



PolarTag – Polar Wildlife Tag Resighting portal

Background

PolarTag <https://Polartag.org> is a platform for gathering polar wildlife tag resighting photos and data reported by citizen scientists. This information can serve the Arctic and Antarctic research community as a data source.

Resightings from citizen scientists can become high value data if the image is of good quality and has a verifiable date and location. We are able to track individual animals over their lifetimes, working with researchers and citizen scientists around the world.



This helps scientists study important ecological questions, such as lifespan and survival, population health, migration patterns, and even social dynamics like family structure.

By harnessing the eyes and ears of the polar community – including visitors, polar guides, research station staff, ship's crew, other field scientists, deep field operators, etc., we can have a positive effect on polar science.

We have a unique opportunity to contribute to science by collecting photos of tagged cetaceans, seals and birds during our expeditions and submitting them to PolarTag.

When an image is submitted it is automatically shared with the relevant scientists or organisation according to species.

Once tag resightings are accounted for by the deploying scientist, the contributor will receive feedback on the researcher and institute responsible for tagging the animal, the animal's known history and any other relevant details.

How can you/guests participate?

Taking part in PolarTag is easy, fun and engaging. When polar travellers see a tag, such as a tracking device on a whale, a seal flipper tag or a ring on a bird's leg, they can submit the information to PolarTag. PolarTag will then forward the information to scientists.

- Make sure cameras are set to Antarctic local date and time (ship's time) and use on/in camera GPS if available. PolarTag will use GPS data either directly from the camera or if no GPS metadata is detected the contributor is required to either mark the location on the map displayed or manually input the GPS coordinates.
- When photographing tag details be sure to follow the IAATO wildlife watching guidelines and do not disturb the animal.
- Upload photos to <https://polartag.org> or deliver them electronically to Project director Ben Wallis (see contact info below). The project is most successful when there is a way to gather images on board; despite the best of intentions, guests often fail to upload photographs after they disembark.
- The portal is very mobile friendly so please feel free to upload via mobile device.
- We also encourage users to submit old or archived tag resighting images so as they can be put to good use. If you have found a physical electronic tag we ask that you let us know.

Training and equipment required

Participation is easy, requiring a decent quality camera/smartphone and basic internet navigation skills. No other training is required.

The equipment needed for this project includes:

- Camera/smartphone with decent camera function

NOTE FOR EXPEDITION STAFF: Remind guests to adjust camera to local date and time.

Expected results/feedback

Participating in science can be rewarding! PolarTag is an attempt to reunite tag sightings with the scientists who deployed them.

PolarTag will notify the contributor via email of the researcher and institute responsible for tagging the animal, the animal's known history and any other relevant details.

This reward for participation – finding out for example that a animal they photographed has migrated to Argentina or was first tagged over 9 years before – reminds the contributor of their Antarctic experience and keeps the voyage alive in their memories. For science, these studies are helping us to understand polar wildlife populations, their behavioural patterns, their distribution and perhaps even how they are responding to a rapidly changing climate.

Scientific project partners

Submitted data is shared with a wide collaboration of research groups, depending on species. A major goal of PolarTag is to make data available for sound management and protection of remote polar regions. By sharing your photos through PolarTag, you are contributing to these projects.

IAATO and PolarTag collaborate with the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR) and the SCAR Expert Group on Birds and Marine Mammals (EG-BAMM) to create data access for researchers trying to understand ongoing changes in polar wildlife.

Main contact information

Ben Wallis, admin@polartag.org or ben@polartag.org