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FROM: Patrick Robinson
TO: Team Elephant Seal Virtual Science Team
SUBJECT: Putting electronic tracker on elephant seal

Hello Team Elephant Seal!

Today was a great day out at Año Nuevo! We had a team of researchers made up of graduate students, undergraduate volunteers, and me. We worked together to attach an electronic tag to an adult female elephant seal. The electronic tag will track where she goes in the ocean during her long foraging (hunting) migration.

First, we had to find a specific seal in a big group of seals called a harem. We were looking for one seal in particular -- Flipper Tag 6018. We had tracked previously and she was very hard to find!

After an hour of searching, we found her and gave her a medicine that makes her fall asleep. We do this to keep her in the same place and to keep the researchers safe while we attach the tag. We then gave her a physical exam, just like when you go to a human doctor. We measure how long she is, how much she weighs, and how much blubber (or fat) she has. For these seals, it is very important to be fat because they sometimes stay on land for 6 weeks without eating or drinking! (This is pretty amazing because I get very hungry if I didn't eat for even just one day). In the photo, we are taking some measurements of the seal.

Then we attached a satellite tag to her. This is a very fancy miniature computer. It sends a signal to satellites in space to track wherever she goes. This tag also has a depth sensor that measures how deep the seal dives. In the photograph, the researcher is attaching the tag to the short fur on the seal. We use rubber gloves so we don't get the epoxy on our hands. It is very sticky! The big cylinder on the back of the tag is the battery that powers the tag so it can last an entire year. The middle of the tag has the sensors. And you can see the long black antenna on the front of the tag.

When we were done attaching the tag, the seal woke up slowly. Then she went back to the other seals in the harem. We are all very excited to see where she goes and how deep she dives over the next few weeks. I will write more soon to give you all an update about seal 6018!

Take care!

Patrick

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