

A NEWLY DISCOVERED BREEDING COLONY OF EMPEROR PENGUINS *APTENODYTES FORSTERI*

NESTOR R. CORIA¹ & DIEGO MONTALTI^{1,2}

¹Departamento de Ciencias Biológicas, Instituto Antártico Argentino, Cerrito 1248, 1010 Buenos Aires, Argentina
(nrcoria@overnet.com.ar)

²Cátedra Fisiología Animal, Facultad de Ciencias Naturales y Museo, Paseo del Bosque s/n 1900 La Plata, Argentina

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Breeding colonies of Emperor Penguins *Aptenodytes forsteri* are distributed around the Antarctic coastline, on winter sea ice between 66°S and 78°S (Watson 1975, Woehler 1993, Williams 1995). Colonies occur in three main areas: the Weddell Sea and Dronning Maud Land, Enderby and Princess Elizabeth Lands, and the Ross Sea, with seven additional colonies discovered between 1979 and 1990 (Woehler 1993). Many colonies have not been counted for many years, and the current minimum breeding population is 202 200 pairs in 43 breeding colonies (Woehler & Croxall 1997). During the breeding season of Emperor Penguins (April–November) access to colonies is difficult or impossible due to inclement weather and extensive pack ice (Kooyman 1993).

Except for the Dion Islands (67°52'S, 68°43'W) at the western base of the Antarctic Peninsula, no Emperor Penguin colonies are known from the Antarctic Peninsula. However, a colony of Emperor Penguins was believed to exist close to Snow Hill Island (64°22'S, 57°11'W) because personnel at the Argentinian base at Esperanza Bay (63°23'S, 57°00'W)

observed adults and juveniles between the 1987/88 and 1995/96 summers (N.R. Coria unpubl. data). Between the 1993/94 to 1996/97 summers, many immature Emperor Penguins were often seen at Cockburn Island (64°22'S, 56°50'W), Seymour Island (64°14'S, 56°38'W) and Snow Hill Island (64°22'S, 57°11'W) by Argentinean scientists (J. Lunski, R. del Valle and R. Capdevilla pers. comm.).

Here we report an additional breeding colony (the 44th known) of Emperor Penguins in the north-east of the Antarctic Peninsula. This colony was discovered on a Twin-Otter aeroplane flight at 300 m on 20 July 1997 during which, in clear weather, aerial photographs were taken on 100 ASA colour film using a 35-mm camera with a 50-mm lens.

The colony is located at 64°32'S, 57°26'W on level sea ice approximately 500 m from the south coast of Snow Hill Island (Fig. 1). Because Emperor Penguin chicks are usually hatched between mid July and August (Martínez 1992), we believe that the penguins were in an advanced stage of incubation or in

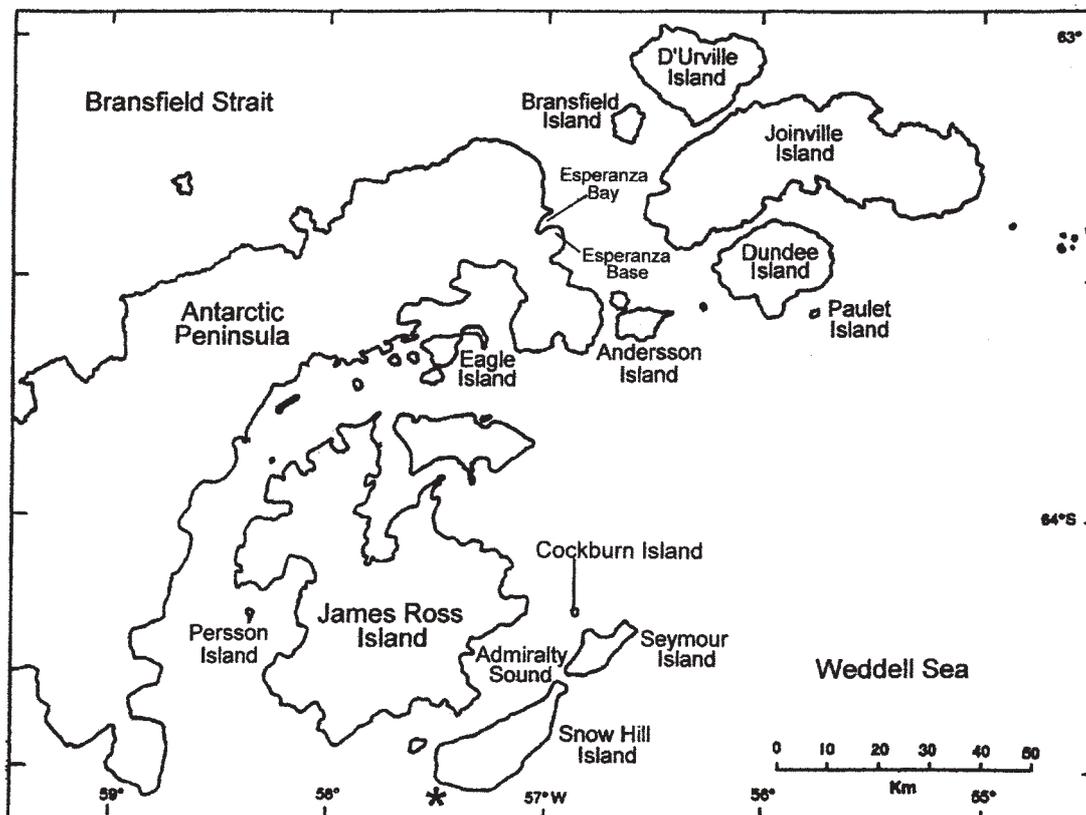


Fig. 1. Location of Emperor Penguin breeding colony (*) at Snow Hill Island, Antarctic Peninsula.

early chick rearing. The population was estimated as 1200 pairs following Croxall & Kirwood (1979) (A3: accuracy ± 10 to 15 %) based on counts obtained from photographs.

Emperor Penguins have been recorded at Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands) (Woods 1988), and are accidental, transient visitors to Tierra del Fuego (Humphrey *et al.* 1970), and at Isla de los Estados (Chébez & Bertonatti 1994). Emperor Penguins are occasionally reported at the South Sandwich Islands (Cordier *et al.* 1981), South Orkney Islands (Rootes 1988, N.R. Coria pers. obs.) and are winter visitors to the South Shetland Islands (Trivelpiece *et al.* 1987, Peter *et al.* 1988, D. Montalti pers. obs.). We believe it is likely that many of the Emperor Penguin sightings in the Antarctic Peninsula and Scotia Arc islands are birds from Snow Hill Island, rather than from the colonies farther to the east in the Weddell Sea, as has been suggested previously (Rootes 1988).

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