

Dispatch from Friday, 8 February 2008

Greetings from Antarctica!

We recently returned to the ship after spending the last few weeks on Cape Shirreff. Given the limited e-mail capacity of the Cape Shirreff field station I was not able to send e-mail updates or images. However, we are now on the ship on our way home to Punta Arenas Chile. As I write this we are about 2/3 the way across the Drake Passage. The weather has been kind and it is sunny outside. While the seas are ok, they are not as calm as our voyage down to the Cape. We are excited to be returning to civilization after a month in the field. Our work has gone extremely well. As I mentioned in the earlier e-mail, the major reason for my trip was to deploy 12 CTD (salinity temperature depth) tags on southern elephant seals. This was part of a collaborative between U.C. Santa Cruz and the U.S. Antarctic Marine Living Resources Program (AMLR), co-funded by the National Science Foundation and AMLR. The other components of this effort were to assist with the ongoing fur seal research carried by the AMLR program under Mike Goebel's direction. In addition, Mike wanted to initiate a pilot effort to see if we could tag Leopard seals! I'm pleased to say that we accomplished all of these activities, as we successfully figured out how to sedate Leopard seals sufficiently to attach satellite telemetry tags and dive recorders on 4 Leopard seals! As the e-mail capacity of the ship is also quite limited, I will send a few updates over the next few days, but once we reach shore I will send a series of images detailing our work here.

The attached image is of a southern elephant seal with a CTD tag attached. These tags provide detailed information about where the animals go, how deep they dive. They also report on the oceanographic conditions where the animal is diving. These data are valuable to understand the not only the animals behavior relative to the oceanography, but also provide data on the oceanographic conditions in regions that are difficult in not impossible to get any other way.

Best,
Dan Costa

