

Our Spring, their Autumn

By Jim Wilson

While spring is well under way for us it's good to remember that when it is spring here in Ireland, in other parts of the world the seasons can be very different. One such place is Antarctica, which is at the other end of the world. Get out a map or globe and find out where it is. You will see that it is much further away from us than England or even America. While here in Ireland all the animals and plants are getting ready for the summer, in Antarctica it is the exact opposite. Everything is getting ready for the long dark Antarctic winter.

I was lucky enough to visit Antarctica during the Antarctic summer – last December and January. When I left Ireland on the 11th of December the birds here were busy just trying to survive the short wet cold winter days. They were even coming into gardens to take food that we put out for them. A few days later I had travelled over 15,000 kilometres south and I was



Photos: © Jim Wilson

Above: An iceberg at the Antarctic.
Right: Gentoo Penguin chicks.

looking at thousands of penguins in a land of glaciers, huge icebergs and snow everywhere. They were busy with newly hatched chicks making the best use of their short summer. The reason they nest in such a cold place is because there is lots of food in the sea. They nest so far south that it never gets dark during their summer. This means they can hunt for food 24 hours a day!



During the short Antarctic summer they find enough food to make sure their chicks are fully grown and ready to go to sea before their winter starts. This comes to the Antarctic during our summer – confusing? Yes it can be hard to picture how this works. Basically when it is spring is here in Ireland this means that our part of planet earth is beginning to lean towards the sun. The sun shines more and more here, which means our days are getting longer and Ireland is warming up. Because Antarctica is at the other end of the world this means that as days are getting longer here, with more sunlight, the days in the Antarctica are getting shorter with less sunlight. So remember when it is spring here in Ireland it is autumn in Antarctica, at the other end of the world.

A Dark Time for Emperor Penguins!

During our summer the South Pole will be going through its winter and it will actually be dark all the time for nearly two months! This means that without the sun it gets very cold in Antarctica. It gets so cold even the sea freezes over. This means the penguins have to leave before this happens or they would starve. There is one penguin that will stay in the freezing cold Antarctic winter – The Emperor Penguin. Emperor penguins will soon be laying their

eggs and the males will mind the single egg on top of their feet. They will protect it from the freezing cold by covering it with a big flap of skin, as they huddle together with all the other Emperor Penguins until the Antarctic winter is over. As our spring arrives, it is now time for the Emperor penguins to get ready for the "march of the penguins".



Photo: © Jim Wilson

Above: Emperor Penguin.

Visit Jim Wilson's website:
www.irishwildlife.net