

Tristan Islanders rally to save oiled penguins

Title

Hundreds of oil-soaked rockhopper penguins have now been put into rehab by Tristan Islanders facing a race against the clock to help save the endangered species (see images attached).



An oiled penguin is brought into the rehabilitation centre

But those assessing the impact of the disaster believe more than 10,000 birds could have been affected. Local conservationists, volunteers and now experts from the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds have been working tirelessly to help the threatened birds. Almost 500 penguins are already in a rehab shed where a team has begun efforts to stabilise them with fluid, vitamins and charcoal to absorb ingested oil. Another 500 penguins arrived on a rescue boat late last night and a further 500 are awaiting transport to Tristan for the same treatment. Katrine Herian, who works for the RSPB on the island, says: 'The priority is to get food into the birds as they are very hungry. We are trying locally caught fish and some are starting to take small half inch squares of the food.' 'We will do all we can to clean up as many penguins as possible after this disaster.' A local barge went out specifically to catch fish for the penguins, which was filleted and fed to the oiled birds. Washing of the birds will be started once they are stabilised and heaters or infrared bulbs are available to keep them warm afterwards. There is a high risk of pneumonia developing if they

are cold. The swimming pool on Tristan has been closed for bathing and is being drained of chlorinated water to be partially refilled and used for birds that are not as badly oiled as others. The crew of the Oliva, which is still ashore on Tristan, are helping out by building a facility for the birds. Sarah Sanders from the RSPB's International Division says: "We still can't believe this has happened and suspect that the full impacts of the oil spill will still be coming to light in weeks to come. "Unlike previous spills of this size, it didn't happen way out to sea and gradually approach such a vital conservation area. It struck right at the heart of the penguin colony and it's devastating to them." Nightingale island includes nearly half of the world population of northern rockhopper penguin, one of the world's most threatened species of penguin. One salvage tug from Cape Town has now arrived on the island and it is hoped a decision will be made quickly to send a second ship shortly. **Anyone wanting to donate money to help support the Tristan da Cunha community respond to the environmental disaster can join the UK-based Tristan da Cunha Association which exists to support the island <http://www.tristandc.com/newsmsoliva.php>**