



Across Bird Sound to South Georgia

This months Wandering Albatross chick round was rather a snowy affair, as I reached Top Meadows to see that all were present and correct I began to wish I had brought a pair of snow shoes – but in the name of science I waded on. I wandered round ticking off the register and admiring the seascape of icebergs. It is always a pleasant task assisting with the Wandering Albatross work here on Bird Island. However, as I glanced down into Jordan cove and beyond into Evermann cove duty called in the form of two large leopard seals hauled out on icebergs.



Antarctic Fur seal



Leopard seal



Elephant seal

Since the first winter Leopard seal was sighted back in April I have been walking the daily round along a stretch of coast on the south side of the island. Each day making observations of Leopard seals, Elephant seals, Antarctic fur seals and South Georgia Pintails. I'm sure you instantly spotted the odd one out in that last sentence, and yes along with the seal observations I am contributing to gathering information about this little known species.



Pintails on Fresh Water Bay



Female Pintail

But back to the seals.... Leopard seals are an exciting winter addition to the wildlife here on Bird Island and provide a popular distraction to the base members. In previous years numerous individuals have been tagged, receiving their own unique number and are also affectionately assigned a name. This year we have seen Johan, Keeley, Pearce, Emma, Hector, Kathleen and William!



Emma hauled out on the ice in Main Bay

There has been such a lot of ice about this winter providing preferable haul out options for the leopard seals that we have yet to see one on the beach. As a result the list of possible names for new arrivals this winter is growing.

Now the big event in June is of course midwinter and whilst those of you in the Northern Hemisphere were enjoying the longest summer evening of the year the winter solstice was celebrated throughout the Antarctic. Leading up to the 21st the workshop saw frenzied and highly secretive present making, whilst the fax machine whirred into life receiving good wishes from all corners of the globe. The day it's self was a real treat...

It is destined to be a good day when you are woken with a glass of bucks fizz and a freshly baked croissant. Thus began midwinter. All events seemed to be punctuated with food that Chris, our Winter Base Commander, had been hard at work creating in the kitchen to supply us throughout the day with several feasts.



Upholding the traditions of Bird Island we donned the appropriate garments ready for the Island Games. I would like to point out that many of the events require, as in the Highland Games, the enormous strength of a BIG burly Scotsman and that I am the least like the said Scotsman in residence here, at least that's the excuse I'm using for my less than average performance in one or two of the events.

We kicked off with a bit of haggis flinging, a number of techniques were tried but experience shone through with Chris taking this first event by storm. However Isaac soon came into his own and after tossing the catching pole like a natural went on to also win the wellie wanging. This popular Scout Fete event has the special Bird Island twist of having to throw the wellie with your teeth.



Alex mid 'haggis' fling



Chris demonstrates his favoured technique to Isaac

Then two events requiring a sure shot and a keen eye followed. The games became a bit of a two horse race when Chris and Isaac achieved joint first for the crossbow but they were unable to match Alex 'no target too small' Cottle in the snow ball throwing event.

Finally cold feet endurance. I felt that here I could come into my own, or at least be keen enough to suffer the required amount of time to ensure glory was mine. After

the initial shock of ice cold water lapping at your ankles I found the pain subsided and went on to not only win the event but smash the previous years record. Yep you heard it here I won possibly the most gruelling event of the day – I had to remind myself of this throughout the following period of hot aches, which were horribly painful.



How cold!



Enduring the pain (Chris, Sarah and Isaac)

Once Isaac had received several hearty slaps on the back for being the clear winner of the 2004 Bird Island Midwinter Games we headed inside to warm up and prepare for the evenings events.

Unlike Christmas, which falls at one of the busiest times of year here on BI, there is ample time to prepare for midwinter, so the base members draw on their creative talents and try out some new skills to make each other gifts for exchanging on the day. We decided to save the best 'til last, postponing the presenting of creations until after the evening meal. As we rolled into the comfortable chairs stuffed full of several delicious courses the child like excitement was building, but still the moment was not upon us. As the Midwinter broadcast was introduced we were reminded of the other BAS bases celebrating in a suitable fashion along with many stations in Antarctica, some of whom we had exchanged well wishes with and whose emails and faxes decorated our walls. It really was fantastic to hear messages from friends and family across the airwaves, the BBC world service broadcast seemed a fitting addition to the event.

Exchanging gifts was a terribly exciting affair and you are keen to hand over something you have created with the individual in mind, eager to know if they'll like it but also bowled over by what you are receiving. There were framed photos, benches, backgammon sets, weather veins, mittens all beautifully made and well received!

As if the previous day had not contained enough treats we woke the following morning to a glorious sight, the island bathed in sunshine, and with every reason to be outside enjoying it off we all trooped.



Looking to the South East of the Island

There are still four months of winter to enjoy...so bring on the snow! Love and kisses to all at home, Sarah

