

# 2010-2011 Weekly Field Reports

## Copacabana, King George Island

Volume 6  
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### Science report:

1. Penguins: The first gentoo penguin chick at Copa hatched on Thursday (11/18), but none in any of our study nests, yet. More are hatching daily, but the peak is still a week or more away.

More known-age penguins are breeding this year than last year, but this is most likely due to the better, snow-free conditions this year. Even so, there are fewer known-age penguins breeding this year than have bred in some of the past years. Of the known-age penguins that laid eggs, 73% of the Adélie penguin nests and 94% of the gentoo penguin nests are still active.

Chinstrap penguin adults were weighed, and measurements were taken of their first egg, at the Uchatka and Patelnia colonies on Thursday, 18 November. As with the Adélie penguins, 50 nests with both adults present and only one egg are randomly selected, then both adults are weighed and the egg is measured and weighed. This year, all the measurements were very close to the 20-year mean.

2. Skuas: The first skua eggs were found at Point Thomas on Wednesday, 17 November, during the regular mid-week check. Two brown skua pairs and one south polar pair each had one egg. All skua eggs are marked, measured, and weighed to determine if there are any differences in egg sizes between the different types of feeding territories and/or if there are any changes between the years. Marking the eggs also allows us to determine which egg is lost and which hatches if an egg loss occurs.

We also did the first check of the skua territories around Uchatka and Patelnia on Thursday, 18 November, while there for the chinstrap penguin work. Most of the territories had at least one bird present, but no eggs were found. The brown skua pairs that defend chinstrap penguin feeding territories usually lay a bit later than the pairs that control Adélie or gentoo penguin territories, since chinstrap penguins breed later than their congeners, meaning the penguin egg resource for these skuas isn't available until later. This delay in egg-laying isn't surprising, as the female skuas are courtship-fed by the males to bring them into egg-laying condition.

The second weekly check of the Back Country skuas on Sunday, 21 November resulted in two nests with eggs, one with a full clutch of two eggs! Only the male was seen at this territory last week, so we didn't expect to see eggs so soon. With the mild weather and relatively snow-free conditions, we expect to see many more eggs soon in all our skua areas.

3. Seals and Whales: The seal census from Copacabana to Uchatka on Thursday, 18 November resulted in only three seals, but one of them was a leopard seal on the beach at Demay, an unusual occurrence here. The other two were juvenile elephant seals. The seal census from Copacabana to Point Thomas was completed Sunday, 21 November and only one Weddell and one fur seal were seen.

Three humpback whales and at least five orcas put on quite a show in the bay on Tuesday, 16 November. The humpbacks appeared to be feeding, showing their flukes regularly as they dove, plus doing the occasional flipper wave. The orcas were in the same general area as the humpbacks, but a bit more dispersed – we are not sure what they were doing, but they didn't appear to bother the humpbacks. We're hoping that this is an indication of a good supply of krill in the bay.



5. Other: The first Wilson's storm petrel was seen near Copacabana on Wednesday, 17 November. Along with the black-bellied storm petrels, these birds nest in cavities in the rocks and scree among the hills around Copacabana and Pt. Thomas.

**Weekly Weather:**

Temperatures were mostly above freezing, with a mix of rain, snow, and clouds, but we did have two clear, calm, and sunny days during the week.

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