

2009-2010 Weekly Field Reports

Copacabana, King George Island

Volume 8
December 20, 2009

Science report:

1. Penguins: The majority of the Adélie penguin chicks have now hatched, but due to the heavy snow earlier in the season, many eggs were infertile, resulting in fewer chicks hatching than usual. Only 25% of our study nests hatched chicks, and more than half of those had only one of their two eggs hatch.

Gentoo penguin chicks are hatching in the earlier-established nests, while eggs are still being incubated or just being laid in the other areas. Most of the latter nests are re-lays after losing their first nests in the big storm earlier this month.

The chinstrap penguin nest census was completed at Patelnia, the farthest of the chinstrap penguin colonies that we monitor. The census was about 26% lower than last year, most likely due to the heavy snow conditions this season.

2. Skuas: The first two brown skua chicks hatched at Point Thomas this week. We also found several nests with their first egg at Point Thomas and in the Back-Country this week, so will be able to estimate their exact lay dates, as there are three days between each egg.

The newly formed pair of brown skuas that control the Uchatka chinstrap colony had their first egg this week. The nest found with eggs last week in the Demay/Uchatka area was lost and no other skuas in the area had eggs.

This week was our first skua check at Patelnia. The three brown skua pairs that control the chinstrap colonies had not laid yet and only one pair of south polar skuas in the area had an egg.

3. Snowy Sheathbills: Only one pair of sheathbills remains at Copa. The male of this pair is a banded bird, affectionately called “Rasta” (due to his color band combination), that has nested here for many years. However, no nesting activity has been observed yet.

4. Southern Giant Petrels: The census of occupied nests has been done at all but one of the giant petrel colonies at Copa, but no census has been done at Point Thomas yet, due to high winds. In addition to the census, attempts were made to resight banded adults and, if time allows, we will try again, in hopes of reading the bands of both members of each pair.

5. Whales: Two unidentified whales were observed in the bay this week.

6. Seals: Our first Patelnia seal census had over 400 elephant seals, mostly females, sub-adult males, and weaned pups, but about a dozen adult males were also present. Most of these are ashore for their annual molt. However, the Patelnia area also supports several elephant seal breeding groups, but as the peak of pupping is in late October, and they wean at three weeks of age, most of the pups are gone. One leopard seal predation of an Adélie penguin was observed.



Camp Activities:

Our water supply comes from rainfall and snowmelt. To ensure that we will have enough water for the remainder of the season, we took advantage of the snow still present, and filled all the rain barrels with snow. Also, a section of the rain gutters for the water catchment system for the kitchen sink was hung on the main hut. An old observation blind above Copa was dismantled and carried down to the hut to be stored until it can be transported out with the trash at the end of the season. The regulator for the propane heater in the main hut was replaced and the system is now working well. Computer data entry has also begun.

Weekly Weather:

The snow has begun to melt rapidly this week, with temperatures in the high 30's for several days. There were also several squalls of rain and high winds throughout the week, interspersed with nice, calm weather.

The 2009-10 Copa Field Team:

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