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25 YEARS PROTOCOL ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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Ukraine, United
States, Argentina,
IAATO
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Site Guidelines for the Yalour Islands, Wilhelm Archipelago

Site Guidelines for the Yalour Islands, Wilhelm Archipelago

Working Paper submitted by the United Kingdom, Ukraine, United States and Argentina, in conjunction with IAATO

Summary

Site guidelines have been prepared for the Yalour Islands, Wilhelm Archipelago. The proponents recommend that the CEP submit the site guidelines for adoption by the ATCM.

Background

1. The Yalour Islands (65° 14S 64°10W) are a small group of islands and rocks in the Southern part of the Wilhelm Archipelago, one Nautical Mile Northwest of Cape Tuxen.
2. The site is recognised as being one of the southernmost recorded Gentoo penguin colonies as well as a number of other confirmed breeding bird species and a considerable coverage of mosses and lichens. It has seen a growth in visitor numbers in recent years; reaching a peak, to date, of 1,953 visitors in 2013-14 season; the site had 27 visits during this austral summer season and was briefly amongst the twenty most visited sites.
3. The United Kingdom, Ukraine, United States, Argentina and IAATO have produced site guidelines for the Yalour Islands (Annex 1 and attached draft map).

Recommendation

The United Kingdom, Ukraine, United States, Argentina and IAATO recommend that the CEP submit the site guidelines for adoption by the ATCM.

Yalour Islands

Wilhelm Archipelago

65° 23S 64°17W – Small group of islands and rocks in the Southern part of the Wilhelm Archipelago, 1NM Northwest of Cape Tuxen.

Key features:

- Small archipelago surrounded by mountainous scenery
- Adélie penguin colony and one of the southernmost recorded gentoo penguin colonies
- Summer habitat of orcas foraging on penguins and seals
- Mosses & Lichens

Description:

Topography – A 1.5 mile long group of scattered low lying islands and rocks in the southern part of the Wilhelm Archipelago. The coastline is primarily rocky, comprising predominantly igneous intrusive rocks, usually with a short steep climb up to the penguin breeding areas.

Fauna: Confirmed breeders: Adélie penguin (*Pygoscelis adeliae*), gentoo penguins (*Pygoscelis papua*), blue-eyed shags (*Phalacrocorax atriceps*) southern polar skua (*Catharacta maccormicki*), brown skua (*Catharacta antarctica*), Wilson's storm-petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*), kelp gull (*Larus dominicanus*) and Antarctic tern (*Sterna vittata*).

Suspected breeders: snowy sheathbill (*Chionis alba*)

Southern elephant seals (*Mirounga leonina*), Weddell seals (*Leptonychotes weddellii*) and Antarctic fur seals (*Arctocephalus gazella*) occasionally haul out. Leopard seals (*Hydrurga leptonyx*) and crabeater seal (*Lobodon carcinophagus*) may be seen near-shore, orca whales (*Orcinus orca*) may be seen hunting offshore.

Flora: Small patches of bearded and crustose lichen species including *Xanthoria* spp., *Buellia* spp., *Caloplaca* spp. *Usnea* spp. Extensive moss beds and Antarctic hairgrass (*Deschampsia Antarctica*) may be present. Snow algae may be present late season.

Known Impacts None

Potential Impacts Trampling vegetation and initial soils and disturbance of nesting birds and seals

Ships¹ Ships carrying 500 or fewer passengers. One ship at a time. Maximum 2 ships per day, of which no more than 1 may be a vessel carrying more than 200 passengers.

Visitors No more than 60 visitors ashore at any time, exclusive of expedition guides and leaders. No landing between 2200 and 0400 to allow a resting time for wildlife.

¹ A ship is defined as a vessel which carries more than 12 passengers.

Visitor AreasLanding Area

Depending on the state of the sea ice, snow conditions onshore and tide, on the largest island there are several potential landing points on cobbled shoreline along the southern shore of the largest island, with a climb up rocky shores to visit the nesting penguins.

Closed Areas

Northern and eastern parts of the largest island (especially cliffs), zones of rich vegetation and initial soils formation, nesting sites. All small islands of Yalour archipelago where there is no place for landings.

Guided Walking Areas

None.

Free roaming Areas

Visitors may roam freely on snow-covered areas, but under close supervision. Given the irregular topography at this site, guides should keep visual contact on all visitors at all times.

Visitor Code of Conduct

BEHAVIOUR ASHORE

All visits are to be conducted in accordance with the *General Guidelines for Visitors to the Antarctic*.

Visits should always be kept to areas where the snow is thick enough to avoid damage to the vegetation, particularly moss and lichen, which is abundant across all exposed rock and boulder areas.

Small boat cruising is an appropriate alternative to landing at this site, particularly late season when snow has melted exposing more vegetation.

Be particularly sensitive to penguin highways and ensure visitors are guided in these areas.

CAUTIONARY NOTES

Small boat drivers should be aware of submerged rocks and foul waters surrounding the island and fast moving current at certain states of the tide, which can affect pack ice conditions.

Compacted snow and ice around the coastline can be undercut by sea water and result in overhangs, which can be dangerous.

