

## Book Reviews

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### Marion & Prince Edward: Africa's Southern Islands

A. Terauds, J. Cooper, S.L. Chown & P. Ryan  
SUN PReSS, Stellenbosch, 2010.  
ISBN 978-1-920338-42-8. 350 Rand  
[Obtainable from [www.sun-e-shop.co.za](http://www.sun-e-shop.co.za)]

This is the second major book on the Prince Edward Islands (PEI) in as many years and whilst the former was a scientific monograph (Chown & Froneman 2008) this is very much a book for the general reader and an excellent complement to the earlier volume. Illustrated with many stunning photographs and written in very accessible prose this is both a book for anyone interested in the sub-Antarctic islands as well as for all South Africans to see what the southernmost part of their country looks like.

Broken into five major sections it first describes the physical environment, then the human history of the islands; this is followed by a section on the plants and their communities, then the animal life and finally a section called "Into the Future" dealing with research, conservation and management. A small number of key publications for further reading are listed at the end. There are virtually no text errors showing a very high standard of proof reading.

This is such a well designed and beautifully laid out book that it seems churlish to criticise anything but, despite all the efforts, there are a few things which could have been done better or differently. I am confused why on the maps and on p. 22 the Falklands are listed as Falklands/Malvinas whilst South Georgia, also with disputed sovereignty, is not given its competing Spanish name Georgias del Sur. The satellite photographs of PEI are excellent but there are none to show the eddies around the island described so well on p. 26 or the phytoplankton downwind bloom caused by the upwelling of nutrients. Whilst the maps of the two islands on pp. 28 & 29 are very clear there are no latitude and longitude marks on their borders as might be traditionally expected. And given the existing illustrations of geomorphological features why no photographs of block streams, terraces or lobes? The very good botanical section is almost exclusively concerned with flowering plants. Even in the fellfield areas where cryptogams become the principal vegetation the emphasis is all on *Azorella*. With over 100 species of lichens, 90 species of moss and 44 species of liverworts there is little attempt to illustrate these or discuss their importance in different communities. This is surely an opportunity missed. Interestingly, no mention is made anywhere of the occurrence of *Prasiola crispa*,

a green alga tolerant of high nitrogen and usually found around penguin rookeries and seal wallows. Whilst there is something on marine habitats it is very limited and underlines how the thrust of the research has for decades been on the terrestrial ecosystems.

The chapter on human usage is both very well illustrated and entertaining. Mention is made of the two non-white servants taken to the island in 1948 but there is no indication of when non-racial recruitment allowed anyone to work there - presumably after 1994? And the discussion of renaming of features previously named during the apartheid era (like High Peak to State President Swart Peak to Mascarin Peak) shows that political correctness is still alive and well in the most unlikely places!

The final section on biosecurity and introduced species in part repeats material on both plants and animals (especially cats and mice) dealt with earlier. And there is some interesting discussion on current attempts to control invasive species and gloomy thoughts for the future. Whilst I can see why global climate change is of importance for the future management of PEI I cannot see why the current ban on mineral exploitation has any relevance to the islands. Nor can I see why changing fishing practices *per se* will impact the islands if CCAMLR regulations are adhered to and fisheries patrols are used to discourage IUU fishing.

Two more general points - whilst in some cases the small photographs are not very successful, looking more like postage stamps, the artist's illustrations on the chapter pages are extremely good and add an extra and very attractive feature to the book.

The enthusiasm with which South Africa is pursuing research on the PEI is to be applauded and the recent investment in both a new station on Marion Island and a new ship to replace the *Agulhas* are clear indications of the long-term value that South Africa places on its Antarctic research. I have no doubt that many people reading this book will want more details on how the island is managed yet I see that the management plan is not available online as might have been expected. I tried to find this interesting book in bookshops around South Africa and failed. The publishers have clearly got a great deal to do to market this successfully to a wider audience. In the mean time it can be bought directly from them on the Internet.

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### References

CHOWN, S.L. & FRONEMAN, P.W., eds. 2008. *The Prince Edward Islands: land-sea interactions in a changing ecosystem*. Stellenbosch: SUNPReSS.