

Arrival and Second Camp Opening Report:

On Sunday 6 January our small field team (Jefferson Hinke and George Watters) arrived at Copa after departing Punta Arenas, Chile only 8 hours earlier. Our travel included a flight from Punta Arenas, Chile to Base Frei on King George Island, a short helicopter ride from Frei to Arctowski station, and then a gracious zodiac from Arctowski to Copa from our friends and colleagues at the Polish Antarctic station. We are very grateful to INACH, particularly Wendy Rubio, Veronia Vallejos, and Ricardo Jaña, and AGUNSA, particularly Milenko Buljan, Monolo Dollenz, and Claudio Bobadilla, for coordinating such seamless logistical support.

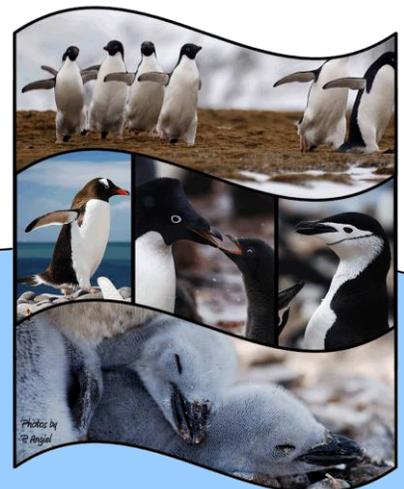
After a one month vacancy, we arrived to find the Copacabana Field Camp secure and in very good condition. The power systems were online and functional. The water collection system was intact and water barrels mainly full and not frozen. Within hours we had established VHF and Iridium communications, but were unable to establish HF communications. We have made no further attempts to use HF this year.

Science Report

1. Penguins

The first order of business was to deploy radio transmitters for studying foraging trip duration during our brief stay. On Tuesday 7 January we deployed 10 radios on Adélie penguins, 9 radios on gentoo penguins, and one stationary reference radio. These transmitters will remain attached to birds for the duration of the field season and all foraging trip data await analysis.

We have deployed 6 Reconyx trail cameras to assist with future studies of penguin reproductive success. We deployed 4 cameras on small to medium sized gentoo penguin colonies and 2 cameras on one large Adélie penguin colony. These cameras are configured to shoot 6 photos on the half hour from 1100 to 1330 for an entire year or until they can be serviced in the field next year. We also serviced a remote camera in use at Copa since 2012. The power connections were corroded and the battery pack was dead, prompting a field overhaul of all wiring and weatherproofing. The camera was tested and redeployed to focus on a mixed colony of gentoo and Adélie penguins for future reproductive success studies.



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The first sample for gentoo penguin diets was collected on Friday 10 January with five adults from the Copa Beach colonies. Only the first portion of regurgitate was collected, which consists mainly of undigested diet items. Average weight of this fresh portion was 353g, and contained 90% krill, 10% fish. One small amphipod (unidentifiable) was also observed. Mean krill size in gentoo diets was 40+/-4mm (1 sd).

The census of chicks at the Point Thomas penguin colonies (near Arctowski station) was conducted on Saturday 11 January. For gentoo penguins, only 14 chicks remain from 150 nests counted in November. For Adélie penguins at Point Thomas, breeding success is much higher. Chick production ranged from 0.27 chicks per nest in the smallest sub colony to over 1.3 in the largest sub colonies. Census of chicks at the Copa colonies are scheduled for today, Monday 13 January.

We also deployed 5 satellite transmitters on gentoo penguins to study foraging ranges. These tags will remain deployed until the end of this week.

2. Skuas

Nest checks of the Copa and Point Thomas breeding territories were conducted on 9, 10, and 11 January. 13 active breeding territories were discovered, 10 near the Copa colonies and only 3 at Point Thomas. All active breeding territories are held by brown skuas. Brazilian scientists studying skuas at a nearby station indicated that some South Polar skua pairs had laid eggs this year, but all eggs were lost prior to hatching. We have seen no evidence of South Polar skua reproduction in our searches at Copacabana or Point Thomas. Time and weather permitting, we will conduct searches near Demay/Patelnia and the Backcountry section near Arctowski Station.

3. Whales and Seals

We have observed fin and minke whales in the bay this week. On Thursday 9 January a small pod of 5 adult fin whales was observed in the middle of Admiralty Bay and on Saturday 11 January we observed 4 minke whales.

Few seals have been observed at Copa. Our lone beach census yielded 27 juvenile elephant seals and one leopard seal was seen resting on grounded ice south of our camp.



4. Weekly Weather

The week's weather has been dry and breezy; very accommodating for our field work. No appreciable precipitation was observed and winds have been less than 20-30 knots at all times. Temperatures have remained just above freezing and significant snowmelt is underway.

The 2014 Copa Field Team, Round Two:
Jefferson Hinke (old timer)
George Watters (first timer)

