

Tribute to the *Treasure* ringers

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The sinking of the *Treasure* on 23 June 2000 resulted in an oil spill that affected about 40 000 African Penguins (Crawford *et al.* 2000). Thanks to the efforts of many ringers who responded to requests for help, about half of these penguins were ringed. As a result it will be possible to assess the impact of the spill on the penguins: to determine to what extent the birds which were oiled, cleaned and released have survived, moulted and bred and to compare this to the survival, moulting and breeding of the birds which were not oiled but were trucked to Port Elizabeth and released there to make their own way back to Robben and Dassen Islands.

RINGERS

Dieter Oschadleus, Les Underhill, Ross Wanless, Jan Hofmeyr, Gordon Scholtz and Bob Ellis helped to ring penguins at the Sea Point Aquarium where unoiled birds from Robben Island were kept before removal to Port Elizabeth. Les also took ringing teams to Dassen Island to ring about 1000 of the 13 500 unoiled penguins to be evacuated to Port Elizabeth.

Oiled penguins were housed and cared for at SANCCOB (Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds) in Milnerton and at a warehouse in Salt River. Here the birds were ringed by four American biologists who had volunteered to help: Michelle Hester, Diana Humple, Josh Adams and Hannahrose Nevins (Fig. 1). They spent 10 days ringing cleaned penguins all day, every day! They were helped by Rosalind Jessop and Peter Collins from Australia, whom Rob Crawford had invited over. Toby Collett from England also helped. More local ringers joined in, including Philip Coetzee

while Peter Thornton and Murrie Slotar from Johannesburg flew to Cape Town at their own expense to help for a week. Many more people helped with the ringing including ADU staff like Doug Harebottle and René Navarro. There will be people who helped who are not listed here, as we were not present at all ringing sessions.

RINGS

At the time of the sinking of the *Treasure* there were only 3000 rings in stock at SAFRING and MCM (Marine and Coastal Management) had another 1000, and rings had to be obtained urgently. A local company, Schuurman Metal Pressings, was commissioned to manufacture penguin rings as it would take too long to obtain more rings from SAFRING's usual suppliers. After about two weeks the first batch of rings was ready. The rings were individually cut, sent to Johannesburg for the laser generated numbering, and sent to Bellville for tumbling (to smooth the edges). The rings were ready by the time the American biologists arrived and ringing could continue without interruption.

DATA CAPTURE

Mary Faragher and Rowan Dunne have helped with the enormous task of computerising the data.

RESIGHTINGS

The penguins have been monitored since the first birds were released. To give an indication of the value of the resighting data, the Dassen Island data for the period 12 July to

10 December 2000 is summarised here. During this period there were 3674 resightings of penguins.

Of the 13 500 oiled birds evacuated from Dassen Island to Cape Recife, Port Elizabeth, over the period 2–4 July, 1130 were banded. By 10 December 478 (42%) of these banded birds had been resighted on Dassen Island. The number of penguins recorded breeding since their return to the island was 205. One bird, released at Cape Recife on 4 July, was resighted on House Bay beach, Dassen Island, on 14 July. This fastest bird, S22061, was an *Apollo Sea* rehabilitee. Two birds, released at Cape Recife on 3 July, were also resighted on 14 July. Nine birds released on 4 July, and one bird released on 5 July, were resighted on 16 July.

Of 2744 oiled adults removed from Dassen Island for cleaning, 644 (24%) had been resighted by 10 December. The number of cleaned birds recorded breeding was 17 and 142 were recorded during moult. Of 772

oiled juveniles removed for cleaning, 191 (25%) had been resighted and 76 had been recorded during moult.

The first cleaned bird was recorded back on Dassen Island on 30 July 2000; at this stage we do not know the date of release from SANCCOB. Remarkably, there has only been this single recovery of a cleaned bird on Dassen Island during the period up to 10 December 2000.

REFERENCE

- Crawford, R.J.M., Davis, S.A., Harding, R.T., Jackson, L.F., Leshoro, T.M., Meyer, M.A., Randall, R.M., Underhill, L.G., Upfold, L., van Dalsen, A.P., Van der Merwe, E., Whittington, P.A., Williams, A.J. & Wolfaardt, A.C. 2000. Initial impact of the *Treasure* oil spill on seabirds off western South Africa. *S. Afr. J. mar. Sci.* 22: 157–176.

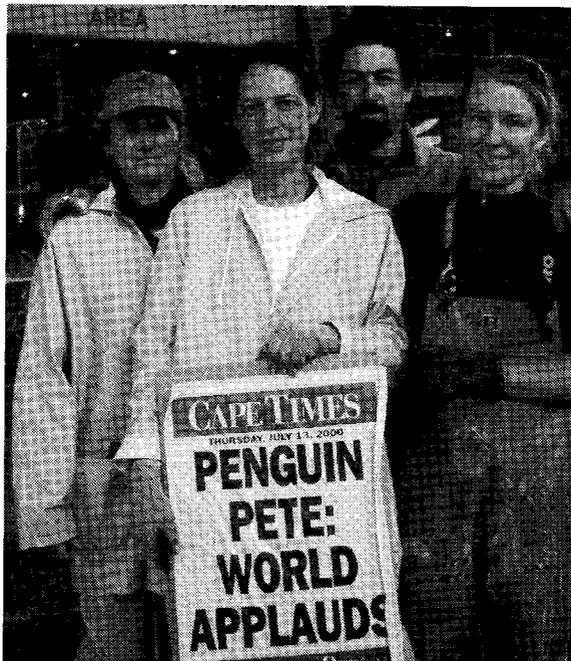


Fig. 1. The four American banders!