

SOUTH GEORGIA & ANTARCTIC PENINSULA

October 19 to November 10, 2023

TRIP REPORT



Photo: Glenn Bartley

ABOUT THE TRIP



The October-November 2023 Cheesemans' Ecology Safaris voyage to South Georgia and Antarctica was a 20-day adventure exploring stunning landscapes and unique wildlife. Starting in Punta Arenas, Chile, the group traveled to the Falklands and boarded the Plancius for visits to locations like Right Whale Bay, Salisbury Plain, and Deception Island. Despite some challenging weather conditions and the initial arrival of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza to the region, under the guidance of a skilled leader and team, we adapted so safety and carefully thought-out biosecurity protocols were met to ensure plentiful landings, on-water activities, and wildlife observations filled our time, cameras, and memories while at sea in the Antarctic. A total of 48 bird species, 9 cetacean species, and 6 pinniped species were recorded. Participants also contributed to scientific projects, including whale identification. The trip ended in Ushuaia, Argentina, covering nearly 3,000 nautical miles of incredible experiences.

King Penguins

Photo: Scott Davis



TABLE OF CONTENTS

|

3

TRIP OVERVIEW

7

BIRDS

13

CETACEANS

15

PINNIPEDS

20

MORE INFO



TRIP OVERVIEW

OCTOBER 21, 2023

Punta Arenas to Falkland Islands

Our adventure began in Punta Arenas, Chile, a gateway to the Antarctic wilderness, with shorelines marking the storied history of Antarctic expedition preceding us. We gathered in anticipation for a scenic flight to the Falkland Islands, where we glimpsed a wind-swept landscape brimming with history and wildlife, including South American sea lions on the docks, before boarding our ship. The moment we stepped aboard the Plancius, action began as we prepared to explore one of Earth's last true wild frontiers. The thrill of what lay ahead kept us eager for the days to come. And as we left port, we saw our first cetacean species, Commerson's Dolphins, along with several bird species.

OCTOBER 22, 2023

At Sea

Under clear skies, the open ocean unfolded before us as we sailed toward South Georgia. Seabirds soared alongside the ship, following our path as we embarked on this journey. We added over a dozen bird species, including a Northern Royal Albatross, and another cetacean, the Hourglass Dolphin, to our species lists. We attended safety briefings and dutifully cleaned our equipment and gear for biosecurity to prep for the landings to come, knowing that soon we'd be searching for some of the most remarkable creatures on the planet.

OCTOBER 23, 2023

At Sea

The ocean grew wilder, and so did our spirits. Today, lectures on the seals of the Southern Ocean and the scientific endeavors we would support fueled our enthusiasm. From the decks, we scanned the horizon for signs of wildlife, knowing that each day brought us closer to South Georgia—home to some of the world's most extraordinary assemblages of animals. We weren't just traveling; we were on the verge of discovery.

OCTOBER 24, 2023

Elsehul Bay and Rosita Harbour

As we neared South Georgia, the island's rugged shores promised a wealth of wildlife, and we weren't disappointed. Orca and humpback whale sightings and then peering through binoculars, we spotted our first light-mantled albatrosses soaring high above. Though conditions prevented a landing at Elsehul Bay, we came close in to view nesting Light-Mantled and Black-browed Albatrosses. We also got our first views of King Penguins. We continued to Rosita Harbour. Stepping onto the beach, we found ourselves surrounded by South Georgia's iconic inhabitants: southern elephant seals, Antarctic fur seals, and curious South Georgia Pintails and our first South Georgia Pipit — proof that nature's resilience thrives here.

OCTOBER 25, 2023

Right Whale Bay and Salisbury Plain

Right Whale Bay greeted us with the symphony of southern elephant seals and fur seals as they belted across the beach. But the true magic awaited us at Salisbury Plain. The moment we set foot on shore, we were awestruck by the sight of thousands of King Penguins—tall, proud, and elegantly adorned. We wandered among them, witnessing the tender bond between parents and their fluffy chicks. It felt like we'd stepped into a dreamland, with every sound and movement reminding us of the wonders of this untamed world. We also had our first leopard seal sighting.

