

# Bird Island Winterers Letter - 2020

Greetings from our magical little island in the Southern Ocean! The current wintering team of Alex, Cameron, Freya and Iain are looking forward to welcoming you when the ship arrives. This letter is a quick introduction to the island and some thoughts by previous teams to give you some ideas and things to bring and introduce you to your new home.

## ***Communications and IT***

Although remote in a geographical sense, contact with the outside world from BI is very good. Each permanent assistant has their own workstation with full access to the internet and the BI network. Each bedroom is also fitted with network and internet access port plus there is a Wi-Fi network that covers everywhere within Prince and Beck House, so a laptop is definitely advisable and great for unwinding with a movie in the evening and organising your personal music and photos.

The bandwidth available through the satellite internet connection is small, so during the summer, when up to twelve people can be using it, downloading can be problematic to impossible and should be left to quiet times – video calls are likely to be out of the question most of the time and banking apps and music apps may not work so look into using the online sites or downloading before travelling South. However the internet does improve during the winter when down to four people. Large work files such as videos or emails with multiple photo attachments may be sent between BI and Cambridge overnight.

We recommend that you bring plenty of external memory for backing up your photographs, videos and for music. Hard drives with plenty of space (a couple of TB drives is not excessive) is definitely worthwhile especially if you plan to take lots of video footage.



There are several telephones, all of which have Cambridge phone numbers and can be called from the UK for the price of a landline call. This is great if you want to speak with people in the UK, you simply ask them to call you. However, to make an outgoing non-work related call you must set up an account with a phone card company. This will be explained to you and further details provided at pre-deployment conference in Cambridge before you travel south. The phones are spread across base so there is the opportunity for privacy, however access may be limited – the line cannot support more than one call at once and poor weather can make the delay unbearable. Messenger apps and chat programs work well from Bird Island

and are an easy way to keep in regular contact with the UK, make sure you update these on your phone before leaving the UK as doing so here is very difficult!

Post can be sent and received, we can have three or more ship calls in summer and none between April and November. Don't discourage family and friends from writing to you though as the post will make it to you eventually. Opening the postbag to find letters and presents is wonderful so make sure everyone's got your new address...

Bird Island Research Station, c/o British Antarctic Survey, Stanley, Falkland Islands, South Atlantic, FIQQ 1ZZ.



## ***Recreation***

People at home often ask us whether we get bored here, especially with just the four of us during the winter, but boredom is *never* an issue. There is plenty to keep you entertained when you are not working or out enjoying the island.

For the DIY enthusiast there's plenty of scope for 'project' making in the workshop. We have a well kitted out workshop and a small stock of nice woods and materials provided for recreation. There is a movie and TV collection on base; however we would definitely recommend bringing down a hard drive of your favourite/the latest films to enjoy throughout the year as we have twice weekly film nights.

The music collection on base is large and eclectic but there will always be room for your personal collection.

We have a good selection of literature (including lots of electronic books), which even the most avid reader could not exhaust, so do not feel you need to bring two years supply of reading material! The choice is pretty varied ranging through general interest, paperback novels, science, and polar history. BAS supply a range of magazines from New Scientist and National Geographic through to Red and Cosmopolitan but the paperboy only delivers once a year, so don't expect to keep up with the current fashions! We tend to dish the magazines out month-by-month, so that you get them a year late.

If you play a musical instrument then bring it down. There is an acoustic guitar and an electric piano on base. Do bring down your own sheet music and spares. There is a Wii console and some board games in the living area which are great fun to relax together with, we have asked for more board games this year for a bit of variety. Feel free to bring down any favourites but let us know and we can check that we don't already have it on station. If you have a specific idea for a project or enjoy other hobbies then please bring down your own supplies.

Skiing and snowboarding is no longer allowed on Bird Island. There are far too many obstacles, such as rocks, tussock and albatross nests, and no doctor for when things go wrong! The base does have a stock of snow shoes for walking around in deep snow during the winter. Much more likely is the chance to go sledging – there are several plastic sledges that are loads of fun.

