



Blog | Penguins, People and Science – Antarctica Depends on All Three

Penguins were my first love. I used to study gentoo, Adelie and chinstrap penguins for the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) on a remote Antarctic island to see how their breeding and foraging patterns changed in response to food supply. My work and experiences left me with a lifetime longing to do what I could to protect them.

So, it was with great interest that I read a paper this week from my old colleagues at BAS about declines in gentoo penguin populations at an historic site on Goudier Island, Port Lockroy on the Antarctic Peninsula, now managed by the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust (UKAHT). Gentoo penguin populations are increasing on the Peninsula, including at other sites popular with human visitors, so the findings at Goudier Island are curious.

Port Lockroy is close to my heart. I worked there in the early noughties, arriving on Goudier Island to expand the penguin study, inquisitive about meeting the thousands of human visitors who land there each summer to experience the living museum and post office. It is one of 37 unique visitor sites on the Peninsula with robust guidelines to manage visitors, regularly reviewed in collaboration with scientists, policy makers, the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO), environmentalists and others in the Antarctic community, and endorsed through the Antarctic Treaty System. IAATO operators follow all guidelines rigorously and the IAATO Secretariat works closely with the UKAHT to ensure they are implemented at Goudier Island.

Long-term monitoring projects, like the one at Port Lockroy, are one of the most effective ways of detecting and understanding change in wildlife populations. They also help inform decisions about managing human activity and improving responsible tourism practices in Antarctica. IAATO operators annually carry scientists across Antarctica in support of these studies.

So, what is going on at Goudier Island? As the paper notes, the gentoo penguin makes it notoriously difficult for scientists to understand what exactly is driving changes in the size of their breeding populations because it varies from year to year, often in response to local environmental conditions such as sea ice or air temperature. Although untangling what exactly is causing the decline remains unclear, the combined drive by



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the IAATO and the UKAHT to continue reviewing the management of this special site in the interests of conservation is not.

As for me, I was captivated by each visitor's sense of awe at what they were experiencing in Antarctica. I marvelled at the professionalism of the IAATO ships' staff, their great knowledge and attention to the smallest operational details to support safety and environmental care. Everyone, from crew to visitor, was – and continues to be – united by a strict code of conduct that seeks to mitigate potential impact and keep Antarctica pristine for generations to come. In essence, those who travel to Antarctica go there as visitors and return ambassadors for its ongoing preservation.

Amanda Lynnes

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About the Author

Amanda began her Antarctic career in 1996 with the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) as a penguin biologist and field assistant for the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). She has also worked as an ornithologist for an IAATO member operator, at Port Lockroy on the Antarctic Peninsula for BAS and as a Project Coordinator for the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust.

About IAATO

IAATO is a member organization founded in 1991 to advocate and promote the practice of safe and environmentally responsible private-sector travel to the Antarctic. IAATO Members work together to develop, adopt and implement operational standards that mitigate potential environmental impacts. These standards have proved to be successful including but are not limited to: Antarctic site-specific guidelines, site selection criteria, passenger to staff ratios, limiting numbers of passengers ashore, boot washing guidelines and the prevention of the transmission of alien organisms, wilderness etiquette, ship scheduling and vessel communication procedures, emergency medical evacuation procedures, emergency contingency plans, reporting procedures, marine wildlife watching guidelines, station visitation policies and much more. IAATO has a global network of over 100 members.