Beaufort Gyre Exploration Project: Dispatch 14: Ice Recon in the Helo

Gerty Ward
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What is the best way to see what is ahead? The best way to see what is ahead is to go look!

Me in the helicopter, just before take-off.

Helicopter engineer Ric Daine prepares the bird for flight.

This morning I had the opportunity to join the LSSL Ice Observer Marie-Claude Bouchard and U. of Alaska, Fairbanks, student researcher Alice an ice reconnaissance flight. The purpose of the flight was to verify ice conditions ahead so that Captain McNeill knew what to expect during the recovery scheduled for the next day.

Marie-Claude is in her second year as an "ice pick." She explained that ice conditions are standardized: she reports "the egg," a series of numb describe the amount, age and size of ice observed. (Please see Sea Ice Facts in the Resources section of my PolarTREC journal for a detailed description of "the egg"). Her data is combined with remote sensing (satellite images) and ice climatology (a 30-year historical record of ice cond a given time and place) to give a complete picture of current ice conditions. These data allow Captain McNeill to navigate for the mooring recove

Alice Orlich works for Dr. Jennifer Hutchings of IARC based on the UAF campus. The main focus of her work is physical properties of sea ice d Alice is looking at ice to verify ship-based observations with an overhead view provided by the helicopter.

Alice checks her GPS so she can note the location of her observations.

Ice and water comes in so many different shapes and hues.

We flew along the 150 longitude line because this is the ship's track and it provided a good reference point. We flew for about 1 hour, observing cover at the next two stations. We also saw a fat seal, two Beluga whales and animal (bear?) prints in the ice. And we saw ice and water, in all directions--an alien and beautiful landscape.

We flew most of the time under the fog. When a hole appeared pilot Chris Swannell rose above to get a long-range view.

Fogbow at about 1000 feet.

The sun shone through fog and clouds.

All photos by PolarTREC teacher Gerty Ward unless indicated.

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