

2012-2013 Weekly Field Reports

Copacabana, King George Island

Volume 10
December 17, 2012

Science Report:

1. Penguins: Reproductive monitoring of Adélie and gentoo penguins continues. Currently only 32 out of 100 Adélie penguin reproductive nests remain active, 26 of which now have chicks. Gentoo penguin reproductive sites continue to do well with 87 out of 100 still active, 30 of which are now with chicks. The number of breeding known-age Adélie penguin nests that are still active stands at four (all of which have chicks), whereas there are 59 nests of known-age gentoo penguins still active (15 of which have chicks).

Diet sampling of Adélie penguins commenced on Thursday (12/20). Five Adélie penguins from the Castle Rocks colonies that had at least one chick and appeared to be fresh from a foraging trip were selected. Each sample was separated into fresh and digested portions, weighed, searched for otoliths and other non-krill prey remains, and 50 whole krill were randomly selected from the fresh portion. The 50 whole krill were then measured, sexed, and weighed. All birds were weighed before and after dieting, and then released unharmed.

Deployment of seven remaining radio transmitters (Tx's) on breeding Adélie penguins took place on Monday (12/17). A total of 20 Tx's are now deployed on breeding Adélie penguins in colonies on Copa Beach as well as in the Castle Rocks colonies. 19 Tx's will be deployed on gentoo penguins when the nests in the Copa Beach colonies reach the chick rearing stage.

There are now five breeding chinstrap penguin pairs on Copa Beach, each with two eggs.

2. Skuas: Regular daily checks of the Copa skua breeding territories continue. There are currently eight active nests at Copa, all brown skuas with penguin territories. A few south polar skua territory holders were resighted this week. We were able to retrieve two additional GLS tags from one brown skua at Copa and one from Point Thomas.

Point Thomas skua routes were completed on Wednesday (12/19) and Sunday (12/23). There are now a total of five active brown skua nests, one of which has hatched the first skua chicks of the season! As with the Copa territories, some additional south polar skuas were seen on territories this week.

The Demay and Patelnia skua routes were completed on Tuesday (12/18). One additional skua nest with eggs was found near the penguin colony at Uchatka, increasing the total active nests in the Demay/Patelnia area to four. The pair of brown skuas nesting on territory 119/149 remains the only non-penguin territory skua nest throughout all of our skua study sights.



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Another Back Country skua trip was made on Saturday (12/22). Resights in the Back Country remain somewhat sporadic and irregular, though a couple of pairs have been seen near new nest scrapes.

3. Sheathbills and Giant Petrels: A total of three unbanded sheathbills have been observed on Copa Rock, often near the same location as last year's nest. No nest has been found yet, but our checks are infrequent, due to the numerous nesting giant petrels in the area, as they are extremely prone to human disturbance. The location of last year's nest still appears to be active but with no eggs or attending adults.
4. Whales and Seals: More humpback whales were observed on Wednesday (12/19), Friday (12/21), and Saturday (12/22) this week, the maximum number seen at one time being two on all three days.

The Demay and Patelnia seal census, carried out on Tuesday (12/18), yielded 570 juvenile/unknown sex elephant seals, 91 weaner elephant seals, and one Weddell seal. The Copa and Point Thomas seal census, carried out on Sunday (12/16), yielded 14 juvenile/unknown sex elephant seals.

There were five leopard seal kills observed throughout the week. Three of the prey species were identified as Adélie penguins, one was a gentoo penguin, and the other was unknown. Two unsuccessful chases of Adélie penguins were observed, as well as a patrolling animal and several observations of animals resting on ice flows.

5. Other: A king penguin, assumed to be the newly molted individual observed over the past several weeks, was seen on the beach near Cape Adélie at Point Thomas on Sunday (12/23).

One lucky gentoo penguin was seen attending a one-week old Adélie penguin chick on the outskirts of the Bolinas colony on Copa Beach.

Nesting cape petrels have been observed in the cliffs near Blue Dyke.

Weekly Weather:

The week's weather proved very accommodating with temperatures hovering near freezing most days. Thursday (12/20) was the only day with stronger winds, up to 15-25 knots, that made conditions less comfortable than normal.



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Camp Activities:

This week's main camp activity was decorating the hut for Christmas, including the making of a gingerbread house.

The 2012-13 Copa Field Team:

Matt Henschen, Co-Field Team Leader

Brette Soucie, Co-Field Team Leader

Caitlyn Bishop

Ana Bertoldi

