

Teen Spots Hagfish-Slurping Elephant Seal

[1]

Submitted by Dwight Owens Wed, 2013-01-23 00:00

For as long as he can remember, 14-yr old Kirill Dudko has been interested in biology. As a young child, he enjoyed observing insects and would bring them home (to his mother's dismay). As he grew older, he became interested in deep-sea biology. After learning about NEPTUNE Canada on a Discovery Channel program, Kirill began watching live video streams from our seafloor cameras, and gathering clips of interest to post on [his YouTube Channel](#) [2].



[3]

On 12 January 2013 Kirill was watching the video feed from our Pod 4 camera in Barkley Canyon (depth: 894 m) and noticed a hagfish moving around on the sediment below the camera, when something unusual happened. "Suddenly, a huge creature grabbed the hagfish," he wrote, "You know, it was like a horror film! This creature wasn't like a fish, and I realized it was a mammal because of its nose and mustache."

Kirill grabbed the clip and posted it on his YouTube channel, then sent us a message asking if we could help identify the creature that caught the hagfish. We put the word out to marine mammal experts in Canada and the US, who identified the mystery animal as a female northern elephant seal. This is our first sighting of an elephant seal in seafloor footage, recorded by a camera situated 894 m below the surface.

Elephant seals are very unusual animals. Unlike other seals, which swim at the surface and dive for food, elephant seals spend 90% of their time underwater, surfacing only to breathe. This behaviour makes elephant seals more akin to whales than seals. They can hold their breath over 100 minutes and dive to depths greater than 1500 metres. Water pressure at such depths exceeds 170 atmospheres or over 17,500 kilopascals (2500 pounds per square inch)! Our Pod 4 platform in Barkley Canyon is positioned at a depth of 894 m?nearly 3 times the

world record scuba diving depth of 318 m.

As for Kirill, he was excited to watch and learn about the amazing elephant seal. And he continues to watch our video feeds and collect clips for his YouTube channel. In the future, he hopes to do research in marine biology or a related field. In our opinion, he is already an amazing amateur scientist and we're sure he will make many more discoveries in the future!

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