

SEABIRDS OBSERVED AT UNGER ISLAND, LYALL ISLANDS, VICTORIA LAND, ANTARCTICA, FEBRUARY 2004

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On 4 February 2004, a visit was made to the little-known Lyall Islands on the Pennell Coast, Victoria Land, Antarctica by about 100 passengers and staff from the icebreaker *Kapitan Khlebnikov*. The group consists of four small islands—Surgeon (the largest), Novosad, Unger and Hughes—all of which are fairly steep and largely encrusted in snow and ice with a few areas of bare rock. Even at this late stage of summer, the islands were still for the most part surrounded by sea ice, enabling the visitors to walk a little more than one kilometre over it to Unger Island (70°41'S, 166°55'E), the westernmost of the group. Unger Island is roughly conical in shape and about half a kilometre in diameter. Observations made on six species of seabirds seen during the visit are reported below.

Emperor Penguin *Aptenodytes forsteri*

Two adults were seen on the sea ice close to Unger Island. There was no evidence of breeding in the immediate vicinity.

Adélie Penguin *Pygoscelis adeliae*

In a colony on Unger Island, 93 chicks were present, most of which were close to fledging. Many fledglings had been seen from the ship during the preceding few days.

Based on an examination of the area, which had evidently been occupied by the colony that season, it would seem safe to assume that many chicks had fledged before the visit. Wilson & Taylor (1984) listed fewer than 50 breeding pairs for 1980/82 from this locality. Totals of 118 and 166 pairs were counted on aerial photographs taken on 7 December 1984 and 4 December 1985 respectively (Taylor *et al.* 1990). An aerial flight in the ship's helicopter provided no evidence of penguins breeding on any other islands in the group, nor do any earlier published records seem to exist for them (Woehler 1993).

Snow Petrel *Pagodroma nivea*

Approximately 25–30 birds were observed flying around the ship close to the islands, although none were observed ashore at Unger Island. Possibly they were breeding at one of the other islands in the group, although the locality is not listed as a breeding site by Croxall *et al.* (1995). It was not ascertained to which of the two forms of Snow Petrel the observed birds belonged.

Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*

One Giant Petrel was seen flying around the ship close to the islands, but no evidence of breeding was observed.

Wilson's Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*

About 15 birds were seen around Unger Island, of which five were seen to fly into small crevices amongst the rocks and not to reappear after several minutes. The crevices may well have been nest sites, but it was not possible to see actual nests or chicks.

South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormicki*

Two (possibly three) pairs were seen and were considered to be breeding on Unger Island. Birds seemed to be defending territories in pairs and showing interest in the penguin colony. It was possible that chicks, which would have been expected at this time of year, were present, although none were seen.

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