

Logbook 10 (04/12/07)

The monster from Loch "starboard ahead"

Polarstern, Weddell Sea (68.43°S/55.17°W), slow ice floe drift, low visibility, gloomy mood. We had two fatal incidents. On one occasion I was actually an eye witness. A fiery red monster with malicious mandibles tore apart one of its vegetarian relatives and sucked it. Like silent symbols of the past the crumbs sank to the bottom, which was not that far away. Perhaps 10 mm, Petri dishes aren't any deeper. *Jan Michels*, PhD-student of the Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI), focussed his binocular microscope to show me the details. The killer is a carnivorous copepod named *Paraeucheta Antarctica*, the victim remains unknown.

It is not a real loss as *Jan* is more interested in those details almost every other person on board would not even spot. Those are tiny black dots drifting in the water - faecal pellets. The goal is to work on a key of faecies, which will enable scientists to go more into detail when it comes to energy flux in and underneath the ice. *Sigi Schiel*, Jan's supervisor based at AWI, works intensively on this delicate matter.

The second fatal incident was even more spectacular. A crew officer saw from the bridge a leopard seal tearing a little crabeater seal to pieces. It was the same leopard seal that has been keeping *Polarstern's* divers out of the water and from harvesting zoo- und phytoplankton from beneath the ice. Since he (or she?) is around, the air is swirling with rumours about bloody encounters. With the exception of one, no reliable reports of serious incidents exist, but anyhow: very impressive! And one cannot deny that a diver would fit well into a leopard seal's prey spectrum. So: safety first. Although it means that the ice biologists are still in need of some stuff only divers can bring to the surface.

We are not yet running out of time. But nevertheless, "Bergfest" (half of the expedition time is over) will be in a week's time. Lots of ice cores have been harvested, some hundreds of litres of brine have run through tubes, innumerable curves on various notebooks give details about ice thickness, salinity and temperature.

But the emperor penguins have left us. Maybe these huge, redish giant penguins - unable to swim and to communicate properly - have lost their attraction in the eyes of the true inhabitants of this floe.