National Science Foundation & U.S. AMLR Program

2008-2009 Weekly Field Reports
Copacabana, King George Island

Volume 1
October 31, 2008

We arrived at Copa on the afternoon of 18 October to find calm conditions & essentially no snow at all around the hut & in the colonies. We decided to send the 4 of us ashore, with our personal gear & radios, to get things opened up & running for the next day's main offload. The power system & radios were set-up & checked out by the *R/V Laurence M Gould* (LMG) ET, Sheldon Blackburn, who has been here many times before & knows the procedure well. The four Copapods* opened all the shutters on the doors & windows, started all the heaters, & prepared things for the next day. The weather cooperated the next day, amazingly, and we were able to begin the main offload right after breakfast. Landing was possible directly in front of the hut, so we had all supplies & gear offloaded & up at the hut in good time. Meanwhile, Sheldon was busy setting up our computers, Iridium phone, & other communications gear. Radios were checked out once again & after making sure all systems were operating well and our food & supplies were all up at the hut & in their proper places, everyone left & the *Gould* sailed away. We are immensely grateful to all who helped make this year's Copa opening a huge success: John Evans (our POC), Herb Baker (MPC), Sheldon Blackburn (ET), the MTs (Rick & Thor), Captain Scott & the crew of the LMG, and all the Palmer scientists & staff (too numerous to mention by name) – we couldn't have done it without you all!

Science report

1. Penguins: As our arrival was about 10 days later than in previous years, we went out immediately after the *LMG* left to check on the progress of the penguins & set-up our study sites. Due to the mild, snow-free conditions, the gentoo penguins were well ahead of schedule, with most nests having full clutches (i.e., 2 eggs) already! The Adélie penguins, however, had no eggs yet, thankfully, so we caught them in time. Each person is responsible for 5-8 areas of 5 nests each of both species (Adélies & gentoos) to follow daily for reproductive success & nest attendance data. So everyone selected & mapped their separate study sites in all the colonies that afternoon & the next day.

   The first Adélie penguin egg was seen the next day, 20 October, so we were just in time to set up the Adélie study areas. The egg lay-dates for the gentoos, though, will require us to back-date from the hatch, since most of our study nests were with 2 eggs already. For the penguin studies, both members of the pair at the Adélie penguin study nests are banded,

*Copapods: researchers currently residing at Copacabana!

but only one member of the pair at the gentoo nests, a total of 100 Adélies & 50 gentoos. These will be used to get daily nest attendance data on the Adélies, plus enable us to determine over-winter survival for breeders of both species next year. Near the peak of egg-laying for the Adélie penguins, at the end of October, we collected adult weights & egg 1 measurements – we select 50 nests at the Point Thomas colony (near the Polish station) with both adults present & only 1 egg, then weigh both adults, & measure & weigh the egg. This will be used as an indicator of adult condition at the start of the breeding season.

2. Skuas: We saw our first skua soon after arriving and started our daily checks of all the skua territories around Copa this past week. We record the arrival dates of pairs at each skua breeding territory and any other birds they are associating with, etc. All of the territories in the ASPA are monitored regularly, at least once a week, with the ones around Copa being checked daily. We have managed to get all of our studies up and running and are looking forward to another season with the seabirds at Copa.

Photo by P. Angiel

Happy Halloween!

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