

Marine Protected Area

The Coastal Francisco Coloane Marine Protected Area (CMPA) covers a surface of 67,000 ha of the coast of the Strait of Magellan adjacent the Carlos III Island, Jeronimo channel and Barbara channel mouth, and contains the first marine park created in the country. The CMPA was created to protect the coastline in order to establish an integrated environmental management and a way to conservation ecosystems, habitats and species. The CMPA is part of the main feeding area of humpback whales that migrate to these waters to feed during the austral summer and autumn. It also has within its boundaries colonies of Fine Sea Lion and sites of breeding of Common Sea Lions; Magellanic penguins, as well as Skúas, Carancas and other waterfowl. In relation to humpback whales from its re-discovery in 2003 in the western waters of the Strait of Magellan, the scientific attention for this species has been increased in the region in recent years. Research has been focused initially to know whether the waters of the western part of the Strait of Magellan, was a feeding area or migratory corridor for some animals to and from Antarctica. So, based on photo-identification studies, a comprehensive comparison that continues to the present, with a large number of photographed humpback whales in the Antarctic Peninsula, states that the waters of the CMPA are not a migration corridor to and from Antarctica.

Meanwhile, other studies have shown that the vast majority of humpback whales of the Strait of Magellan return to this new feeding area year after year, remaining more than 60% of the animals for more than 3 months. Longer residence registered to date include 6 months, however, a few sightings during the winter months by artisanal fishermen in the area, suggest that some individuals (probably young) not conduct their migration to tropical waters, remaining in the fueguine channels.

Studies on the winter migration destinations of these animals were unknown until 2007. In that year investigators of CEQUA Foundation in collaboration with several other researchers from America South and Central, reporting for the first time the re-watching of eight copies photo-identified in the Strait of Magellan were also photographed in the waters of Ecuador, Colombia, Panama and Costa Rica. Moreover, in the same study a very particular fact has been documented, that is the realization of two full migration cycles by the same animal between Panama and the Strait of Magellan, suggesting that this sub-population probably migrates further north, the waters of Panama and Costa Rica, which those humpback whales that feed in the Antarctic Peninsula primarily migrate to the waters of Ecuador and Colombia. These studies are still in progress.

Also is being knowing their feed and their preys capture mode. To date it has been determined that the diet is based mainly on sardines caught by small and continuous exhalation of bubbles forming a kind of network or attacking the shoal by lunges from below. Other dams are euphausiids and shrimp of the channels they consume on the surface or mid-water.

As for the sea lions, two breeding colonies of Common Sea Lions are known, one of them located in Rupert islet where born annually about 20 to 30 pups, and another located in a rocky crevice of Helado Sound. However, many Common Sea Lions, beside Austral Fine Sea Lions, resting on the shores of the islands and also have been observed feeding sardines of the channels.

As for waterfowl, the Magellanic penguin stands with a large breeding colony in Rupert Island, and to a lesser extent in islands Monmouth and James. The last population estimate in 2007, gave a total

of nearly 19,000 specimens. Other seabirds observed in large numbers, are the Skuas, Seagulls, Giant Petrels and Black-browed Albatross, which preferentially feed on sardines banks and euphausiids. Also frequently seen the majestic Condor that low to the coast in search of dead marine animals.

In relation to terrestrial fauna, scientific studies have documented the presence of Coypu on the islands of CMPA, Foxes and Huemules on the coast of the Brunswick Peninsula as well as a kind of toad in Condor tideland, Riesco Island; constituting the southernmost record for Chile. Among the flora, scientific studies highlighted the abundance and importance of Coigue forests, not only because they provide habitat for many small birds and Woodpecker, but are also vital for other plant species and terrestrial insects.