

Ruth Musgrave

From: Bold in the Cold [boldinthecold@whaletimes.org]

Sent: Tuesday, January 25, 2011 11:11 AM

To: boldinthecold@whaletimes.org

Subject: Seal Camp News from Ray Buchheit

Hey Virtual Team Members!

This is Ray. I am a seal researcher at Cape Shirreff, on Livingston Island.

Every day, we get up and have some breakfast before we head out to work. Usually we eat the same kinds of breakfast cereals or oatmeal that you guys probably do. But sometimes, somebody will have a "breakfast penalty." That is when one of the crew forgets to take his or her radio out with them to work. We carry them for safety, and if you forget, then you have to make the rest of the camp breakfast the next day. So some mornings we get omelets, cinnamon rolls, or some other delicious treat! Today we had omelets, because I forgot my radio!

Typically, after we eat, the fur seal crew heads out to the study beaches where the Antarctic fur seals breed. Some of the seals have flipper tags with numbers that let us know how old they are and when they were tagged. Every day, we go look for these tags and record them. At the end of the season, we can tell when the females had their pups, how many trips they took to sea, and how long they stayed on land.

On some of the animals, we attach special measuring instruments that tell us where they go to find food at sea, the water temperature, and even how deep they dive! Today we retrieved one of these instruments and found out the fur seal had made 12 trips to sea. We now know where she was eating and how deep she had to go to find food for the last month. Very valuable and cool information for us!

Most of a *fur sealer's* day revolves around the fur seals. But today, in addition to our tag re-sights, we got to catch a leopard seal. It was very exciting! There are many leopard seals here, and we are starting to study them in addition to the fur seals. Today, we put one of those instruments I was telling you about on a leopard seal. We hope we will get some exciting information from it! We also used a huge tripod and a tarp sling to weigh the seal. She weighed 491 kilograms and was 287 cm long. (That is about 9.5 feet long, and over 1,000 pounds!)

I wonder...if you measure that out...how many kids in your class does it take to be as long? How many does it take to weigh as much? Do you know what leopard seals eat? How much does a 1000 lb leopard seal eat a day?

The weather has been a bit crummy for the last couple of days. We are on an island near the ocean, so it isn't as cold as the on the continent. Sometimes, people don't realize that it rains in Antarctica. We have been getting heaps of rain for the last two days! That is good news for us, as we get all of our drinking water from rain barrels, but it makes working with the seals and penguins much tougher. The wind has been blowing pretty hard, as well.

The *quadrocopter* (remote controlled helicopter) crew has been grounded, but we hope they'll get a nice day to fly so they can tell you all about it. It's super cool!

It looks like we will be helping with some penguin work tomorrow. Hopefully the rain stops, as working in the penguin colonies can be quite messy! But that is a story for one of the penguin biologists to tell you. I might wait an extra day to take my shower though. We take one shower each week, so I have to make mine count!

I hope you guys are having a great week, and are enjoying hearing about Cape Shirreff. We sure enjoy getting your great questions! (If you have any more, please send them!)

Take care,

~Ray

PS Attached are photos of the Seam Camp and a cool one of a leopard seal face-to-face with a fur seal.