



MEDIA RELEASE

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Mice threaten near-pristine island

Cape Town, 29 April 2015: Getting rid of a conservation problem, once and for ever, is something of a rarity. But eradicating invasive species from islands is one example. BirdLife South Africa is leading an initiative that could result in invasive mice being eradicated from Marion Island.

Marion Island is the jewel in the crown of South Africa's islands. It is massive, beautiful, and a sanctuary for seabirds, seals, killer whales and more. Cats were eradicated from Marion Island in the early 1990s, leaving mice as the only introduced mammal. Work done at Gough Island demonstrated that predation by mice can cause extinctions, and their impacts at Marion Island are increasing.

BirdLife South Africa is leading a collaborative effort to review the feasibility of eradicating mice from Marion Island. The good news is that the techniques to do this conservation work exist are proven effective. Marion Island remains the largest island ever cleared of cats. Australia's Macquarie Island is now clear of rabbits, rats and mice, the largest island to have a 3-species complex eradicated simultaneously, and one of very few where rats and mice have been tackled successfully. South Georgia is currently being cleared of rats and mice – which will make it the biggest island on earth ever cleared of these invasive rodents. Serious consideration is also being given to eradicate mice at Gough Island, the celebrity island for mouse impacts on seabirds. So initiating work to consider options at Marion Island isn't really pushing the envelope in any meaningful, technical sense. But it is a massive island, and will require very significant resources if an eradication programme is to be tackled. And therefore we really need to get every aspect looked at, studied in depth and squared away comprehensively.

That's the good news. The bad news is that these are fiendishly expensive, risky operations that require extensive studies, exquisite planning and a lot of time. And time is, as everyone knows, money. The first step is to have an expert, and in this instance it is Dr John Parkes from New Zealand, inspect the island and point out where there are significant risks to other species,

logistical constraints and areas requiring more research. BirdLife South Africa is trying to raise R200 000 to cover the expenses of getting John to Marion Island, so that he can undertake a feasibility study and risk assessment.

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To donate in support of this appeal, please go to
www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/donate

Notes for the editor:

1. The mission of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the enjoyment, conservation, study and understanding of wild birds and their habitats. BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organization in the country.
2. BirdLife South Africa contact details: Lewis House, 239 Barkston Drive, Blairgowrie, P.O. Box 515, Randburg, Johannesburg, South Africa, Tel. +27-11-7891122, Fax. +27-11-7895188, e-mail address: info@birdlife.org.za, website: www.birdlife.org.za
3. Marion Island is managed by the Department of Environmental Affairs, through the South African National Antarctic Programme www.sanap.ac.za