Photographs of friends, family and pets are often overlooked in people's packing frenzy, but they make excellent wall decorations. Slideshows of previous adventures make for an interesting evening's entertainment for all.

The beach in front of the base, when clear of fur seals in the winter, is a good size for kites and ball sports, whilst we have rowing, cycling and running machines indoors. There are also free weights, yoga mats and various workout videos.

Often we have parties that may involve fancy dress. We have a dressing up box but fresh looks are always approved of if you have a little space in your luggage. We also have a sewing machine if you really wanted to get creative. Face paints and hair dyes can transform any look but they are easily used up so bringing some new items down would be welcomed.

You will be here for the Midwinter's week holiday. This is your chance for a week of celebrations, games and relaxing. In the weeks running up to Midwinter it is customary to make a midwinter present for another member of the base, to be presented on Midwinter's Day. We make just one present each (the names are pulled out of a hat at the start of winter to decide who is making for who) so all efforts can be concentrated into producing one nice present. It is worth thinking of ideas in advance, so you can bring down any special equipment, materials or fixings you might like to use. Gifts have included jewellery, furniture, clocks, games, models, picture frames, tools and all manner of other interesting and original ideas.



## ***Photography***

Photography is a very popular pastime on Bird Island, with some visitors investing a lot of time and money in it. A compact, point-and-shoot camera is great to always have in your pocket; a weatherproof model is advisable in the Bird island climate- but not essential as small dry bag/ plastic bag will do. Make sure you bring plenty of memory and a spare battery or two as the cold drains the power quickly. Lithium batteries are not allowed in the P boxes so bring on the flight down.

If you are bringing an SLR you will have the usual questions of what lenses to bring and what to carry on a daily basis. A wide angle is useful but the wildlife is very approachable so a large

zoom is only necessary for trying to photograph whales, penguins and seals at sea. So far this winter there have been quite a few whale sightings but that cannot be guaranteed! If you do bring a long lens then a tripod or monopod for stability is a good idea. A smaller lens for daily use is more important (an 18-200mm is useful). We have a printer that is suitable for printing photos but a limited supply of photo paper, so you should bring your own photo paper if you plan on printing many shots out.

If you have your own binoculars it is worth bringing them but we have a few pairs here for field work. There is also a decent spotting scope that lives on base. But if you are a birder a spotting scope and tripod is definitely recommended!

Please note that UAVs and drones are not allowed on South Georgia for anything but scientific and media purposes, which require licenses from BAS and the SG government. These are highly unlikely to be issued to individuals.

## ***Clothing***

BAS provide everything you need to clothe yourself for the great outdoors but you will have to provide your own indoor clothing. The base is well heated throughout the year so shorts and t-shirts are a good idea (and you might need them for any onward travel adventures after Bird Island!), but do bring some jumpers for when a cold wind blows. Comfortable casual clothing is great for everyday use and 2 pairs of slippers (they wear out) or other indoor-only shoes is a must as the carpets are very hard on socks. Definitely bring a fieldwork watch and at least one spare for the 18 month duration.

You will be fitted for your outdoor clothes at BAS, so you can see what you're getting in your kitbag and decide from there if you need any extras. We recommend bringing any outdoor clothing that you specifically find works for you! Your preferred hat, neck warmer and gloves, extra thermal layers and walking socks are all good personal things to bring. The last few seal assistants have invested in battery powered heated gloves which they haven't regretted bringing with them for the winter. It is also worth bringing some dry bags- large one for rucksack/ day sac and smaller ones for cameras/DSLR.

There is a separate washing machine for heavily soiled outdoor gear. We can wash personal clothes any time but do pack enough items to keep you going for at least a week or two as water can be limited. Clothing, especially pants and socks wear out quickly, so bring enough items to keep you going for 18 months. Saturday dinner and special occasions tend to be more formal so a few respectable items for these nights are useful.

