

ANT XXIII/8 Weekly Report No. 1 26 November 2006

On the 23rd of November Polarstern departed with the ANT XXIII/8 expedition from Cape Town according to plan at 6 pm local time. Shortly after departure the new satellite communication device was tested successfully while the ship was slowly steaming close to the shore.

In the beautiful sunshine and with the famous Table Mountain filling the background the scientists and crew members used the opportunity to introduce themselves to one another. Not surprisingly almost everybody noticed a small group of passing humpback whales close to the ship. As if one of them wanted to say a fare well to Polarstern on her way south one whale suddenly leaped almost vertically out of the water only to let itself plunge back into the ocean. Most of us have only seen such a display on television.

On day two of the cruise everybody started the usual unpacking of scientific equipment and to set up the laboratories. All of us were working twice as hard not to be hampered by bad weather conditions forecasted for the next couple of days. The sooner this strenuous work is done the more relaxed we can face what is going to come. Despite the workload there were some spare moments to watch the first albatrosses gliding effortlessly above the sea surface.

Since leaving Cape Town the vessel has been heading south towards the German Neumayer Station, which we have to supply with fuel and other consumables. Subsequently we will travel along the ice edge to reach the Antarctic Peninsula. Only after arrival at the Peninsula will the majority of scientists start their scientific program per se.

There are two main objectives of this cruise; the first is the investigation of natural resources, which will focus mainly on fish as part of the Convention of the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). The second objective is the Census of Antarctic Marine Life (CAML), which will investigate the marine life situated directly beneath the recently collapsed Larsen Ice Shelves, which was caused by climatic warming. Both will contribute to the International Polar Year 2007-2008, which will begin soon. The incentive of international cooperation will draw scientists from Germany, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, France, United Kingdom, Italy, Canada, Russia, Spain, Czech Republic, Ukraine, and USA to work together as a team. The percentage of female participants (38%) indicates that the tradition of equal opportunity within the field of marine ecology prevails.

All the scientists have settled in well with some finding the ships movement a calming experience others needing longer to get used to the swell.

On behalf of all the scientific participants the chief scientist Julian Gutt sends his regards and best wishes.