

2009-2010 Weekly Field Reports

Copacabana, King George Island

Science report:

1. Penguins: The first Adélie penguin chick was seen on 11/28, a few days later than normal. This is likely due to the delayed clutch initiation dates resulting from all the snow in the colonies this season. To date, no chicks have hatched in our reproductive study nests. Over all, nest losses are tapering off, and those occurring now are mostly birds abandoning nests when their mates fail to return from the long, first foraging trips to sea after egg laying. Many of the adults that disappear are thought to have been preyed upon by leopard seals. However, only a few leopard seal kills were observed earlier in the vicinity of the breeding colony, and none have been seen in the last few weeks. Of the 24 known-age nests, where at least one member of the pair is an adult banded as a chick, only 11 are still active with eggs. These are mostly young, inexperienced birds, which often fail at their first breeding attempts, especially with the adverse conditions we've had so far this season.

The gentoo penguins continue to lay eggs in their new, higher colonies, and restructured beach colonies. Most of the latter are concentrated around the few sites with exposed bare ground or rock, leading to smaller, tightly-packed groups of nests. Of the nests that were built in the guano-covered snow areas on Copa Beach, most of these pairs have now melted down into snow-holes, similar to what the Adélies experience. The blizzard we had on Sunday, 11/29, covered many of these nest sites.

The first chinstrap penguin egg was observed on 11/24, in one of the three active nests on the periphery of a small Adélie colony on Copa Beach. This is an indication that the larger chinstrap colonies near the mouth of Admiralty Bay have started to lay, as well, so we will be heading there next week to do adult and egg one measurements.

2. Skuas: More eggs were found in brown skua nests at Point Thomas last week, but only in nests of pairs that control penguin colonies. There are still no eggs in any of the Copa or Back-Country skua territories. There is very little exposed ground for the skuas to build nests on, so many are laying in rocky areas, where there is some vegetation available for nesting material. Some of these areas have been used in the past, during similar heavy snow years.

One of our oldest female brown skuas, at least 33 years old and a holder of a prime penguin territory for 28 years, was recently displaced by a new, presumably younger, female. The male, her past mate, banded as a chick 26 years ago, has occupied this territory with her for the past 17 years. He is still there, but now appears to be paired with this new female. We are sad to see her go.

3. Whales: More humpbacks have been observed in the bay on a regular basis. As they are in different-sized groups (usually 1-3 individuals), often one a calf, we are assuming they are different animals. They still appear to be doing feeding dives, an indication that there must be krill in the bay, although we haven't seen any sign of krill along the shore since the big wash-up of krill a week ago.



Camp Activities:

We hosted Thanksgiving dinner at Copa on 11/26, with seven Poles joining us for the feast. We served two turkeys with all the fixings, many side dishes and the obligatory pies for dessert. All had a very nice time. Snow removal and deck clearance continues, although the snowstorm on Sunday definitely set us back.

Weekly Weather:

Mostly sunny days, with temperatures above freezing and minimal wind. Two snowstorms -- one on Thanksgiving, from the west-northwest was warm, with minimal accumulation; the other, starting on Sunday, 11/29, and continued through the night into Monday. This storm was from the east and quite cold (below freezing), with 15-20 knot winds, heavy accumulation, and drifting.

The 2009-10 Copa Field Team:

Sue Trivelpiece, Co-PI

Amy Lindsley, Field Team Leader

Alexis Will

Renee Koplan

