



Media Release

For Immediate Release

Flock to Marion AGAIN!

A Roaring Success in the Roaring Forties

4 February 2025

Johannesburg, Gauteng – A voyage organised by [BirdLife South Africa](#) in association with the [Mouse-Free Marion Project](#) and hosted by [MSC Cruises](#) departed Durban Harbour on 24 January, bound for the waters around South Africa's sub-Antarctic Prince Edward Islands, with 1900 passionate birders and conservationists aboard, returned on 31 January. Primarily a fundraising and awareness campaign, the voyage raised over R9 000 000 through various sources for conservation causes, a staggering sum and testament to the importance of the Mouse-Free Marion Project, and the generosity of our passengers.

This voyage offered birders of all ages and experience levels a unique opportunity to appreciate the wide variety of seabirds that live in the Southern Ocean, many of which breed on Prince Edward and Marion Island, located 1900 kilometres from Durban, or roughly halfway to Antarctica. The islands are in a band of latitude long known by sailors as the 'Roaring Forties,' due to the area's fierce winds.

The focus of the trip was to highlight the unfortunate plight that these seabirds face, namely predation by invasive house mice. The voyage also raised funds for [the Mouse-Free Marion Project](#), a conservation campaign dedicated to restoring Marion Island's ecosystem to a pristine state. Introduced inadvertently to Marion Island by sealers in the early-1800s, eradicating the invasive mouse is the eponymous goal of the Mouse-Free Marion Project.

Stationed around the ship were seabird and marine mammal experts, who facilitated the spotting and identification of seabirds and mammals for the enthusiastic and excited passengers, for some of whom this was their first time birding at sea. Many of our passengers spent hours at a time on the outer decks of the ship, hoping to spot the seabirds that are only found with regularity in these remote waters to which no other commercial vessels usually travel. One would normally have to travel to this remote part of the Southern Ocean aboard the *SA Agulhas II*, South Africa's polar research vessel. Luckily, the *MSC Musica* was more comfortable than a research vessel, with amenities like coffee, tea, and pastry stations found regularly throughout the ship.

Among the 1900 passengers aboard the *MSC Musica* were such luminaries of the scientific and ornithological communities as Peter Harrison MBE, who has spent his life studying seabirds and is the first Patron of the Mouse-Free Marion Project, and Professor Peter Ryan, Emeritus Professor of the University of Cape Town and former director of the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, among many other experts on various topics including seabird ecology, island restoration, and sub-Antarctic research.

When birders were not gazing with wonder at the many species of seabirds from the decks of the ship, (Species seen include Wandering, Sooty, Grey-headed, and Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross, Macaroni and King Penguins, Southern and Northern Giant Petrel, Salvin's and Antarctic Prion, and Blue and Kerguelen Petrel, as well as a wide variety of cetaceans), they were able to visit the high-tech lecture venues on the *MSC Musica*, and learn from the experts on various topics, such as the ecology of Marion Island, the life cycle of the albatross, and the logistics of eradicating mice from Marion Island.

A voyage of this popularity and scale is a largely unprecedented undertaking by a conservation organisation; but in fact, this was the fourth trip of its kind hosted by BirdLife South Africa. Known as "Flocks at Sea", the first of which took place in 2013, and continued in 2017, and in 2022 with the first "Flock to Marion", these events have earned a reputation for being unique voyages, which attract attendance by people from all around the world and of all ages. Thanks to the dedication of the organising committee members from BirdLife South Africa and the Mouse-Free Marion Project, MSC Cruises' hosting of our voyage, and the eager support of our passengers, we are very grateful to be able to add another successful trip to that list.

For further information please contact:

Kurt Martin, Communications Manager: Kurt.martin@birdlife.org.za

About BirdLife South Africa

BirdLife South Africa is the country partner of BirdLife International, a global partnership of conservation organisations that strives to conserve birds, their habitats and global biodiversity, by working with people towards sustainability in the use of natural resources. BirdLife International partners operate in more than 120 countries worldwide. BirdLife South Africa relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work.

BirdLife South Africa Contact details

Tel: +27 11 789 1122

Email: info@birdlife.org.za

Website: www.birdlife.org.za