OCTOBER 26, 2023

Fortuna Bay and Stromness

A stormy start couldn't dampen our spirits as we anchored at Fortuna Bay. Shackleton's historic path beckoned us, though winds kept us from landing. Undeterred, we ventured to Stromness, where we trekked across the glacial plains that once challenged explorers. Along the way, we encountered the resilient wildlife of South Georgia—southern elephant seals, Antarctic fur seals, and King Penguins—who continue to thrive in this rugged wilderness. The connection to history and nature was palpable.

OCTOBER 27, 2023

Grytviken

Grytviken, a place steeped in history, welcomed us for a day of remembrance and discovery. After a thorough biosecurity inspection, we made our way to Shackleton's grave for a toast in his honor—a tribute to his incredible spirit of adventure. The day's exploration led us through the old whaling station and museum, where stories of survival and endurance came alive. Along the way, we spotted wildlife reclaiming this place, including newborn southern elephant seal pups and curious King Penguins, reminding us that even in places touched by humanity, nature always finds a way to return.

OCTOBER 28, 2023

Saint Andrew's Bay and Gold Harbour

Saint Andrew's Bay delivered drama and beauty as leopard seals patrolled the shores, hunting among vast colonies of king Penguins. From the safety of our zodiacs, we watched these apex predators in action, while elephant seals lounged in the sun, oblivious to the commotion. Later, at Gold Harbour, we cruised past towering glaciers and enjoyed the thrill of searching for elusive fur seals and more Penguins. Every twist and turn of the zodiac offered a new perspective on this majestic landscape.

OCTOBER 29, 2023

Cooper Bay and Drygalski Fjord

Today was all about the hunt for macaroni Penguins! After spotting them from the zodiacs, we trekked up steep slopes to their colonies, watching them scramble up rocky paths to nest. We also were rewarded with our first Chinstrap Penguins. The real adventure came later as we sailed through the towering icebergs of Drygalski Fjord. The glaciers were stunning, but it was the wildlife—seals,

birds, and Penguins—that captured our hearts, making each sighting feel like a small victory in this grand wilderness.

OCTOBER 30, 2023

Scotia Sea

The vastness of the Scotia Sea stretched before us, and the anticipation of what lay ahead fueled our excitement. As we scanned the waters, the call of “whales!” echoed across the deck. We caught sight of humpbacks breaching and Chinstrap Penguins resting on passing icebergs. Then the day brought more cetacean species, including sei whale, fin whale, humpback whale, hourglass dolphin, Peale’s/dusky dolphin, and southern bottlenose whale. It was a day filled with the grandeur of these southern oceans, as we marveled at the raw beauty and power of the marine world.

OCTOBER 31, 2023

Scotia Sea and Halloween

As we sailed deeper into the Antarctic, Halloween brought a festive atmosphere aboard the Planicius. But the real thrill was in the wildlife sightings—killer whales slicing through the waves and seabirds following our wake. Lectures added to the excitement, with talks on killer whales’ hunting tactics and tips on how to capture the perfect wildlife photo. Nature didn’t stop for the holiday, and neither did we.

NOVEMBER 1, 2023

Scotia Sea and Elephant Island

Elephant Island appeared like a ghost through the mist. Its steep cliffs and icy waters were shrouded in mystery, but we kept our eyes peeled for wildlife. Despite the low visibility, our determination paid off—we spotted Chinstrap Penguins nestled on the rocks and even caught a glimpse of fin whales feeding nearby. Also Black-browed Albatross and several different petrel species were recorded. Each encounter with wildlife brought a sense of triumph, reminding us of the adventure that lay in seeking and discovering.

NOVEMBER 2, 2023

Deception Island and Whaler’s Bay

We knew we were approaching the seventh continent with the sighting of an Antarctic Petrel through the dining room window at breakfast. Entering Deception Island’s volcanic caldera later that day felt like stepping onto another planet. Chinstrap and Gentoo Penguins greeted us as we explored Whaler’s Bay, walking along shores once teeming with whalers. We also had our first sighting of an Antarctic Shag. A special sighting of “Chunk,” a leopard seal with an old injury, named and observed by other citizen scientists before us reminded us of nature’s resilience.

