

2012-2013 Weekly Field Reports

Copacabana, King George Island

Science Report:

1. Penguins: Reproductive monitoring of Adélie and gentoo penguins continues. Currently only 41 out of 100 Adélie penguin reproductive nests remain active, 21 of which now have chicks. Gentoo penguin reproductive sites continue to do well with 91 out of 100 still active, 13 of which are now with chicks. Numbers of breeding known-age Adélie penguins stand at 11, whereas there are 60 nests of known-age gentoo penguins still active. Currently, there are six known-age Adélie penguin nests with chicks; three known-age gentoo penguins have chicks.

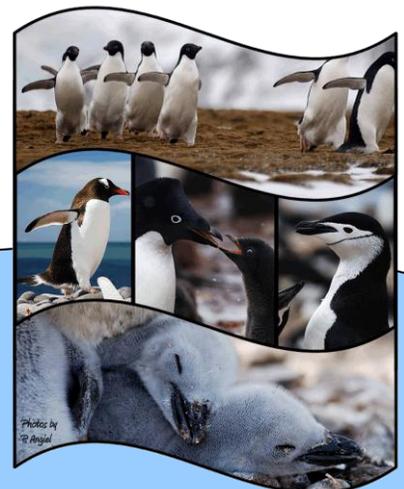
Deployment of 13 radio transmitters (Tx) on breeding Adélie penguins took place on Thursday (12/13) and Sunday (12/16). We will be putting a total of 20 Tx on Adélie penguins and 19 on Gentoo penguins to collect data on foraging trip durations during the chick rearing stage. Nests with two chicks and both adults present were selected. Nests will be monitored on the “full nest check” schedule (every four days) to observe if/when any of the chicks are lost.

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 four additional GLS tags from the brown skuas at Copa and two from Point Thomas.

Point Thomas skua routes were completed on Wednesday (12/12) and Sunday (12/16). There are now a total of seven active brown skua nests. As with the Copa territories, some additional south polar skuas were seen on territory this week.

The Demay and Patelnia skua routes were completed on Friday (12/14). Many territories remain unattended although there has been an increase in resights. The skua territories near the Patelnia chinstrap penguin colony yielded two nests this week, one two-egg clutch and one with just one egg. Only one other nest was found on the Demay/Patelnia skua route, a one-egg clutch at territory 119/149 near Block Point.

Another Back Country skua trip was made on Saturday (12/16). Yet again, there was an increase in skua resights this week, with six pairs of south polar skuas and three pairs of brown skuas seen along with a handful of individual birds. No breeding activity was observed, but we were able to collect samples of courtship feces in which otoliths will be separated out and identified. Feces will also be collected during incubation and chick rearing phases.



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3. Sheathbills and Giant Petrels: One unbanded sheathbill was observed at the end of Copa Rock, near the same location as last year's nest. The location of last year's nest still appears to be active but with no eggs or attending adults.

A census of occupied giant petrel nests was conducted on Saturday (12/15) at Copa and on Sunday (12/16) at Point Thomas. A total of 190 nests were counted, down from the 270 total of last season. This decline could be attributed, in part, to competition from gentoo penguins that moved from their usual beach nesting areas, due to heavy snow, to the higher, snow-free giant petrel colonies.

4. Whales and Seals: Only one humpback whale was seen this week, feeding in the middle of Admiralty Bay on Thursday (12/13).

The Demay and Patelnia seal census, carried out on Friday (12/14), yielded 630 juvenile/unknown sex elephant seals, 65 weaner elephant seals, and one leopard seal weaner. The Copa and Point Thomas seal census, carried out on Sunday (12/16), yielded 14 juvenile/unknown sex elephant seals. Three leopard seals were seen hauled out on ice flows offshore but, because they were not beached, they were not counted in the census.

There were eight leopard seal kills observed throughout the week. Four of the prey species were identified as Adélie penguins while the other four were unknown.

5. Other: A king penguin continues to molt in the Orange Cliff Adélie penguin colony at Point Thomas. The bird was seen on both Wednesday (12/12) and Sunday (12/16).

Wilson's storm petrels continue to be seen in the waters off Copa Beach and along the talus slopes and cliffs near the hut in the evening hours. The birds are often seen frequenting the areas near leopard seal attacks.

Weekly Weather:

The week's weather was very consistent throughout the week with temperatures remaining near freezing and almost no wind. Temperatures exceeded the freezing mark later in the week which has increased the melting of the snow and ice making walking muddy and wet.



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Camp Activities:

The Chilean naval vessel “Lautaro” paid a visit to Copa on Thursday (12/13). The visitors included 13 Chilean naval personnel along with one sailor from the Argentine Navy and one from the Canadian Navy. The Captain of the Lautaro, Rodrigo Pascal, offered any assistance we may need in the future as well as a plaque, a framed photograph of the Lautaro.

The R/V *Laurence M. Gould* also visited Copa on Thursday (12/13). Fresh food, supplies, and propane were delivered and the HF radio was checked by technicians from the *Gould*.

The 2012-13 Copa Field Team:

Matt Henschen, Co-Field Team Leader

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