



# AFRICAN PENGUIN CHICK BOLSTERING PROJECT

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**PROJECT UPDATE:** 5 January 2011

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## Brave new world ..... The first chicks are released back into the wild



Photo credit: Dudley Mare

During November a total of 482 African penguin chicks were admitted to SANCCOB for hand-rearing after being abandoned by their moulting parents. Of these, 305 were removed from the Betty's Bay colony, 173 from Dyer Island and 4 from other areas.

On Tuesday, 4 January SANCCOB released 60 birds of which 55 were orphaned chicks (39 from Betty's Bay, 16 from Dyer Island). Two rehabilitated adults were released with the group of youngsters – one was an oiled bird and the other was a moulting adult with a seal bite wound on its tail which had been rescued with the chicks from Dyer Island. The bird finished its moult and recovered from the wound, and together with the ex-oily they led the little ones to the ocean.

SANCCOB still has a total of 360 chicks at the centre and expects to release another group of approximately 60 birds from a boat close to Robben Island on Friday the 6<sup>th</sup> of January. Thereafter group releases will take place on a weekly basis. It is anticipated that the tracking devices will be available towards the end of January and deployed on the birds just before they are released.

## Operational Report: Dr. Nola Parsons

The 470 chicks admitted from Betty's Bay and Dyer Island colonies were in a poor condition on arrival at SANCCOB and there have been 56 deaths so far (12% total admitted). Chicks in poor body condition are less able to withstand the stress of rehabilitation and are more susceptible to bacterial infections, but the bacteria involved in the respiratory tract infection have been determined and antibiotics used so far have been working well.

A herpes virus was discovered in three of the chicks which died during the rearing process. Extensive work was done by SANCCOB and the Provincial Veterinary Laboratory in Stellenbosch to identify this specific herpes virus. Subsequently this virus has been confirmed to be present in a wild African penguin chick, and therefore this discovery poses no health risk to the wild population.

Currently a total of 340 birds are blues and their weight and overall progress are very good. This group of birds is being fed twice daily and most of them are being forced to swim 2 – 3 times per day. There are still 30 chicks which receive treatment and another 30 which are growing their plumage after featherloss. We have not diagnosed avian malaria on any of the blood smears from birds currently being reared. Approximately 150 birds have reached release criteria but have not been released due to the ILT virus diagnostic work.



Photo: Laurie Macha/Mystic Aquarium



Photo: Trevor Samson/IFAW

## Tracking devices:

*One of the postulated causes for the recent decrease in the population of African Penguins *Spheniscus demersus* in South Africa is a spatial mismatch between the breeding localities in the Western Cape and the local availability of small pelagic fish (Crawford et al. 2008), following the displacement of stocks to the east (Barange et al. 1999; Roy et al. 2007; Coetzee et al. 2008).*

The Chick Bolstering Project partners and organizations from the international African penguin community have provided funding for a proposed study to gain insights into the movements of fledglings in relation to prey availability. The project, under leadership of Dr. Richard Sherley (post-doc fellow with the University of Cape Town), is permit-dependent, and will involve attaching tracking devices to several chicks currently at SANCCOB prior to their release in order to monitor their movements.

## Support:

The Chick Bolstering Project partners would like to thank the following organizations and individuals who have generously supported the project in 2010:

Bristol Zoo	Zoo Leipzig	Enebnis Hannover
Zoo Basel	Living Coasts	DierenPark Amersfoort
Alwetter Zoo	Burgers Zoo	Zoom Mondo Animali
Zoo La Palmyre	IFAW	Mystic Aquarium
National Aviary	Memphis Zoo	Disney Rapid Relief
SeaWorld Animal Crisis Fund	Georgia Aquarium	Wallace Global Fund
Little Rock Zoo	Steinhardt Aquarium	Fort Wayne Kid's Zoo
Leiden Conservation Fund	Toledo Zoo	LePal Zoo

