

2008-2009 Weekly Field Reports

Copacabana, King George Island

Volume 8
December 21, 2008

The weather has been much nicer for most of the week allowing us to complete all of our scheduled tasks. All of our Christmas decorations are up and we are ready for the holiday season. As usual, we will be spending Christmas Eve with our friends at the Polish station. The hut continues to operate smoothly and we had a couple days of rain to help fill our water catchments.

Penguins

The Adélie penguin chicks are beginning to crèche in large numbers. We are nearly half done with the 21-day chick weights and many of the chicks of known-age parents are already large enough to receive adult flipper bands. The radio telemetry study is working well, regularly receiving signals from our transmitter birds. The Adélie penguin diet sampling will begin this coming week. The melanistic Adélie has been sighted several additional times this season, and was observed paired on a nest for the first time this week. We are hoping this means that it will be breeding here next season.



Photo by P. Angiel

Gentoo penguin 21-day chick weights are nearly complete, with only the latest breeders having chicks under 21 days old. Many of the chicks of known-age parents have received their adult flipper bands, and with the crèches growing larger and larger, finding them in the crowd is becoming increasingly difficult. We had one day of strong winds and heavy rain that killed some crèched chicks, as they were unattended and apparently too young to thermoregulate on their own when very wet. Very few of our repro birds suffered losses from the storm;

however, many dead chicks were observed in the colonies.

Chinstrap penguin chicks were observed at all the Demay and Patelnia colonies on 12/16/08. Approximately 10 of the active nests were with chicks. Our only 2 nests here at Copa have yet to hatch.

Skuas

The first brown skua chick hatched on 12/18/08. Only 2 nests were with chicks by the end of this week with a few additional eggs pipping; however, many will be hatching in this



coming week. No south polar skua chicks have hatched yet, as all the early season breeders have failed. Only 71 of the territories we monitor have bred so far this season. Of these 71 nests, 27 have failed (38%). As it is getting late in the season, it is unlikely that many more pairs will breed this year, but not unprecedented.

Seals

Another week has passed with no leopard seal predation sightings. Nothing unusual was observed on our weekly seal census.

Other

A relatively calm week has allowed us to complete most of the giant petrel nest census and re-sighting. None of the re-sighted birds have chicks yet, but many are on eggs. The first macaroni penguin of the season was seen among the Adélies in one of the beach colonies at Copa. We also had our first whale sighting of the season this week; several minke whales were seen feeding in the bay on 12/17/08.



Weekly Weather

The beginning and end of the week were some of the calmest days we have encountered all season. Winds gusting to 50 knots and heavy rain hit the area on 12/18/08 causing some penguin chick mortality. We had snow most of the day 12/20/08, but with no accumulation.



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