NOVEMBER 3, 2023

Gerlache Strait and Useful Islands

Our day started as we moved through the Gerlache Strait between Anvers Island and the Antarctic Peninsula, with soft morning light illuminating the glaciers and peaks. After arriving at the Useful Islands for a morning landing, we spotted a leopard seal resting on an ice floe and observed Chinstrap and gentoo Penguins populating the island. Onshore, snowy sheathbills greeted us, while Antarctic fur seals lounged on the snow near the landing site. The morning was filled with seabird activity, including Snow Petrels and both Southern and Giant petrels. One striking sight was a white morph of the Southern Giant Petrel, sitting near several Weddell seals.

As we climbed towards the Chinstrap Penguin colony, we navigated through the Penguin highways, taking breaks as gentoos waddled past. A highlight for many was the surprise arrival of an Adelie Penguin, which appeared disoriented at first but quickly dashed across the colony before disappearing into the crowd. Meanwhile, a large, potentially pregnant Weddell seal struggled to find a comfortable spot on the snow, likely preparing to give birth. As we wrapped up our landing, the Adelie Penguin reappeared, offering a final, fleeting glimpse before we boarded the zodiacs back to the ship. Another zodiac cruise that afternoon brought us to thousands of gentoos on the islands, waiting for the snow to melt to build their nests.

NOVEMBER 4, 2023

Paradise Bay, Danco Island, and Neko Harbour

We awoke early for a sunrise landing at Paradise Bay, setting foot on the Antarctic mainland amidst a magical, snowy backdrop. Danco Island was an unexpected spectacle as thousands of Gentoo Penguins made landfall, filling the landscape with their characteristic squawks and waddles. Later, at Neko Harbour, we marveled at glaciers calving into the sea while Penguins darted in and out of the water. Each stop today was a wildlife photographer's dream come true, but this day was particularly spectacular and offered hours of time in the field watching and recording.

NOVEMBER 5, 2023

Cierva Cove and Mikkelson Harbour

Cierva Cove presented a maze of icebergs and wildlife for us to navigate by zodiac. We found Gentoo Penguins diving for fish, seals lounging on ice floes, and birds soaring above us. Antarctic Terns perched on small pieces of ice posing for photos as Snow Petrels flew low over the zodiacs. Penguin Island provided great viewing and photo opportunities of Chinstrap Penguins coming and going from their elevated nesting colony. Mikkelson Harbor, shrouded in fog, challenged our search for landings, but it only added to the sense of exploration. Every moment felt like a new discovery in this frozen world.

NOVEMBER 6, 2023

Half Moon Island and Yankee Harbour

Our last full day in Antarctica brought spectacular weather and a final opportunity to walk among

Chinstrap Penguins on Half Moon Island. The sun shone as we trekked through snow-covered ridges, observing the Penguins build their nests. At Yankee Harbour, Gentoo Penguins bustled in their colonies while seals snoozed nearby. For those brave enough, the day ended with a heart-pounding Polar Plunge into the icy waters—a fitting way to celebrate our Antarctic adventure.

NOVEMBER 7-8, 2023

Drake Passage

The infamous Drake Passage tested our sea legs, but it also gave us time to reflect on the incredible wildlife encounters we'd experienced. From the deck, we kept a lookout for seabirds riding the winds and occasional whale spouts from fin whales breaking the surface. As we neared Tierra del Fuego, calmer waters revealed Peale's dolphins and Magellanic Penguins swimming alongside the ship and 16 other bird species. Each wildlife sighting felt like a final gift from the Southern Ocean, reminding us that the spirit of adventure had truly been met on this incredible expedition.

NOVEMBER 9, 2023

Ushuaia: Farewell to the Southern Ocean

As we docked in Ushuaia, Argentina, the landscapes of Tierra del Fuego provided a fitting backdrop to the end of our journey. After 20 days at sea and covering nearly 3,000 nautical miles, the expedition concluded with clear skies and a cool morning, marking our return to land. The voyage through South Georgia and Antarctica offered countless wildlife encounters and insights into these fragile ecosystems.

Disembarking brought farewells to fellow travelers, new friends, and the remarkable environments we explored. While the search for wildlife had ended, the experience reinforced the importance of protecting these habitats. This trip provided not only valuable observations but also a deeper commitment to the conservation of the Southern Ocean and its unique inhabitants.



