

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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BIRDS AS WEATHER VANES

There appears to be little in the natural history books about the tendency of birds to stand or sit facing the wind; hence the following passage from Herbert G. Ponting's "Great White South" is worth quoting. He is describing a visit to a penguin rookery at Cape Royds during Scott's Antarctic expedition.

"Occasionally I noticed that almost every penguin in the colony, whether sitting or standing, was facing in the same direction, whilst at other times they would be facing every point of the compass. I was for a while puzzled by this unanimity of front, until I remembered that Lafcadio Hearn had once asked his Japanese rickshaw runner why it was that a number of birds sitting on a telegraph wire all faced the same way. The literal translation of the reply was: 'Little birds always wind-to facing sit.'

"There lay the explanation. Surely enough, when all the penguins faced in a certain direction, it was from that quarter the breeze was blowing; and as often as they were facing haphazard, it invariably happened that there was either no wind at all or none worth mentioning."

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