

## TRISTAN PENGUINS APPEAL 2011

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### Race to save oiled penguins after tanker strikes Tristan da Cunha

Mon, Mar 21, 2011



An urgent clean up operation is underway to save many oiled penguins.  
Copyright Trevor Glass.

A grounded cargo vessel has been wrecked on Nightingale Island – part of the Tristan da Cunha UK overseas territory in the South Atlantic – and an oil spill now threatens wildlife, including nearly half of the world population of Northern Rockhopper Penguin; classified as Endangered by BirdLife International on the IUCN Red List. Hundreds of oiled penguins have already been seen coming ashore.

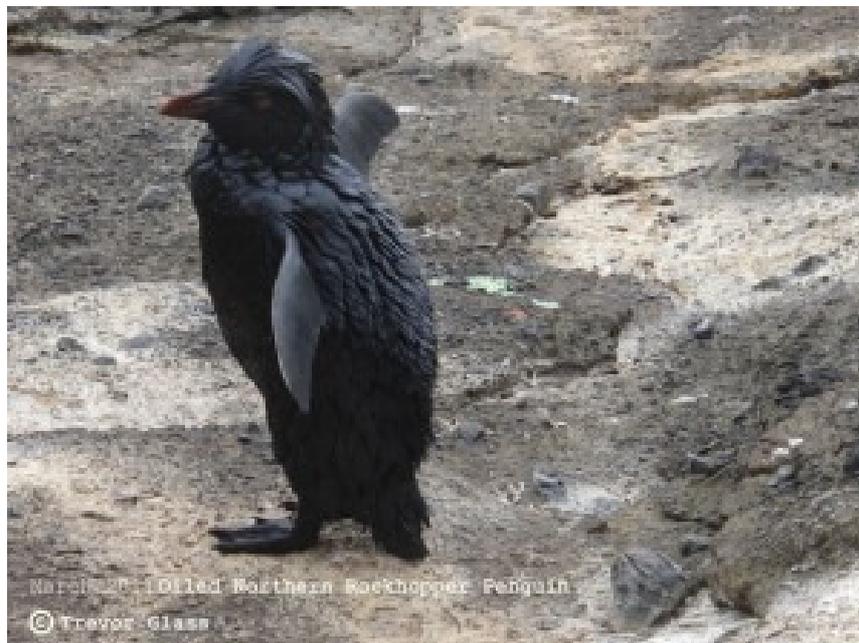


An oil slick has spread to 8 miles (c. 13 km) offshore.  
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The concerns of the Tristan Islanders, the Tristan Association and the RSPB who work on the islands, are not only for the oil spill but also the risk of any rats on the MS Oliva cargo vessel colonising the island, potentially placing the island's internationally-important seabird colonies in immense jeopardy.

The fuel oil and cargo of 1,500 tonnes of heavy crude oil is already leaking into the sea, Oil now surrounds Nightingale Island and extends in to a slick 8 miles offshore from the wreck. The slick poses a major hazard to the island's tens of thousands of pairs of penguin as well as the economically-important rock lobster fishery.

The Tristan Conservation Department – which rapidly deployed nine people to the island – has already placed baited rodent traps on the shore in the vicinity of Spinner's Point, the headland on the north-west of the island where the bulk carrier has grounded.



Hundreds of oiled penguins have been found.  
Copyright Trevor Glass.

A salvage tug is currently en-route from Cape Town with an experienced crew and environmental experts but she is not due to arrive at the island until Monday. The ship has already broken in two, but all of the 22-strong crew are safe. As the situation is no longer a salvage operation, the Tristan authorities understand that the vessel's operators and insurers are investigating chartering a second vessel to assist with cleaning up the pollution and oiled seabirds.

Richard Cuthbert is an RSPB research biologist who has visited Nightingale Island. He said: "How a modern and fully-laden cargo vessel can sail straight into an island beggars belief. The consequences of this wreck could be potentially disastrous for wildlife and the fishery-based economy of these remote islands. The Tristan da Cunha islands, especially Nightingale and adjacent Middle Island, hold million of nesting seabirds as well as four out of every ten of the world population of the globally endangered Northern Rockhopper Penguin. Over 200,000 penguins are currently on the islands and these birds will be heavily impacted by leaking oil."



More than 40% of Northern Rockhopper Penguins are currently on these islands.  
Copyright Richard Cuthbert.

“If the vessels happens to be harbouring rats and they get ashore, then a twin environmental catastrophe could arise. Nightingale is one of two large islands in the Tristan da Cunha group that are rodent free. If rats gain a foothold their impact would be devastating. Fortunately, the Tristan da Cunha Conservation Department has already done a brilliant job in placing rodent traps in the vicinity of the wreck, with the hope these will intercept any rats getting ashore.”

Trevor Glass, the Tristan Conservation Officer, has been working around the clock since the incident occurred early on Wednesday morning. Returning from an emergency assessment visit, he said: “The scene at Nightingale is dreadful as there is an oil slick encircling the island. The Tristan Conservation Team are doing all they can to clean up the penguins that are currently coming ashore. It is a disaster!”

For updates please visit the Tristan Association website:

<http://www.tristandc.com/newsmsoliva.php>

## Tristan Islanders rally to save oiled penguins

Fri, Mar 25, 2011



A priority has been to get food into the birds as they are very hungry  
Copyright Katrine Herian/The RSPB

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  
Copyright Katrine Herian/The RSPB

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.

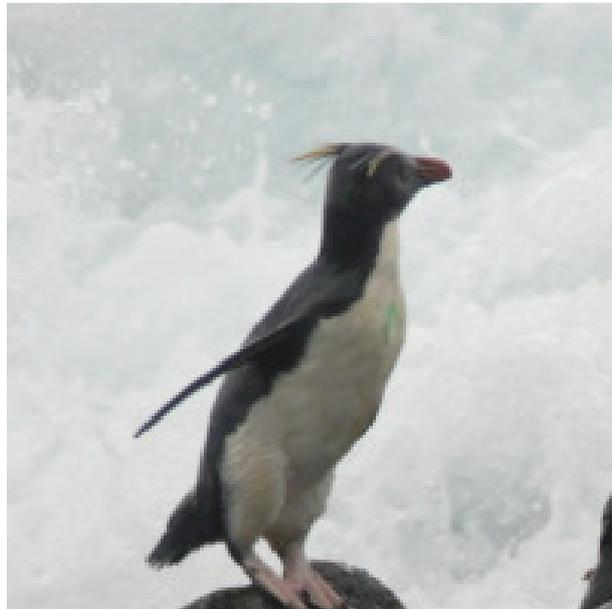
One salvage tug from Cape Town has now arrived on the island and it is hoped a decision will be made quickly to send a second ship shortly.

**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>**

## First Tristan penguins released from ‘rehab’

Tue, Apr 5, 2011



3,662 oiled penguins have been admitted to the rehab centre.  
Copyright Katrine Herian/The RSPB)

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”.



Thousands of penguins need life-saving treatment.  
Copyright Sean Burns/TDC

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.



The first treated penguins walk back to their home.  
Copyright 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.**