Snow Petrel

Photo: Glen Bartley

King Penguins with Elephant Seal

Photo: Athena Georgiou



SPECIES LIST BY DATE & LOCATION	21-Oct	22-Oct	23-Oct	24-Oct	25-Oct	26-Oct	27-Oct	28-Oct	29-Oct	30-Oct	31-Oct	1-Nov	2-Nov	3-Nov	4-Nov	5-Nov	6-Nov	7-Nov	8-Nov	9-Nov
Falkland Steamer-Duck	✓																			
Yellow-billed (South Georgia) Pintail				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
Snowy Sheathbill				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								✓			
Chilean Skua																			✓	✓
Brown Skua				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			
South Polar Skua																✓				
South Polar/Brown Skua	✓																			
Dolphin Gull	✓																			✓
Kelp Gull	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Arctic Tern				✓																
South American Tern																				
Antarctic Tern				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
King Penguin			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										
Adelie Penguin				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓		✓			
Gentoo Penguin				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			
Chinstrap Penguin									✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Magellanic Penguin																			✓	✓
Macaroni Penguin									✓											
Northern Royal Albatross		✓																		
Southern Royal Albatross		✓	✓						✓											✓
Snowy Albatross		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓											✓
Light-mantled Albatross		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓									✓	✓	✓
Gray-headed Albatross		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓								✓	✓	✓
Black-browed Albatross	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓
Wilson's Storm-Petrel		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓
Gray-backed Storm-Petrel		✓																		
Black-bellied Storm-Petrel		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Southern Giant-Petrel		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Northern Giant-Petrel		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Southern Fulmar		✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
Antarctic Petrel											✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Cape (Pintado) Petrel		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Snow Petrel				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Kerguelen Petrel			✓	✓					✓	✓								✓		
Atlantic Petrel		✓																		
Blue Petrel		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	
Fairy Prion									✓	✓	✓	✓								
Antarctic Prion			✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓						✓		
Slender-billed Prion		✓							✓	✓	✓	✓						✓		
White-chinned Petrel		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓
Sooty Shearwater	✓																			✓
Common Diving-Petrel			✓	✓					✓											
South Georgia Diving-Petrel				✓					✓											
Common/South Georgia Diving-Petrel		✓			✓															
Magellanic Cormorant	✓																			
South Georgia Shag				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											
Imperial Cormorant	✓																			
Antarctic Shag													✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
South Georgia Pipit				✓	✓	✓	✓		✓											
House Sparrow	✓																			✓



BIRDS
 Gentoo Penguins
 Photo: Scott Davis

South Georgia and Antarctic Peninsula

- Falkland Steamer-Duck
- Yellow-billed (South Georgia) Pintail
- Snowy Sheathbill
- Chilean Skua
- Brown Skua
- South Polar Skua
- South Polar/Brown Skua
- Dolphin Gull
- Kelp Gull
- Arctic Tern
- South American Tern
- Antarctic Tern
- King Penguin
- Adelie Penguin
- Gentoo Penguin
- Chinstrap Penguin
- Magellanic Penguin
- Macaroni Penguin
- Northern Royal Albatross
- Southern Royal Albatross
- Snowy Albatross
- Light-mantled Albatross
- Gray-headed Albatross
- Black-browed Albatross
- Wilson's Storm-Petrel
- Gray-backed Storm-Petrel
- Black-bellied Storm-Petrel
- Southern Giant-Petrel
- Northern Giant-Petrel
- Southern Fulmar
- Antarctic Petrel
- Cape (Pintado) Petrel
- Snow Petrel
- Kerguelen Petrel
- Atlantic Petrel
- Blue Petrel
- Fairy Prion
- Antarctic Prion
- Slender-billed Prion
- White-chinned Petrel
- Sooty Shearwater
- Common Diving-Petrel
- South Georgia Diving-Petrel
- Common/South Georgia Diving-Petrel
- Magellanic Cormorant
- South Georgia Shag
- Imperial Cormorant
- Antarctic Shag
- South Georgia Pipit
- House Sparrow



