



Annual Progress Report

January - December 2025



Details of the Mouse-Free Marion Project

Saving Marion Island's Seabirds: The Mouse-Free Marion (MFM) Project seeks to restore South Africa's globally important Southern Ocean territory, Marion Island, by eradicating the invasive house mice that are causing widespread damage to the island's ecosystem. Nineteen of the 29 bird species breeding on Marion Island are vulnerable to mouse predation and are at risk of local extinction. The island is home to four species of albatrosses, including more than 30% of the world's Wandering Albatrosses, all threatened by mouse predation.

The MFM Project is working to eradicate mice from Marion Island using methods and approaches that have proven successful in previous operations on large islands. The method involves the aerial distribution of rodenticide bait across the entire island. At 30 000 hectares, Marion Island will be the largest island on which a rodent eradication has been attempted in a single operation. The success of such operations is significantly influenced by the quality and level of detail of the planning and preparatory work, which is easily the most time-consuming component of an eradication project.

The MFM Project is a partnership between the South African Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) and BirdLife South Africa (BLSA). BLSA has established the MFM Non-Profit Company (NPC) as a special purpose entity to help facilitate the execution of its responsibilities with respect to the partnership and the implementation of the project.

Activities and outcomes during 2025

The New Zealand Department of Conservation's Island Eradication Advisory Group (IEAG) discussed the progress of the MFM Project planning at a meeting in September, focusing on the MFM Project Research Plan, which was finalized earlier in 2025.

Fieldwork associated with pre-eradication trials and research on Marion Island commenced during the April – May 2025 annual relief voyage to Marion Island and continued throughout the course of the year. These trials help address some of the priority knowledge gaps identified in the Feasibility Assessment and the Research Plan. The knowledge gaps relate primarily to mouse ecology and bait application rates—both critical to the baiting strategy and, ultimately, the success of the eradication operation. They will help inform the design of the aerial baiting trial scheduled for 2027, in which an area of 975 ha will have bait aerially applied, with further trials undertaken in the polar desert habitat.

Building on the success of the 2022 *Flock to Marion* voyage, BLSA once again partnered with MSC Cruises to charter the *MSC Musica* for another voyage to the Southern Ocean and the Prince Edward Islands. The *Flock to Marion AGAIN! 2025* voyage took place from 24-31 January 2025 with 1 900 birders, with the aim of raising funds and the profile of both BLSA and the MFM Project. Fundraising activities during the voyage raised over USD 200 000 for the project. More than just raising funds for the MFM Project, the *Flock to Marion AGAIN! 2025* voyage allowed the project team to engage with project supporters and donors. Some of these engagements have resulted in opportunities to introduce the project to additional supporters and potential major donors and funders.

Fundraising for the MFM Project continues to be an urgent priority. Three international high-profile fundraising events were held in support of the MFM Project in 2025 in Geneva, Switzerland; Tokyo, Japan; and Nice, France. Cumulatively the events have raised over USD 1



million for the project. These events introduced the MFM Project to a carefully selected audience with the aim of building awareness, sparking philanthropic interest and opening avenues for future engagement. Additional high-profile events are being considered in other locations, including Cape Town, South Africa; New York, USA; and a follow-up event in Switzerland.

