

# A little known colony of Emperor penguins on the coast of the eastern Weddell Sea

N.T.W. Klages<sup>1</sup> and D. Gerdes<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Port Elizabeth Museum  
P.O. Box 13147, Humewood 6013  
<sup>2</sup>Alfred Wegener Institut für  
Polar- und Meeresforschung  
2850 Bremerhaven, FRG

*A little known breeding colony of Emperor penguins *Aptenodytes forsteri* on the fast ice of the Drescher Inlet, Vestkapp Ice Shelf (72°52'S, 19°25'W) in the eastern Weddell Sea was surveyed, and movements of individuals within and the spatial extent of the colony are reported.*

*'n Sensusopname was gemaak van die onbekende broeiplek van Keiserpikkewyne *Aptenodytes forsteri* op die vaste ys van die Drescher-inham, Vestkapp-ysbank (72°52'S, 19°25'W) in die oostelike Weddellsee. Daar word verslag oor bewegings binne die kolonie en oor die kolonie se verspreiding gedoen.*

## Introduction

Since Emperor penguins (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) reproduce on fast ice during winter and spring and have one of the southernmost breeding distributions of any bird, colonies have seldom been visited at times when the colony sites and num-

bers of breeding pairs can best be assessed. Hence, estimates of their abundance have relied largely on incomplete and biased censuses. Only colonies near Showa, Mawson, Dumont D'Urville and McMurdo stations have been reliably surveyed in the past (Wilson 1983). Particularly in the eastern Weddell Sea comprehensive data on the distribution and abundance of this important predator are missing. Here, due to environmental and logistical constraints imposed on ship operations in heavy sea ice, our present knowledge of the avifauna originates entirely from summer cruises of research and supply vessels into this remote and hostile pack ice region.

Along this coast from Gould Bay to Atka Bay (Fig. 1) five breeding colonies of Emperor penguins have been reported, although not all of them have been properly described. Those farthest to the southwest are at Gould Bay (77°30'S, 48°30'W) and Halley Bay (75°40'S, 27°14'W) (Watson *et al.* 1971, Wilson 1983). A third one is at Stancomb-Wills Promontory (74°00'S, 22°50'W), though claimed to be no longer

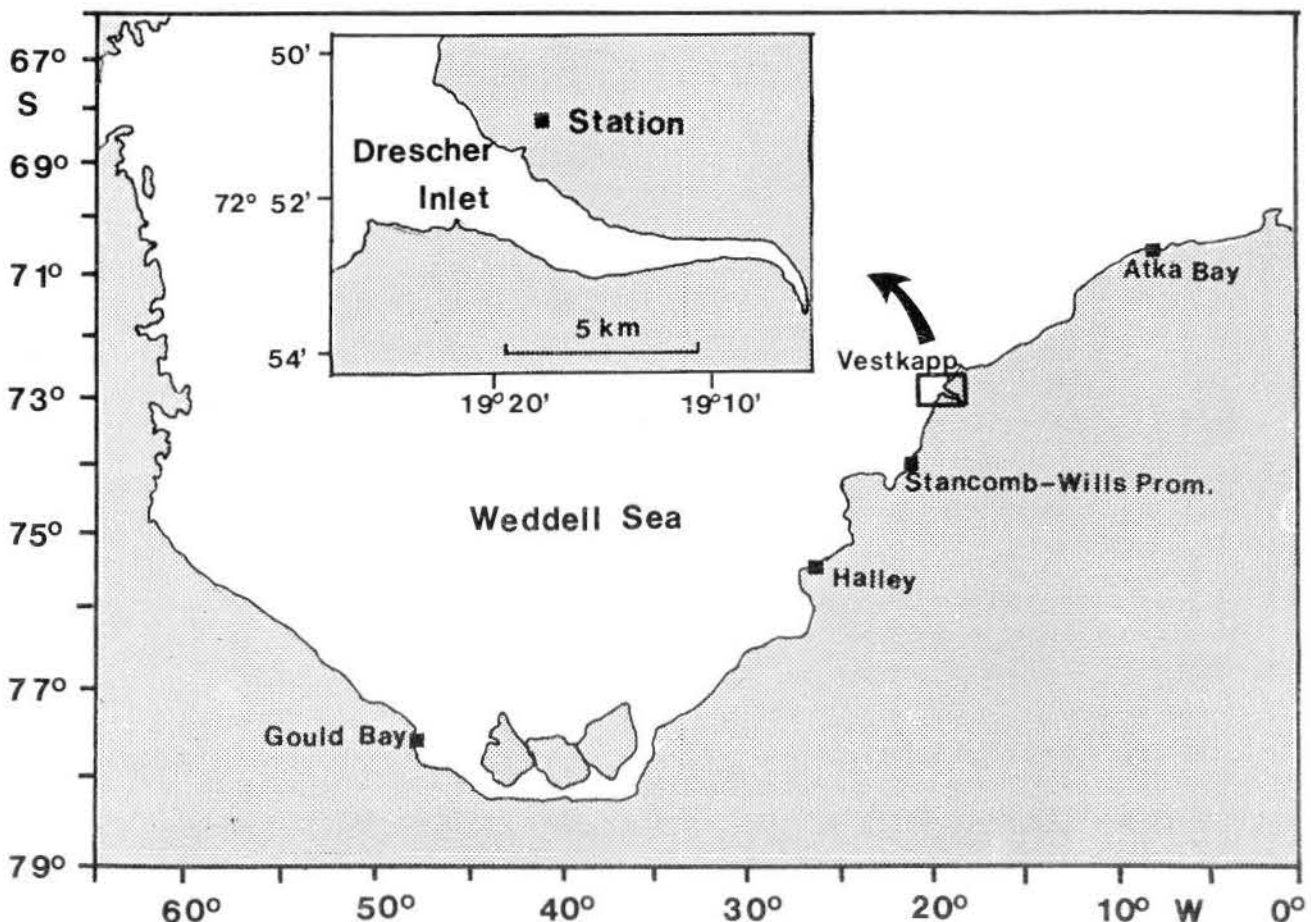


Fig. 1. Map of the Weddell Sea with the locations of the five Emperor penguin colonies reported to date between Gould Bay and Atka Bay; and the Drescher Inlet with the position of the newly-established West German research station (inset).

ner is feeding at sea. Additional adults may be accounted for by both members of the same breeding pairs being present at change-over. Others, like those birds that gathered at back of the inlet (subcolonies D and E) are most probably unsuccessful breeders which lost their young recently; some others may have missed their chicks on their way through the subcolonies.

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