

2012-2013 Weekly Field Reports

Copacabana, King George Island

Volume 12
December 31, 2012

Science Report:

1. Penguins: Reproductive monitoring of Adélie penguins now yields 24 out of the 100 Adélie penguin study nests that are still active with chicks; only three of the known-age Adélie penguin nests still have chicks. Diet sampling of Adélie penguins continued on Friday (1/4), with five more Adélie penguins from the Castle Rocks colonies selected.

Gentoo penguin reproductive success dropped one nest to 86 out of 100 nests still active, 85 of which are now with chicks. All 57 of the known-age gentoo penguin breeders remain active with chicks. Following peak hatch in gentoos nesting on Copa beach, 19 radio transmitters (Tx's) were deployed. The deployments were confined to the Copa Beach colonies to ensure that the radio signals would be picked-up easily by the receiver in the hut. Nests were selected that contained two chicks (< 1.5 weeks old) with both adults present. As with the Adélie penguins, the Tx's will collect data on foraging trip durations during the chick rearing stage and will be added to the 'Full Nest Check' schedule to monitor any chick losses.

Breeding chinstrap penguins on Copa Beach stand at five nests, three of which have two chicks each, the remaining two nests have one chick and one egg each.

2. Skuas: Regular daily checks of the Copa skua breeding territories continue. There are currently eight active nests at Copa, one of which was newly laid on the 'Island' territory on Wednesday (1/2). Six of these eight nests have chicks. There was an increase of additional skua resights this week of old non-penguin territory holders and new skuas alike, though still no breeding activity was observed.

Point Thomas skua routes were completed on Wednesday (1/2) and Saturday/Sunday (1/5 and 1/6). There are now four active brown skua nests, three of which have chicks. One failure occurred just following their chick hatch. As with the Copa territories, additional skuas were seen on territory this week, but the resights remain inconsistent and no breeding activity was observed. There have even been new 'mates' in pairs who have been consistently together since our arrival.

The Demay and Patelnia skua routes were completed on Thursday (1/3). There still remain four active nests, all with eggs, with no additional nests located. As with both Copa and Point Thomas, some additional skua pairs have arrived on territory, while territories occupied in previous weeks were once again vacant.



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Back Country skua routes were completed on Saturday (1/5). Resights in the Back Country, as with the rest of the routes, remain somewhat sporadic and irregular, with new pairs coming and going every week. There are still no active nests in the Back Country.

3. Sheathbills and Giant Petrels: Two unbanded sheathbills have been observed near Copa Rock and appear to be attending an old nest site used last year. We checked the site on Wednesday (1/2), and although it contains a nest that looks newly built and tended, there are still no eggs.

Now that most of the giant petrels have small chicks, or eggs that are about to hatch, band resights at Copa and Point Thomas were conducted this week on Wednesday (1/2). This is the one time during the season when the adults will not abandon their nest when approached, which is why we do the band resights at this time.

4. Whales and Seals: Humpback whale sightings continue; whales were seen on Monday (12/31), Tuesday (1/1), and Wednesday (1/2). Only one individual was seen at each sighting this week, with two sightings on Monday (12/31).

The Demay and Patelnia seal census, carried out on Thursday (1/3), yielded 321 juvenile/unknown sex elephant seals and 16 weaner elephant seals. The Copa and Point Thomas seal census, carried out on Sunday (1/6), yielded 38 juvenile/unknown sex elephant seals.

Leopard seal attacks continue off Copa Beach. There were four leopard seal kills observed, all on Tuesday (1/1). Two of the prey species were identified as Adélie penguins, the other two could not be identified. During a beach walk on Sunday (1/6), eight banded carcasses were found, seven of which were identified as Adélie Penguins. An additional Adélie penguin band was pulled off a carcass on Saturday (1/5).

5. Other: One lucky gentoo penguin pair continues to be seen attending a three-week old Adélie penguin chick on the outskirts of the Bolinas colony, while still trying to incubate their own eggs.

A king penguin was observed near the Adélie Beach colony at Point Thomas on Sunday (1/6). The bird appeared to be post molt as it was missing its long tail feathers.



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Weekly Weather:

The week's weather proved fairly accommodating with temperatures above freezing for most of the week which resulted in some melting of the remaining snow. Unfortunately the snow returned on Saturday (1/5) followed by more rainy snow on Sunday (1/6).

Camp Activities:

This week's camp activities included visits from representatives of the Brazilian crew at Ferraz Station, including their new chief, as he was getting acquainted with all the other stations in the bay.

The 2012-13 Copa Field Team:

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