

## Penguins 1 – Skuas 0

When Adelie Penguins adapted to live in the harsh environment of Antarctic they pretty much got this place to themselves. Nesting on the ground in other parts of the world is very risky for birds as this makes them extremely vulnerable to the numerous predators. In Antarctica there are not as many predators, but the one that discovered eating is easy in an Adelie penguin colony is the South Polar Skua.



This large aggressive bird is an opportunist. When the seals haul out on the ice and give birth to their pups the Skuas hang around and eat the after birth. At McMurdo Research station they will wait for people to leave the dining hall with a sandwich or cookie in their hand and swoop down for the 'kill'. When it's time for them to breed many build their nests at the edge of penguin colonies

where first the penguin eggs then the chicks can be easy pickings among the penguin parents who are just beginning.



**A pair of Skuas harassing a nesting Adelie Penguin.**

Adult Adelie Penguins can defend themselves so are safe from Skua attack. However, while the penguins are nesting, and before the Skuas lay their own eggs, the Skuas work in pairs, one will fly overhead to distract the

Adelie and the other will swoop in and snatch the egg or chick as the penguin stretches to peck at the decoy. Often times when I've been sitting watching this, I wish that the penguins would someday take revenge.



**A Skua nest very close to a group of Adelie Penguins. Some penguins would walk by without paying attention to the intruder.**

The Skuas often build their nest close to the Adelie breeding colony so they do not have to go far for their food. But in the following sets of pictures you can see this Skua was very bold, laying the egg within 10 feet of nesting Adelies. At first the Adelies would walk by with only passing interest in the nesting Skua but finally one penguin decided this was too close and challenged the Skua.



**First a challenge and then the Skua is evicted from the nest.**

Skuas are no match for adult Adelie penguins so the Skua moved off the egg. The penguin did not chase the Skua but stood at the nest and did not allow the Skua to return. Every attempt by the Skua to return to the egg was thwarted, and meanwhile the Skua egg was getting colder by the minute.



Skuas are indeed opportunist eaters. Even exposed Skua eggs are taken. This egg was no exception and once the penguin walked off, with in a few minutes another Skua made this egg its meal. The Skuas abandoned this nest site and will likely build one a much safer distance away next time. Penguins 1 – Skua 0