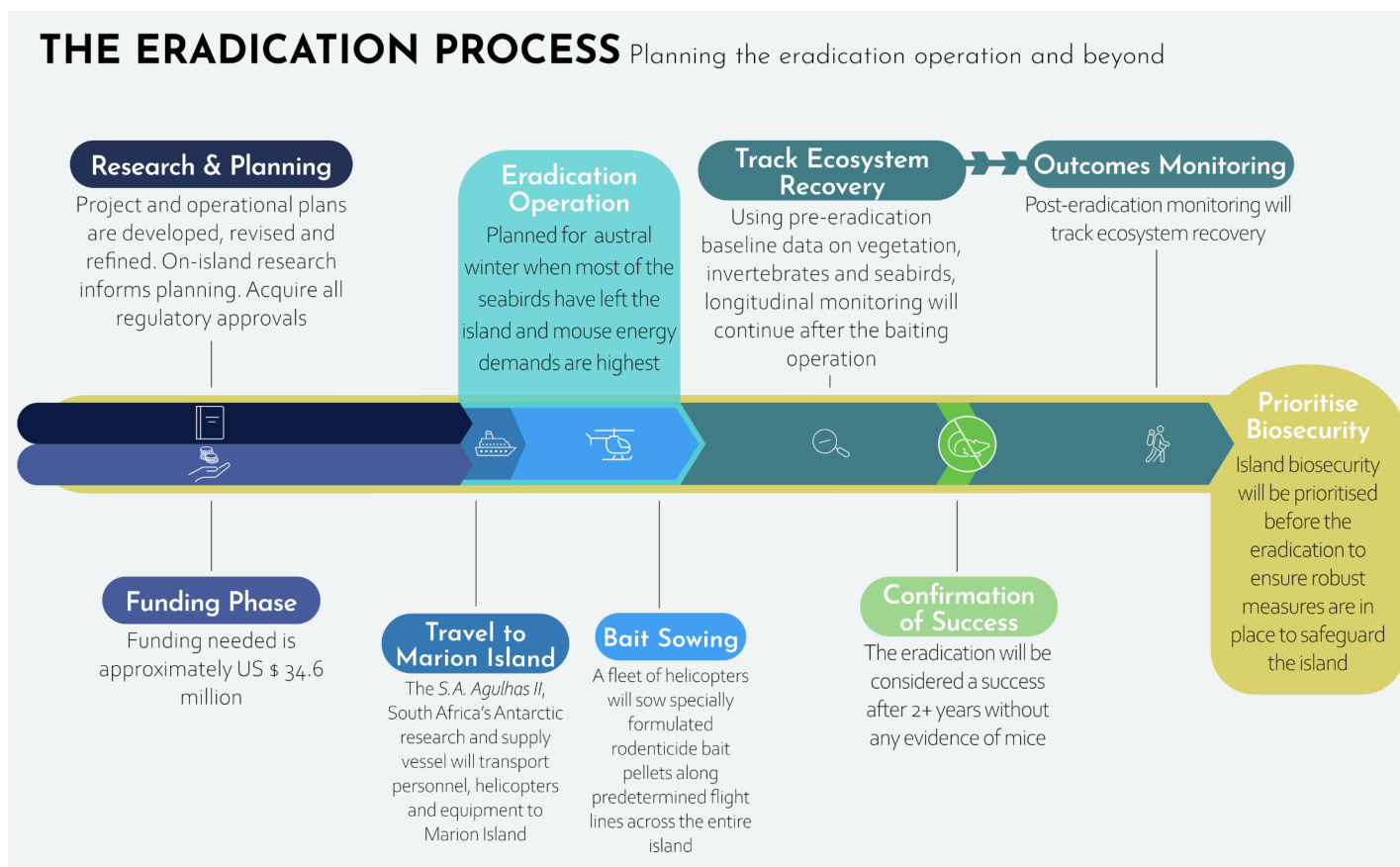
The MFM Project team have initiated the formal Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process to acquire the necessary environmental authorisations for the project. Permit applications for a range of activities that form an integral part of both the planning and operational phases of the project (2025–2029), that require exemptions from the DFFE under the regulatory framework of the Prince Edward Islands Management Plan, are in preparation.

Together with colleagues from the DFFE, the MFM Project team has continued discussions with the Department of Agriculture to ascertain an approved pathway for the import and use of the bait required for the project.

MFM Project in the public eye

The MFM Project continues to raise awareness of Marion Island and the importance of eradicating invasive mice from the island. This also lends momentum to other initiatives to eradicate invasive species from islands across the world.

Dr Anton Wolfaardt, the MFM Project Manager presented the project to the passengers during the well-attended lecture series on board the *Flock to Marion Again! 2025* voyage,



with other notable ornithologists and seabird conservationists such as Peter Harrison MBE and Prof. Peter Ryan also presenting talks on seabird conservation.

The MFM Project participated in the Global Birdfair (Rutland, UK, July 2025) and the South African Bird Fair (Pretoria, September 2025), using both events to raise awareness of the MFM Project, enhance its profile and promote the fundraising initiatives. Visitors were able to experience immersive Virtual Reality (VR) footage of Marion Island using VR headsets, offering a rare and powerful insight into the island's landscapes, wildlife and conservation challenges.

The MFM Project continues to raise awareness through [newsletters](#), podcast and radio interviews, and feature articles in newspapers and other media, highlighting the critical and ambitious mission to restore Marion Island's ecosystem.

Contact

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Saving Marion Island's Seabirds™

The Mouse-Free Marion Project



**forestry, fisheries
& the environment**

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

The Mouse-Free Marion Project is a registered non-profit company (No. 2020/922433/08) in South Africa, established to eradicate invasive albatross-killing mice on Marion Island in the Southern Ocean. The project was initiated by BirdLife South Africa and the South African Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. Upon successful completion, the project will restore the critical breeding habitat of over two million seabirds, many globally threatened, and improve the island's resilience to a warming climate. For more information or to support the project please visit mousefreemarion.org

www.mousefreemarion.org

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