

# 2009-2010 Weekly Field Reports

## Copacabana, King George Island

Volume 6  
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### Science report:

1. Penguins: Copacabana had an intense three day storm that hit the gentoo penguins hard. Some of the Copa beach nest sites were completely covered with snow and all nests were lost. Other beach breeding sites, and some of the higher nesting areas, lost anywhere from 10-50% of their nests to snow drifts. However, gentoo penguins, unlike either Adélie or chinstrap penguins, can re-lay and many pairs have already begun establishing new nests. We are following these birds and will determine their reproductive status throughout the remainder of the season.

The first gentoo chick of the season was born at Copa on the 2nd of December. This chick we from a nest in one of the higher, earlier established breeding sites that was clear of snow early in October and therefore available for egg laying. Many other nesting areas in the lower areas and on the beach are just completing clutches; others are still constructing nests. The time span of nesting for the gentoo penguins will exceed two months this year, due to the storms and snow. This plasticity in egg laying and the ability to re-lay a clutch if lost early in the year is one of the key reasons the gentoo population has remained stable over time at our study site.

We completed the gentoo penguin egg 1 and egg 2 measurements at Copa on Sunday, December the 6th; additional measurements were completed at Point Thomas earlier in the week. The annual population census of gentoo penguins was completed for the higher and earlier established nests. We are waiting to census the beach and other snow covered areas following the peak of egg-laying in these areas.

The Adélies fared much better in the storm, the beach breeding sites were hit, but most birds remained on their nests as eggs are near to hatching. We are starting to see the Adélies hatch this week and it will be interesting to see how many eggs survived the snow nests and early season storms. We have seven known-age Adélie nests still active.

We have four chinstrap nests at Copa, three of which have eggs. Due to the storm last week and deep snow, it was impossible to get to the Chinstrap colony at DeMay for the adult and egg 1 measurements; however, we expect to hike to that distant colony this coming week to make the egg 1 and egg 2 measurements.

2. Skuas: A pair of brown skuas was the first to lay eggs at Copa early this week and we now have two pairs at Copa with nests. Both of these skua pairs forage in the penguin colonies. The recent storm once again covered much of the exposed ground, so availability of nesting space and material is very limited at Copa, Point Thomas and back-country. We lost two of our Point Thomas brown skua nests during the storm. As of Saturday, we had four pairs of browns and a south polar/brown hybridizing pair that have nests at Point Thomas. Many of the skua breeding territories at Point Thomas are not occupied and this is also the case in back-country where no birds have been seen on about half of the territories. Our first survey for skuas on the flats and at Block Point was conducted Thursday and we plan to head to DeMay and Uchatka to check skua pairs in these areas when we hike there for the chinstrap penguin work this coming week.



3. Whales: No whales have been observed in Admiralty Bay this week.

4. Seals: We have been conducting our weekly seal censuses in the Copa and Point Thomas vicinity. This week was the first census for the Flats and Blok Point area, where none were observed. The Copa beaches have seen an increase of activity with the elephant seals. A couple of our gentoo and Adélie nests have been flattened by these visitors. Only one leopard seal was observed this week on the journey back from the flats, it was seen consuming a fish.

### **Camp Activities:**

On the 2nd of December we had a celebration for Sue Trivelpiece, who departed this week. In attendance were seven of the Polish crew and a few members of the Argentinean ship the Castillo, including the Captain. All had a very nice and enjoyable gathering to wish Sue the best with her travels and to thank her for all her assistance this season. Sue departed via the cruise ship Minerva. The Copa crew was invited onboard the ship to talk to the passengers and to have dinner. It was a wonderful time and experience for the Copa crew and we were especially grateful for the fresh fruit and vegetables sent ashore with us when the ship departed.

We are still dealing with snow on the deck and one of our out-buildings is still a few feet under the snow. We are also still without running water, although for a few days around Thanksgiving we were blessed with running water in the main hut.

The canoe was transported, via snow sliding, to Agat Point, near the Baronowski Glacier and is now ready for use in crossing the lake in front of the glacier on our future travels to Demay and Patelnia. Our normal location for canoe storage in the moraines was under 4 feet of snow, so we filled the canoe with rocks to secure it in a temporary location.

### **Weekly Weather:**

On the morning of November 29th a very strong storm began that lasted three days with heavy snow and wind gusts of 60 mph. This storm added more snow to our already present amount and in many areas there are deep drifts. The rest of the week was relatively nice and calm. Friday and Sunday mornings we had a light dusting of snow both days, while Saturday was a beautiful, clear day.

The 2009-10 Copa Field Team:

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