



There is nothing like a Sunday snooze!





New life on the island.

Take note:

1. Our Polar Supply ship will be arriving on 15 March with a team of maintenance people. At this stage I assume my operation will be down scaled, especially the SSB operation.
2. The ship returns to Cape Town on 19 April to collect the new team, including fuel and food for the next year.
3. The ship departs Cape Town on 5 April for Marion Island and arrives 11 April with the new team.
4. I expect the ZS8M operation will cease officially on 11 April 2011. More details to follow.

73 de Pierre ZS1HF / ZS8M

Look up **ZS8M**, **ZS1HF** and **ZS7SIG** on [www.qrz.com](http://www.qrz.com) for more info regarding mode and times.



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