

First Tristan penguins released from 'rehab'

Title

The first 24 penguins of more than 3,600 admitted to the “rehab centre” on Tristan da Cunha after the oil spill around Nightingale Island have been released back to sea. “The penguins were selected from the strongest ones, with no visible oil on their outer plumage,” reports Trevor Glass Tristan da Cunha Conservation Officer. “Of the many tested to see if they were ready for release, only 24 had perfectly waterproof plumage.”

“It was an emotional moment to see these penguins released from captivity and walk into the sea and then swim off among the waves,” said Katrine Herian, the RSPB Project Officer on Tristan da Cunha. “The Tristan islanders are putting hundreds of hours of their time into saving the oiled penguins and we hope these are the first of many to be released”.

Image not found

[1000s of penguins need life-saving treatment](#) (Sean Burns/TDC)

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On arrival to the rehab centre the oiled penguins are stabilised and kept indoors, after which the fittest ones are moved to an outside pen. From here the cleanest and strongest ones are moved to the island’s swimming pool, which is refilled daily with fresh, unchlorinated water. So far, 3,662 oiled penguins have been admitted to the rehab centre. 373 have died since the first batch of 500 were admitted on 23 March. About 25% of the penguins at the centre are currently in the release pool.

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[walking back on the wild side](#) (Katrine Herian/The RSPB)

The first treated penguins walk back to their home (Katrine Herian/The RSPB)

But there are still many oiled penguins which require urgent washing. A team from SANCCOB (The Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds, an internationally recognised leader in seabird rehabilitation), is on its way, bringing the specialised equipment and materials needed for cleaning the penguins, but their arrival is being delayed by rough seas.

The rehab centre was set up after the cargo ship *M.S. Oliva* ran aground on Nightingale Island on March 16, spilling 800 tonnes of fuel oil into the sea at the heart of one of the most

important breeding colonies of the Northern Rockhopper *Eudyptes moseleyi*. Nightingale, Tristan and Inaccessible islands hold around half the population of this globally Endangered

species.



The RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) have started the Nightingale

Island disaster fighting fund. Your donation will be used to help the penguins and other wildlife affected by the oil. Your support will also be used to fund follow-up monitoring and to assess the full impact of this disaster.