Title

Tristan da Cunha Wednesday 6th April, 2011: After seven days at sea, a five-member specialist team has arrived on Tristran da Cunha to lend their expertise to cleaning the thousands of Northern Rockhopper Penguins affected by the oil spill which followed the grounding of cargo ship MS *Oliva* on Nightingale Island. After a day?s delay caused by rough weather, the team from SANCCOB (the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds) were able to get ashore, and the equipment and materials they had brought with them were offloaded. The materials include vitamin supplements and medicines, which are already being put to use in the rehab centre set up by the Tristan islanders

Marlei Martins gives training on penguin care
(Katrine Herian/RSPB)

The SANCCOB team met many of the islanders involved in the rehab operation as they began their daily shift ?tubing? and feeding the penguins. (When penguins first arrive on Tristan they are dehydrated, so are given electrolyte solution with a tube and syringe.) They were impressed with the set-up at the rehab centre, and praised the islanders? efforts under difficult conditions and with very limited resources. Today work began on installing specialist equipment at the wash-bay facility, which will be housed in two government containers close to the rehab shed. Here hot water geysers will be installed to remove the heavy bunker oil from the penguins, which will then be moved to a drying room equipped with infrared lights. Outside, large tanks will collect and separate the waste-oil/solids and grey water from the washing process. SANCCOB logistics manager Mariëtte Hopley reported that the washing facility would be up and running on Friday, when training would begin for islanders in the washing of penguins. Working closely with the island rehab manager Dereck Rogers, the SANCCOB team separated penguins by ?habitus? (physical type and condition). The rehab shed was cleaned out and disinfected, before turning it into a dedicated unit for the very weakest penguins. By midday, the first boxes of frozen pilchards had come ashore and were being defrosted and fed to the stronger penguins, which are being prepared for washing over the weekend. Each penguin was fed one pilchard for the first day, as they need to get used to the change in diet from the local yellowtail and ?five fingers? fish fed to them thus far. Dr. Mark Whittington of ITOPF (a not-for-profit organisation established on behalf of the world's shipowners, to promote an effective response to marine chemical pollution incidents), and Mr. Jean-Luc Dardidon of Le Floch Depollution (a company specialising in dealing with the aftermath of oil spills), visited Middle and Nightingale Islands to assess the residual oil remaining in the bays and on the rocks. A plan will shortly be formalised to deal with the remaining oil, and to prevent further impact on the penguin and bird colonies.

Donate online

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.