Chinstrap Penguin

Photo: Scott Davis



King Penguins

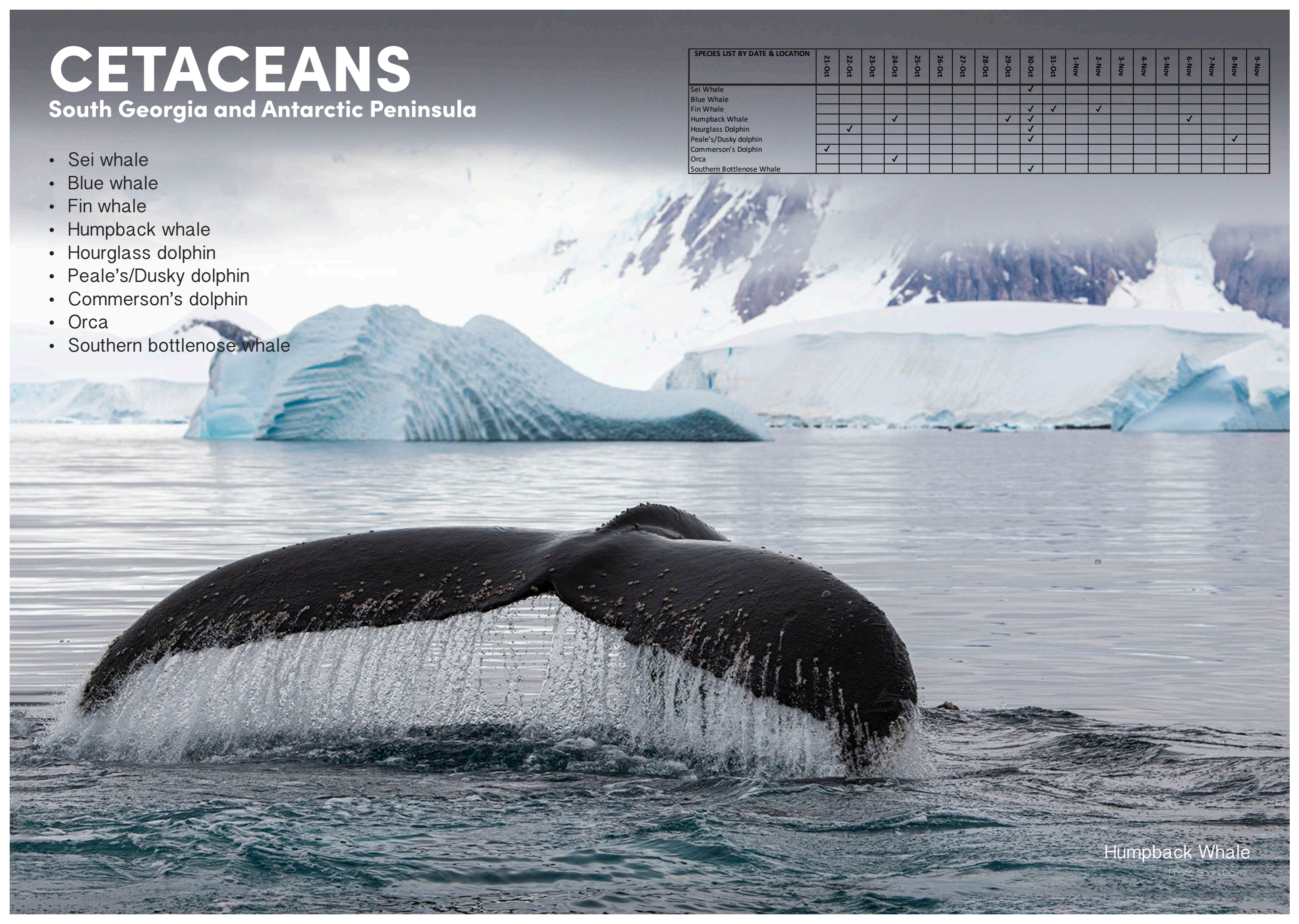
Photo: Scott Davis

CETACEANS

South Georgia and Antarctic Peninsula

- Sei whale
- Blue whale
- Fin whale
- Humpback whale
- Hourglass dolphin
- Peale's/Dusky dolphin
- Commerson's dolphin
- Orca
- Southern bottlenose whale

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Sei Whale										✓										
Blue Whale																				
Fin Whale									✓	✓	✓		✓							
Humpback Whale				✓					✓	✓							✓			
Hourglass Dolphin		✓								✓										
Peale's/Dusky dolphin										✓										
Commerson's Dolphin	✓																		✓	
Orca				✓																
Southern Bottlenose Whale										✓										



