

## **AWR Funding Press Release**

September 15, 2015

# **Three Projects Named as Antarctic Wildlife Research Fund Inaugural Grant Recipients**

Whales, penguins and krill will be studied by scientists from five different countries as thanks to grants awarded to three groups of researchers by the Antarctic Wildlife Research Fund (AWR).

The three projects chosen to receive the first AWR research grants are:

- A long term ecological study on the foraging behavior of humpback whales around the Antarctic Peninsula, focusing on how critical foraging areas relate to historic catches of krill in the region. The AWR Board awarded US \$84,530 towards the research by Dr. Ari S. Friedlaender (Oregon State University) and Dr. David W. Johnston (Duke University).
- A research project that will explore how brush tail penguins (Adelie, chinstrap and gentoo) are key consumers of krill that rely on predictable aggregations of the small crustacean in order to successfully raise and fledge chicks during their austral-summer breeding seasons. This project will receive a US \$80,000 grant from AWR, and will be led by Dr. Andrew Lowther, of the Norwegian Polar Institute, in cooperation with Dr. Phil Trathan and Dr. Norman Ratcliffe (British Antarctic Survey) and Dr. Kit Kovacs and Dr. Christian Lydersen (Norwegian Polar Institute).
- A research project that will investigate one of the fundamental limitations to understanding Antarctic krill ecology on a global scale: the inability to directly age them. Dr. Christian Reiss, of the US National Marine Fisheries Service, Dr. Raouf Kilada, of the University of New Brunswick and Dr. So Kawaguchi of the Australian Antarctic Division will conduct the study. The AWR Board awarded the project a research grant of US \$48,200.

These grants celebrate the landmark collaborative effort of several of the world's leading environmental groups, scientists and businesses who have come together with the aim of strengthening research efforts in the Southern Ocean and the Antarctic region. Most marine species in the Southern Ocean, such as whales, seals and penguins are dependent on Antarctic krill—a small shrimp-like organism that

forms the base of Antarctic food web. AWR aims to help determine the impact and fill in the gaps of the krill fishing industry on the Antarctic marine ecosystem.

“In order to manage a sustainable fishery for krill in Antarctica, we require an understanding of the ecological needs of krill predators and how these are likely to be affected by both fishing and environmental change over time. This knowledge is critical for managing and protecting all aspects of the Antarctic marine ecosystem”, said Dr Ari Friedlander.

“Our most sincere congratulations to the first three grant recipients,” said Mark Epstein, chair of the Antarctic Wildlife Research Fund. “The selected research proposals will help to strengthen our knowledge about the Antarctic, and in particular, about the krill and animals that depend on it as a primary food source. That data will help ensure ecosystem protection and improved management efforts moving forward.”

AWR’s research grant program specifications came as a result of discussions with research scientists who have considerable experience of working with the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), the international body that regulates the fishery for Antarctic krill. Over the past three months, AWR’s Science Advisory Group (SAG) evaluated 10 scientific research proposals, based on criteria including: excellence, fit to scheme, cost effectiveness, and track record.

### **About AWR:**

AWR launched in February 2015, with the aim of strengthening the research basis for the management of the Southern Ocean and the Antarctic Region. It is a first-of-its-kind partnership between industry, academia and non-government organizations (NGOs), which fund research projects in Antarctica. Its vision is to ensure a resilient Antarctica, in which the management of all natural resources must rely on precaution and thorough and up-to-date knowledge.

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