To maintain the body beautiful we have ample supplies of quality products including, shampoo, shaving foam, razors, soap, toothpaste, mouthwash toothbrushes, floss but NOT moisturiser, deodorant, shower gel or conditioner. It is always worth bringing a few bottles of your favourites down as well- just remember it needs to be alcohol free to go in the P box. It is also recommended that if you want to shave bringing your own preferred brand of razor is definitely recommended as the ones on base are not very good! We do have sanitary supplies so there are towels and tampons in stock but are only there in case you run out. Bring down your own supplies and BAS will reimburse you for the costs.

There are always budding barbers and hairdressers on Bird Island and although their skills may not be up to standard of the salons you choose to visit at home it is a lot cheaper! There are hair clippers on base and most of the boys (and some of the girls) tend to just keep their hair short, or use the isolation as the perfect excuse to grow it long!



## ***Food***

The quantity and variety of food on Bird Island is impressive, with big freezers and dry food stores stacked full of everything from almonds to zucchini. We've a wide variety of meat cuts and a range of Quorn products along with enough tinned and frozen vegetables to last years. Fresh food is limited to the frequency of ship visits, although things that keep well (potatoes, carrots, cabbages and onions) often last from one ship call to the next, and for a significant proportion of winter.

Everyone on base is on the cooking rota, and responsible for cooking the evening meal and bread-making. The latter is something of a dark art but you will quickly get the hang of it. We have a variety of flours and different nuts and seeds to make different sorts of bread. Breakfast and lunches are help-yourself affairs, often with bread, cheese and leftovers from the previous night's feast, but it is not uncommon for someone to rustle up a pot of soup or bacon sandwiches, which is lovely to return to after a morning on the seal study beach or in a penguin colony. We eat very well, you will never go hungry!! Whilst BAS provides an excellent variety and quality of foodstuffs, you may find that if you enjoy special delicacies they will be in short supply or lacking entirely. If you have an addiction to a specific chocolate bar, or fondness for a magic cooking ingredient that only you know of, it is worth checking with us whether we stock it, or whether to bring some with you.

We suggest tucking away a few special items in your personal box for enjoyment and celebratory events. Remember that your box has to traverse the tropics so they must be items that keep well. BAS will send you a list of what can and cannot be sent in personal boxes.

We have dozens of recipe books here, and many recipes are available online, but if you have a favourite style of cooking, or favourite recipe book then there is no harm in packing it. We are very fond of cakes for tea breaks so if you have any special cake recipes they are always gratefully received.



## ***Final thoughts***

BAS provide everything on station to make your life very comfortable but we have a few little recommendations to make it a little more personal. Your own single bed linen gives a more individual look to your room, a blanket is nice for snuggling into to watch a film and one winterer even packed his own pillows and duvet and did not regret it! The linen cupboard has plenty of large towels, hand towels and flannels but often people bring their own sets as well. There are some mirrors in some of the bedrooms and all bathrooms have one but if you want to ensure you have your own it is worth packing one very carefully into your P-Box. There are plenty of plain white mugs here but a personal mug will bring a bit of colour to the kitchen cupboards. Definitely think about bringing a set of portable speakers for listening to music out on the jetty or during over-night stays at Fairy Point Hut – we all use ours! There are a few communal ones on base but a personal one is handy. There are leftover food tubs for fieldwork picnics, but if you fancied bringing your own personal lunchbox then you'll definitely find a use for it and it will mean you have a tub that will have a lid that stays on!

Field work on Bird Island is very physically demanding and the terrain is not easy to traverse. If you aren't currently fit don't worry you will be by the end of summer but hitting the gym now will help you before you arrive! Walking up and down the hills can be quite hard on the legs and so if you are prone to issues we advise to bring knee/ankle supports.

If you have any questions don't hesitate to drop us a line and we will try our best to answer. And don't worry about the packing; you can live here comfortably with the bare minimum of two pairs of pants and a bar of soap. You can always have small parcels sent down in the post and have the option to get a 20kg box sent in on the ship for your second summer.

Bird Island is a brilliant place, lots of fun, lots of wildlife and we're all absolutely sure you will love your time here. We look forward to meeting you soon!

The current wintering team of



E-mail addresses for current winterers:

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Albatross ZFA  
Seal ZFA  
Penguin and Petrel ZFA  
Technician