

Elephant seal travels 18,000 miles

December 13 2011



Jackson is the male southern elephant seal tracked by the Wildlife Conservation Society that traveled an astonishing 18,000 miles Credit: Wildlife Conservation Society

The Wildlife Conservation Society tracked a southern elephant seal for an astonishing 18,000 miles – the equivalent of New York to Sydney and back again.

WCS tracked the male seal from December, 2010, to November, 2011. The animal – nicknamed Jackson – was tagged on the beach in Admiralty Sound in Tierra del Fuego in southern Chile. WCS conservationists fitted Jackson with a small satellite transmitter that recorded his exact location when he surfaced to breathe.

Jackson swam 1,000 miles north, 400 miles west, and 100 miles south from the original tagging location, meandering through fjords and

venturing past the continental shelf as he foraged for fish and squid.

During this tracking, the WCS team analyzed the data to better understand elephant seal migratory routes.

[Elephant seals](#) are potential indicators of the health of marine ecosystems and may show how climate change influences the distribution of prey species that serve as the basis of Patagonia's rich marine ecosystem. To protect this vast region, conservationists need to know how wildlife uses it throughout the year.

"Jackson's travels provide a roadmap of how elephant seals use the Patagonian Coast and its associated seas," said Caleb McClennen, WCS Director for Global Marine Programs. "This information is vital to improving ocean management in the region, helping establish protected areas in the right places, and ensuring fisheries are managed sustainably without harming vulnerable marine species like the southern elephant seal."

The information WCS gathers will serve as a foundation for a new model of private-public, terrestrial-marine conservation of the Admiralty Sound, Karukinka Natural Park (a WCS private protected area), and Alberto de Agostini National Park. It will help build a broader vision for bolstering conservation efforts across the Patagonian Sea and coast.

"The [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) has a long history of working in the spectacular Patagonia region to establish protected areas and advance conservation of its rich wildlife," said Julie Kunen, WCS Director of Latin America and Caribbean. "Individual stories like Jackson's are awe-inspiring, and also inform the science that will ultimately help protect this region."

WCS reports that Jackson has returned to Admiralty Sound, the site of

the original tagging. Each year, elephant seals haul ashore in colonies to molt and find mates. The satellite transmitter is expected to work until early next year, when it will eventually fall off.

WCS has tracked more than 60 southern elephant seals via satellite on the Atlantic side of the Southern Cone since the early 1990s. Jackson represented the first southern elephant seal tagged from the Pacific side of the Southern Cone.

Elephant seals are among the largest pinnipeds in the world, reaching weights of up to 7,500 pounds and lengths of 20 feet.

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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