

From the National Geographic Explorer in Antarctica



Cruising the Weddell Sea

Tabular bergs were all around. Those who had never seen one before were stunned and awed. Maybe you have seen an iceberg before in Alaska or maybe even the still more large and amazing bergs from Greenland. But nothing can compare once you have seen the tabular bergs from the Weddell Sea.

Full sunshine was glinting off the steep icy sides. They were stunning, floating between bright blue water and bright blue sky. Then during breakfast the announcements started: Emperor penguin, Emperor penguin, Emperor penguin, Killer Whales, Emperor penguin, and finally, a group of five Emperor penguins.

The *National Geographic Explorer* had moved into the waters around the area of Snow Hill Island. This is where, when the sea is frozen, a large colony of Emperors spend their winter brooding their eggs. When the sea breaks up in the spring, the chicks have fledged, but many chicks and adults still hang out in the general area before finally heading further out to sea for food. We are lucky to have had the winds blowing in a direction that has pushed the sea ice away from shore, opening a pathway for us to head quite far South into the Weddell. What a treat.

The ship moved to the southern end of Snow Hill Island. Here we found the fast ice. Frozen into the fast ice were giant towering castles of icebergs. The landscape was amazing. Slowly emerging from behind these ice towers were clusters of dark figures. Binoculars were brought up to our eyes. They're all Emperors! Everyone was so excited.

This was definitely the right time for a fast ice walk. The ship pulled into the ice. We hopped into the Zodiacs and headed out to get close up views of these amazing penguins. A walk around the ice led us to several groups of ten to fifteen Emperors. Everyone was delighted. The penguins put on a good show, leaping out of the water, their feathers shining in the sunlight, pushing along on their bellies in single file, and occasionally filling the air with their wonderful trumpeting call.

It was an amazing afternoon. What more could you possibly say.

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