

Apart from a welcome interlude of celebrating New Year, the year 2007 started as 2006 had finished, with successful bottom trawls. This doesn't necessarily mean that the net was bursting with fish but we made good progress regarding the scientific fisheries program. At first, stations north-west of the South Shetland Islands were processed. Here, our position was on the southern-most fringe of the feared Drake Passage, the strait between South America and the Antarctic Peninsula which is famous for its strong winds. But we were blessed with calm weather.

Afterwards, we "turned" into the Bransfield Strait, the stretch of water that lies between the Antarctic Peninsula and its offshore islands – the South Shetlands. By midweek, the Polarstern was fishing near Joinville Island, which is situated on top of the Peninsula like the proverbial dot on the letter i. This meant a change in scenery compared to the Drake Passage in two respects. Firstly, this body of water is influenced by the Weddell Sea situated due east. As a consequence, the species composition shifted towards high-Antarctic fish species, especially ice fish, which was a welcome change for workers routinely processing the catches.

And secondly, those that found their way out on deck noticed that the landscape is now dominated by ice rather than mountain chains. Currents brought medium-sized table icebergs into our path. These icebergs originate exactly where our research program is going to take place – the east coast of the Antarctic Peninsula in the western Weddell Sea. Despite increasing wind conditions, we were able to completely finish the scientific fisheries survey within the framework of the Convention of the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

Around the South Shetland Islands, catches were significantly lower than those of a comparable study in 2002. In contrast, around Joinville Island, an American-German investigation of the local fish fauna in early 2006 yielded equal results to our preliminary findings. Apart from stock assessment, our scientific fisheries program includes genetic investigations, analyses of pollutants as well as general biological enquiries conducted by Erica, Marzia and Andrea from Italy, Karel from the Czech Republic and Malte from Germany.

During this phase of fisheries investigations, the eager expectations of the marine ecologists to collect scientific material using dredges, which are better suited for sampling invertebrates, were only partially fulfilled.

Finally, it is our turn. We're all excited and are looking forward to what is going to come in the next three weeks. Despite being trained fisheries biologist I still care for fish, their scientific application and the protection of their stock, this second phase of the cruise also allows me to contribute to the scientific program.

During the night to Sunday we passed the Antarctic Sound (photograph: E. Isla) and, as a consequence, we are now on the eastern coast of the Antarctic Peninsula. In the next weekly report there will be information on our first impressions of the work in the Larsen A/B area of collapsed ice shelves, where prior to this expedition, no one has ever done comprehensive biological investigations. Everyone here is well and it is reflected by the excellent atmosphere onboard the Polarstern.

Best regards in the name of all participants.

Yours Julian Gutt