



FOCUS ON THE

AVIAN DEMOGRAPHY UNIT

The Avian Demography Unit undertakes bird research in partnership with BirdLife South Africa

Prince Edward Islands Millennium Expedition

five members of the Avian Demography Unit (ADU) joined 19 other scientists in the Prince Edward Islands Millennium Expedition over Christmas 2001, under the overall leadership of Dr Rob Crawford of Marine and Coastal Management.

The Prince Edward Islands lie 1 800 kilometres south-east of Cape Town, and are an Important Bird Area. There are two islands in the group, the larger being Marion Island where a small team of meteorologists and researchers is

based each year. Visits to neighbouring Prince Edward Island are restricted in order to minimise the introduction of alien plants and animals. Twenty-eight seabird species breed on the islands, of which 14 are in the South African Red Data Book.

Les Underhill and John Cooper were part of the team that undertook an intensive ornithological survey of Prince Edward Island, while Marienne de Villiers and Michelle du Toit counted breeding seabirds along the western section of Marion Island. Phil Whittington was a member of the 'night bird' team that was based at the meteorological station on Marion Island. They studied burrowing petrels and other species which only visit their nests at night to relieve their partners on incubation duties or to bring food to nestlings.

The results of the surveys were alarming for several species, such as the Rockhopper Penguin whose breeding populations were far smaller than anticipated. The full results will be published as a series of papers in the *South African Journal of Marine Science* in the course of this year. In the meantime, the tracks of several birds and seals which were satellite-tagged during the expedition can be seen on the ADU website. □



LES UNDERHILL (2)

The census of breeding Rockhopper Penguins on the Prince Edward Islands showed a worrying decrease.



Researchers are welcomed at Cave Bay, Prince Edward Island, by a group of King Penguins on the shore.

Swift Tern project

If you bird along the coastline anywhere in southern Africa, you could play an important role in gathering data for Janine le Roux's Masters project. Janine is doing a study of the movements of the Swift Tern, which breeds from late summer to autumn and nests mainly on the offshore islands of the Western Cape, moving from island to island between years. This year breeding activity is centred on Dassen Island.

About 500 nestlings from the 2002 breeding season are being fitted with engraved colour rings and, by the time you read this, they will have fledged. Most will be heading east, and will be 'available' to birders between Cape Point and Maputo. A minority will head north, and will spread north along the west coast to about Swakopmund.

So, wherever you are along the southern African coastline, please focus your telescope on flocks of Swift Terns and look out for colour rings. Janine's rings have a two-letter code engraved on them, repeated three times around the ring. The codes read from the top of the ring to the bottom. If you see a ringed Swift Tern, please report it to SAFRING (safring@maths.uct.ac.za). The information needed is the date, time and place that you saw it, and the colours and engravings on the ring. Full details of the Swift Tern Project are on the ADU website (www.aviandemographyunit.org, click 'Projects').

Likewise, if you see any other bird species with a colour ring, please report it to SAFRING, which acts as the clearing house for all colour-marking projects in South Africa and forwards sightings to the right researchers.

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