



Falkland Islands Science Symposium: A Microbiologists Perspective

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Our Pan-American Science Delegation visit to the Falkland Islands is over now, but I leave with many incredible vistas imprinted on my mind, a new cohort of scientific colleagues and potential collaborators, and many ideas about scientific research opportunities in the area. The people we met in town, including business and local government officials were so friendly and welcoming, and were universally concerned about protecting and managing their resources and unique ecosystems in a sustainable fashion. It was refreshing to see a society that is forward thinking on this theme, especially given the relatively pristine condition of the environment there. Sadly, people the world over frequently only start to pay attention when they witness deterioration or experience personal impacts. Scientists at the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute are already conducting excellent research on a wide variety of very important topics to the area. Yet there are many opportunities for collaborative research that can pull in complementary expertise to bear on new questions. Researchers at my home institution, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution include many who are engaged in studies of physical, chemical and biological oceanography, including fisheries, and of impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems worldwide. Climate change is significantly impacting our polar regions, and these changes have impacts that propagate to subpolar regions in the form of altered weather, ocean currents, temperature, etc. As a marine microbiologist I am particularly keen to collaborate with scientists at SAERI to collect data on impacts of these alterations to major biogeochemical cycles where microorganisms have center stage. Any major shifts in microbial communities and/or processes carried out by these communities can affect the many important fisheries in the region of the Falklands. We envision a very international collaborative study of atmospheric and marine processes involving SAERI, the British Antarctic Survey, and several US and South American institutions.

Interspersed among the many intense and stimulating scientific discussions this past week were amazing field trips to see some of the local treasures; including Elephant Seals, nesting Shearwaters by the gazillions, and of course, penguins. I was enthralled by the penguins, particularly a small cluster of King Penguins who approached me on a beach as I sat still. It was clearly a mutual

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inspection, the outcome of which was universal agreement that clearly, they were better dressed. Another highlight for me was gazing through the microscope at interesting protozoa zipping around in a water sample I collected from an Elephant Seal wallow. The water was the colour and consistency of soy sauce (probably a cocktail of peat, seawater and Elephant Seal faeces). A microbiologist is easily amused.

Thank you to all the folks who made this past week possible. Now we all need to work hard to get funding for our research ideas!

