

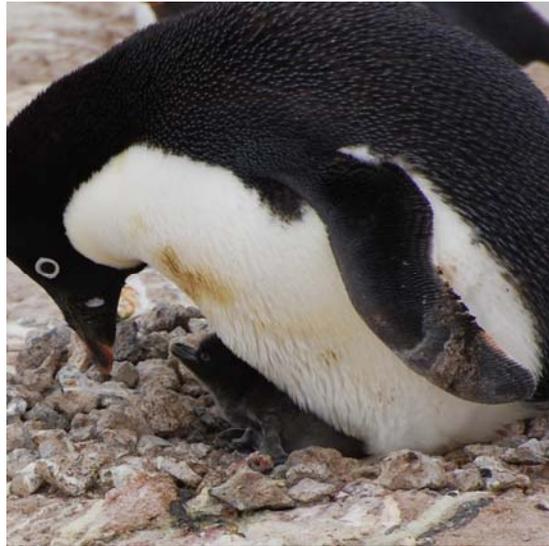
Dec 18, 2009 New Life Comes to Cape Royds

The cycle of life is eternal. It emerges even in this harsh and difficult environment where Adelie Penguins make their home. An entire lifetime spent on the ice and in sub freezing water these birds come to shore once a year to breed and bring new penguins into the world. This year the Cape Royds breeding season got a delayed start. With such a short window of opportunity to breed, hatch and raise their chicks a few days can make the difference between chicks ready to be on their own by the time the winter ice moves in, and chicks that will not make it. We do not know why the females laid their eggs over a week later than last year, but observing these events is why we are here.

On this day we put aside the worries about this year's chicks reaching maturity in time and enjoyed the miracle of their hatching. The first evidence is an egg that is peeping. The chick is ready to emerge and uses his beak to break a small hole in the egg. We can hear a peeping noise at this point and see the beak coming through the egg.



It may take a few minutes or an hour, but the next step will be the egg will crack wide open and the chick will emerge. At first they are wet, but the adults will hold them on their feet to keep them warm and off the sharp rocks. Finally they are soft and fluffy chicks ready to eat and only the remnants of a shell remains.



As we walk the colony we look for these shells alongside the nest as evidence of a chick that has hatched. These parents have a big job ahead of them. The chicks must multiply their birth weight 30 times in 50 days to be ready for their first winter.



First chicks were seen this year on Nov 18, over a week later than last year.

If you would like to see daily pictures of these chicks as they grow (Nov – Jan) follow along with our “Nest Check” project at www.penguinscience.com and go to the education page.