

# 2008-2009 Weekly Field Reports

## Copacabana, King George Island

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Things are starting to wind down early this season, with the earlier than normal penguin breeding. Many storms hit us this week, causing us to delay some of the more distant work we had scheduled. The water catchments are all filled after a week of many types of precipitation. The hut continues to operate smoothly with everything still functioning properly.

### Penguins



The Adélie penguin fledglings have been leaving Copa in large numbers this last week. We have continued to weigh fledglings on the beach twice daily to determine the condition of the fledglings just before leaving the rookery to begin foraging on their own. We have achieved our minimum amount of 100 fledgling weights and will attempt to reach our goal of 200 by the end of the upcoming week. Most of the adult Adélies have stopped returning to the colonies to feed their chicks, and it was not possible to complete an additional

diet this week. No adult known-age Adélies were observed on the last “beach sweep”, when we re-sight known-age penguins in the evening on the beaches and around the colonies. Two of the PTI’s we had deployed on Adélies earlier were not recovered, & now show the birds heading towards their wintering grounds – one currently in the northwest Weddell Sea, just east of James Ross Island & the other in the northeast Bransfield, possibly headed towards the Antarctic Sound & the Weddell Sea.

Gentoo: The final gentoo diet was completed this week. The diets consisted of 86% female, 14% male, and less than 1% juvenile krill. The krill sizes varied from 35 mm – 58 mm, with the vast majority in the 40 mm – 50 mm range. Most of the gentoo chicks have molted all their down and are now with adult plumage. Many have been observed swimming near shore. They continue to harass us in the evenings by coming onto our deck by the dozens. We build barricades to deter them, but the older they get the more determined they are to explore around the hut.

Chinstrap: Our first chinstrap diet was planned for the end of this week; however a series of storms caused us to delay until early next week. Chinstrap chicks have probably begun to crèche this week, but as we were unable to visit the colonies, we hope to confirm this information soon. The only 3 chinstrap chicks hatched here at Copa haven’t crèched yet, but are still alive and well.



## Skuas

Many skua pairs continue to relay, and we even had one pair lay their first clutch this week, which is very late in the season to begin incubating eggs. 84 pairs of skuas have bred this season, which only constitutes about half of the occupied territories that we monitor. Of these 84 breeding pairs, 60% have failed on their first breeding attempt. 48% of the skuas that failed have re-laid an additional clutch. Some pairs have failed twice and laid a third clutch. Several days of strong winds, rain, and snow caused some weather related losses this week. Some of the nests were completely covered with snow drifts, and other nests were found with eggs blown outside of the nest bowl. Another big storm with strong winds hit the area after our final territory check of the week, and more nests possibly failed due to weather.

## Seals and Whales

No whales were sighted in Admiralty bay this week. One leopard seal was seen patrolling the beaches this week, but no penguin predations have been observed, which is unusual for this time of year. This is typically when leopard seals are taking several inexperienced fledglings a day as they enter the water for the first time. Many fur seals are observed daily, as their numbers continue to increase on the beaches.

## Weekly Weather

Strong wind and rain the morning of 1/19. A mix of rain and snow blowing in from the southeast on 1/20, with winds gusting to 20 knots. A strong snow storm with winds in excess of 30 knots hit us on 1/22, very little snow accumulation in most areas; however some drifts were several feet deep. Strong winds gusting to 40+ knots moved into the area the afternoon and evening of 1/24 accompanied by periods of very heavy rain.

The 2008-09 Copa Field Team  
David Loomis – Team Field Leader  
Wayne Trivelpiece – Principal Investigator  
Amy Lindsley  
Kristen Green

