

Wash and dry for rockhoppers at rehab centre

Title

The first rockhopper penguins to be washed at the newly erected wash-bay facility were drying off under infrared lights Saturday night. This was a rewarding moment for Rehab Manager Dereck Rogers, who has been closely involved with the care of the penguins from the moment the first oiled penguins were brought back to Tristan more than two weeks ago. He was elated at being able to hold a cleanly washed penguin.

The past few days have seen the whole island working together to ensure the expert support from staff from SANCCOB have everything they need to erect the wash-bay facility, post-wash pens and pools. The island plumbers, electricians, carpenters have all been on standby to assist with the operation, as well as plant operators for moving equipment and materials. SANCCOB have installed three large hot water geysers in the wash-bay to heat the water for washing, as well as hundreds of metres of piping and cable to link in to the island's water and electrical supplies.

This morning the washing of oiled penguins got well under way as the first 'washing-team' comprised of islanders received training from SANCCOB's Venessa Strauss. The washing-team work in pairs and island Administrator Sean Burns watched with interest as the first pair were taken through the thirty minute process. This entails spraying a fine mist of de-greaser (breaks down the oil/s as a pre-wash application), over the feathers of the penguin while carefully protecting the bird's eyes. The penguins are then washed in a warm bath of biodegradable soap and anti-septic solution, gently working the feathers from the base of the penguin up. After a second wash with the soap and a gentle clean around the eyes with a toothbrush, penguins are taken to a rinsing bay. SANCCOB's Jennie Bancroft showed islanders how to rinse the penguins' feathers, especially how to ensure that the rinsing water is not ingested by the penguins. A high-pressure shower head is used in order to fluff up the feathers. After a hydration treatment of fluid with electrolytes and glucose is given orally to the penguins, they are washed, tagged and put in a recovery pen under infrared lamps for warmth while they dry off. They are later moved to small clean pens which will each have access to a swimming pool where there are encouraged to swim.

Sixty-four penguins were washed today but SANCCOB's vet Tertius Gous, said they were aiming to wash up to a hundred a day once the washing-team are in full swing. Meanwhile at the holding pens for oiled penguins the feeding teams were hard at work trying to satisfy the hunger of the many penguins waiting to be washed. Pilchards are being fed to the penguins at the village swimming pool and in the outside pens to build up their strength before undergoing

the washing process. Some of the more lightly oiled penguins at the swimming pool are being 'swum' every day after which their waterproofing is tested. As soon as these penguins satisfy the release criteria of effective waterproofing and sufficient weight, further penguins will be released. To date 3662 penguins have been admitted to the centre, 1577 have died. The first 69 to be washed will hopefully be able to join the 24 individuals so far released back to wild.



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.