

Gill Memorial Award JOHN COOPER



LESLIE CLEMENCE

John Cooper and Mark Anderson at the presentation.

Congratulations to John Cooper for receiving BirdLife South Africa's most prestigious award, the Gill Memorial Medal, given for outstanding lifetime contributions to ornithology in southern Africa. John, the 19th recipient of the Gill Medal, continues to make a major contribution to ornithological research and bird conservation, enhanced by his caring, gentle life philosophy. He brought his enthusiasm for birds to the Cape in the 1970s, after spending his school and undergraduate student years in what was then Rhodesia. It was during his work for SANCCOB on Dassen Island that he began what became an enduring passion for islands and the birds that breed on them. After conducting research on a diversity of seabirds and coastal birds, he was appointed the FitzPatrick Institute's Antarctic officer in 1982.

John's far-sightedness led to the establishment of long-term monitoring studies on Gough and Marion islands, upon which rests much of our understanding of long-term trends in albatrosses and other seabirds breeding at these globally important sites. Throughout the 1980s he fought tirelessly to ensure that research and conservation at these islands continued, sometimes resorting to subversive tactics in the face of the often absurd and contrary apartheid government policies in the late 1980s.

John's career in publishing ornithological research articles extends back

to the 1960s, and comfortably exceeds 100 peer-reviewed papers in international journals as well as numerous book chapters. His collaborative nature and generosity with data are illustrated by the huge diversity of co-authors on his publication list. John has also authored innumerable reports and popular articles for seabird research and conservation purposes. He founded the African Seabird Group and managed and edited its journal *Cormorant*, later leading the move to make this the international peer-reviewed journal *Marine Ornithology*, as well as editing various conference proceedings.

Perhaps John's most important legacy has been the conservation of the Prince Edward and other southern islands. He drove the UNESCO World Heritage Site nomination for Gough and Inaccessible islands, and the successful Ramsar convention nominations for these and the Prince Edward Islands. Perhaps most importantly, he was intimately involved in negotiating the establishment of the International Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) under the Bonn Convention.

John has been an activist for ensuring that bio-security and quarantine measures are in place at the Prince Edward and Gough islands and regularly serves as the environmental officer on voyages to these locations. He has

led eradication efforts against alien species, including feral cats on Marion Island and an invasive plant on Gough Island. He also instigated clean-up exercises that have resulted in more than 25 tons of litter and redundant structures being removed from Marion and Gough islands during the past decade.

In keeping with his indefatigable energies, and despite having officially retired in 2007, John promotes seabird and island conservation through more scientific papers, writing popular articles and book chapters, and initiating two new, long-term breeding studies at Gough Island. He is currently a Research Associate at the Centre of Excellence for Invasion Biology at the University of Stellenbosch and, when not volunteering his time and expertise for the ACAP secretariat or as the conservation officer for Marion or Gough relief voyages, he lives in Cape Town.

One of John's great unsung contributions has been the nurturing and mentoring of young seabird researchers, many of whom now occupy senior positions, including Associate Professor Peter Ryan and Drs Nigel Adams, Deon Nel, Sam Petersen and Ross Wanless. Aside from the Gill Memorial Medal, John received the equally prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award from the Pacific Seabird Group. We congratulate John on a wealth of impressive achievements in research and conservation.

PETER RYAN AND ROSS WANLESS



PETER RYAN

Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, Inaccessible Island.