Humpback Whale

Photo: Scott Davis

PINNIPEDS

South Georgia and Antarctic Peninsula

- Southern elephant seal
- Crabeater seal
- Leopard seal
- Weddell seal
- Antarctic fur seal
- South American sea lion

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Southern Elephant Seal				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓											✓
Crabeater Seal																✓				
Leopard Seal					✓			✓					✓	✓	✓					
Weddell Seal																				
Antarctic Fur Seal				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓					
South American Sea Lion	✓																			

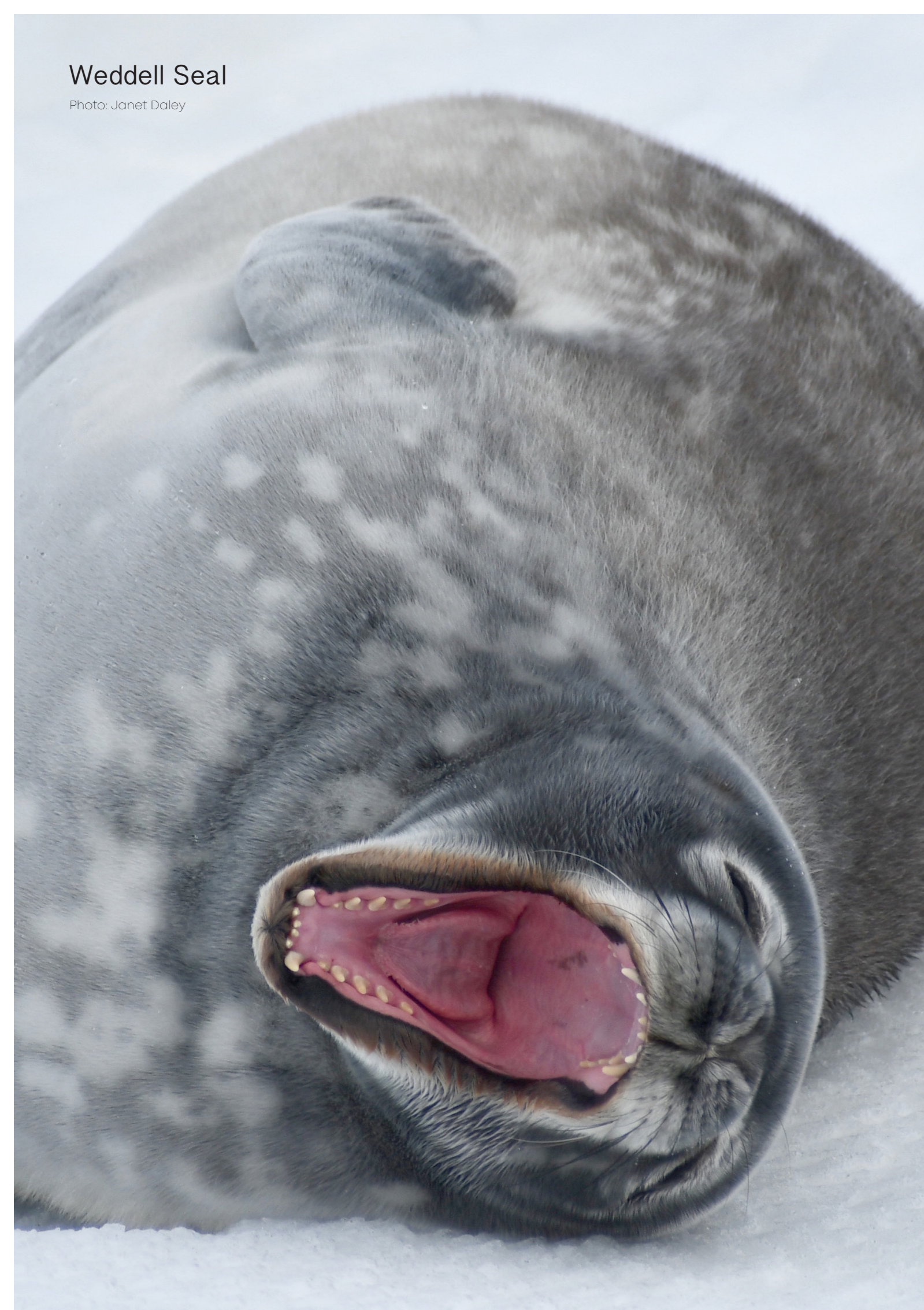


Antarctic Fur Seals

Photo: Ajit Huilgol

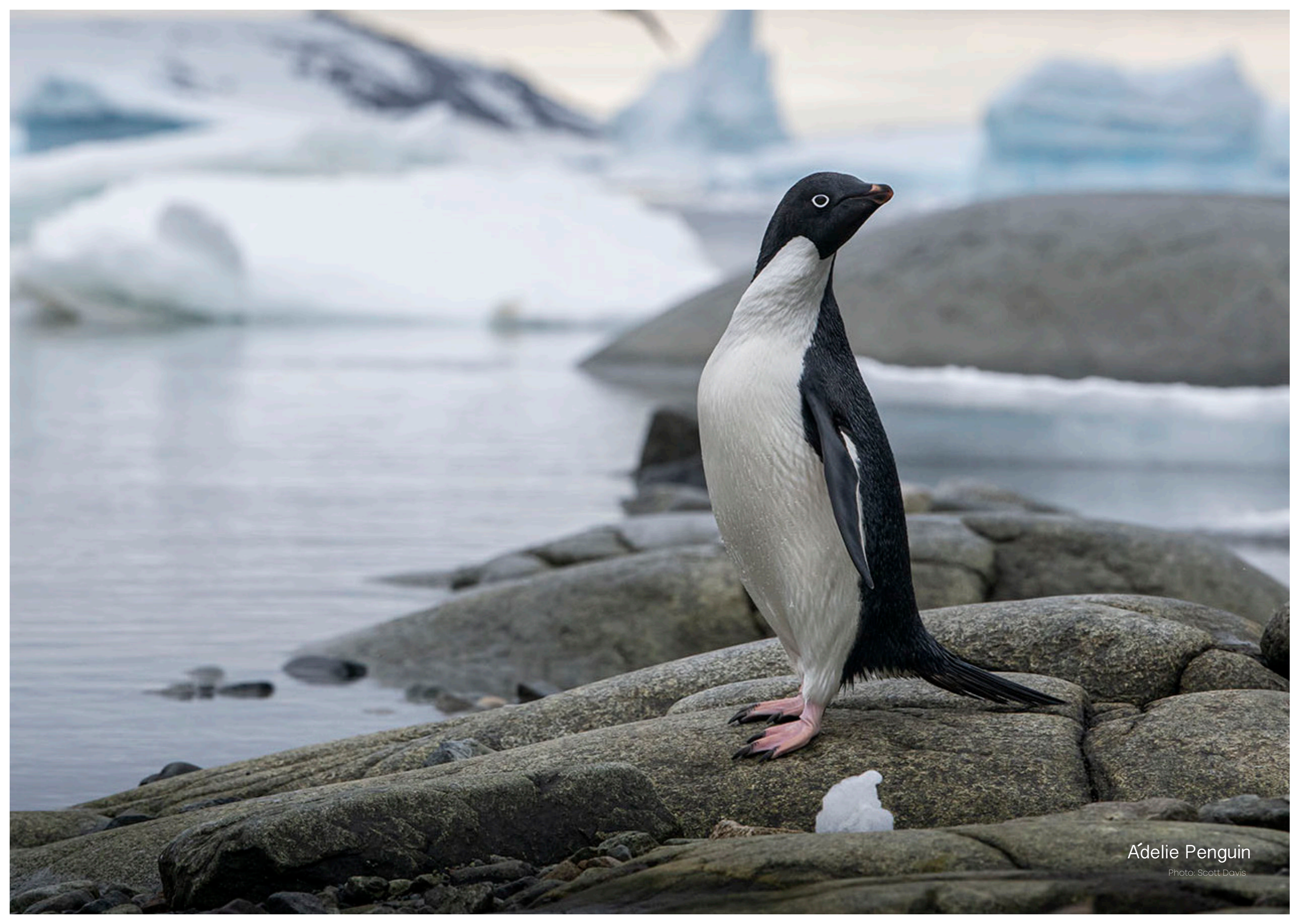
Weddell Seal

Photo: Janet Daley



Southern Elephant Seal

Photo: Alex Fine



Adélie Penguin
Photo: Scott Davis

THANK YOU



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