

THE FITZPATRICK INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN ORNITHOLOGY



Overwintering Birder Research Assistant Marion Island: On Island Impacts of Climate Change on the Southern Ocean's Iconic Seabirds

FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, Department of Biological Sciences,
University of Cape Town



We invite applications for the above Marion Island overwintering research assistant position. The position will consist of collecting field data on surface-nesting seabirds including albatrosses and giant petrels to be used for conservation and academic purposes. The post falls within the NRF SANAP-funded project 'On-island impacts of climate change on the Southern Ocean's iconic seabirds' led by **A/Prof. Susan Cunningham** and **Prof. Peter Ryan**.

Albatrosses and petrels are among the most at-risk birds because they face threats both on land and at sea. To date, conservation research has mainly focused on impacts of invasive species on land and fisheries, pollution and climate change at sea. Yet, reports of Southern Giant Petrel chick mortality on hot days suggest that on-island climate change impacts could also pose a significant risk to surface-nesting species. This project will examine on-island impacts of climate change on albatrosses and giant petrels at the rapidly-warming Marion Island. Project aims are: (i) to assess physiological sensitivity of albatross and giant petrel chicks to increasing summer temperature means and extremes; (ii) to assess whether colony locations and nesting microsites currently buffer or exacerbate temperature exposure risks, and model likely changes in exposure risks under future climate scenarios; (iii) to assess impacts of increased frequency and severity of winter storms under climate change on Wandering Albatross chicks; and (iv) to make use of long term demographic data to model impacts of changing climate on populations.

MAIN DUTIES:

- carrying out physiology work with giant petrel nestlings including handling, blood sampling and isotope work
- collecting behaviour observations on nestlings of surface-nesting albatrosses and giant petrels
- monitoring nestling survival in Wandering Albatrosses
- deploying and maintaining camera traps
- deploying and maintaining temperature dataloggers
- assisting with monitoring of long-term study populations of petrels and albatrosses when necessary

SPECIFIC ATTRIBUTES:

The successful applicant will need to manage and keep track of all aspects of the research. Office work will entail report writing and keeping meticulous records of all collected data and samples. It is thus essential that the candidate meet the following criteria:

- Strong academic background (minimum of a BSc Hons), **with a possibility of working towards an MSc or PhD within the project;**
- Attention to detail and organized as data management is a crucial part of the post;
- Demonstrated history of field work in demanding environments collecting biological data;
- Curious, self-motivated and well-organized, as many different field activities need to be conducted in a short period, especially in summer;
- Self-sufficient, as you will need to work without direct supervision for ~11 months on the island and communications can be intermittent;
- Computer literacy with strong experience in data management and report writing;
- Previous experience in handling birds including ringing and blood sampling will be a distinct advantage.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS:

The incumbent will execute duties at a sub-Antarctic Base and adhere to the health, safety and environmental requirements of the managing authority for Marion Island, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. **The successful applicant will spend 13 months (~April 2025 to May 2026) on Marion Island. There is no option to return to South Africa before May 2026.** The ability to work and live with small groups of people is thus

essential. The base has limited e-mail and satellite telephone facilities, but these can be intermittent, so the applicant must be able to do without constant supervision or links to family and friends in South Africa.

The post will require extensive walking over rough terrain under demanding environmental conditions (very windy, wet and cold). Candidates must be physically very fit, mentally strong and enjoy the challenge of physically demanding work. In addition, the successful candidate may often be called upon to work long hours in extreme conditions on duties not directly related to core project functions. Short-listed candidates will be subjected to screening and security vetting to determine their suitability for the position. Appointment is subject to a rigorous medical (physical and psychological) examination, which will be arranged for at no cost to the applicant.

REMUNERATION:

The remuneration package is approximately R 300 000 (April 2025 – May 2026, including a potential performance-linked bonus). Food and accommodation in the field are provided.

TO APPLY:

To apply, please send a CV (including your academic record & names and contact details of two referees) and a short motivation letter to Nqubeko Hlekwayo at fitz@uct.ac.za (subject 'your surname' and Marion Overwinterer). Informal enquiries can be directed to A/Prof Susie Cunningham: susan.cunningham@uct.ac.za. For more information on the FitzPatrick Institute visit <https://science.uct.ac.za/fitzpatrick> and the Department of Biological Sciences at UCT visit www.biologicalsciences.uct.ac.za

Candidates from historically disadvantaged backgrounds are especially encouraged to apply.

Closing date: 25 October 2024

We reserve the right to disqualify ineligible, incomplete and/or inappropriate applications, and reserve the right not to appoint.