



SANCCOB™
saves seabirds



Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds

Report to Stichting Cari (Cari Foundation): Rescue, rehabilitate, release, research and educate

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Introduction

It is a pleasure to share with you SANCCOB's progress for the year. SANCCOB received a total amount of R23 920.62 from Stichting Cari on the 5th of February 2019 – thank you so much! We used the funds in the Research Programme and the Ranger Support Project.

1.1 New SANCCOB Penguin and Seabird Ranger appointed on Bird Island

In the year under review, the Penguin and Seabird Ranger Project supported rangers at four important African penguin breeding colonies. Penguin and Seabird Rangers were stationed at the Simon's Town, Stony Point, Robben Island¹ and Bird and St Croix islands breeding colonies, and rescued ill, injured, abandoned, oiled and abandoned penguins as well as other seabirds. The rangers' skill and dedication have saved thousands of endangered African penguins who would not otherwise have survived. Before the birds get to SANCCOB, the rangers were responsible for stabilising them and making sure they were safely transported to one of our centres. The chicks were admitted to either the SANCCOB centre in the Western Cape or to the SANCCOB Centre in the Eastern Cape. In 2019 alone we admitted 2 560 sea and coastal birds to both our centres, of which 945 were African penguins. *Please refer to addendum i for a detailed overview of the number of sea and coastal birds admitted during 2019.*

The rangers were also instrumental in passing on valuable information to our research team by reporting sightings of microchipped penguins, which gave us insights into the movement and behaviour of the birds. Rangers further ensured that the natural habitat was looked after, and that there was continuous monitoring of predators in and near colonies so that rehabilitated penguins could be released safely in a supportive environment.

Sadly, Stony Point's Penguin and Seabird Ranger Marcelo October, passed away on 27 February 2019 and was laid to rest in March. We will always treasure our memories of this passionate and caring man, who made his impact as a Penguin and Seabird Ranger at the Stony Point penguin colony in Betty's Bay. In May 2019, Gavin Petersen was appointed as the new ranger in Stony Point and he has been instrumental in a coordinated rescue of African penguin chicks in October, where SANCCOB assisted CapeNature in the removal of chicks from the colony due to a large percentage of parent penguins that started their moult.

Last year's highlights also included the appointment of an Addo Elephant National Park Marine Protected Area (MPA) Seabird Monitor on Bird and St Croix islands (In the Addo Elephant National Park Marine Protected Area) after South African National Parks (SANParks) and SANCCOB successfully raised funds for this position. SANCCOB now deploys a total of eight conservation staff in colonies that are under the protection of conservation authorities.

The Seabird Monitor appointment feeds directly into the objectives of the Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) for the African penguin, gazetted at government level. The South African Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF), with assistance from SANCCOB and other conservation partners, compiled the 2nd Biodiversity Management Plan for the African penguin, and this has been gazetted – public comments are currently being reviewed by DEFF.

1.2 Chick Bolstering Project

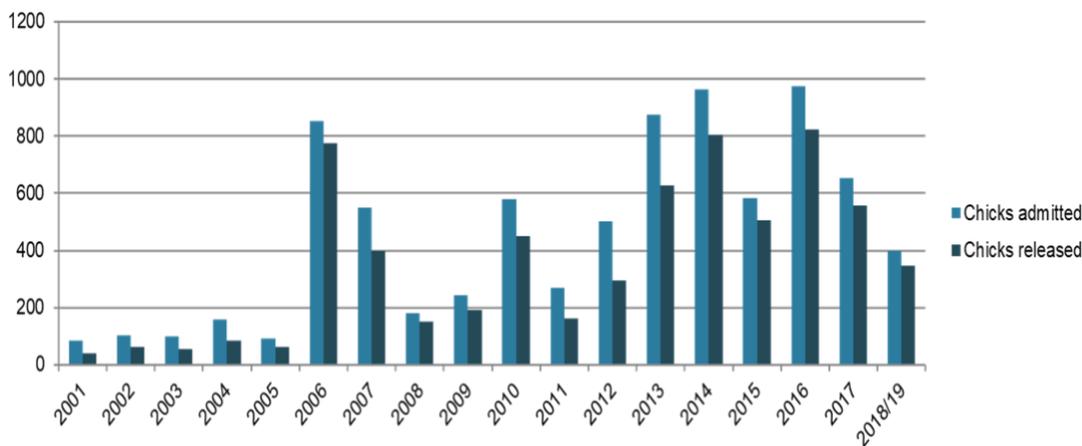
In 2019, both of SANCCOB's centres in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth admitted a total of 348 African penguin chicks. Most admissions from 22 October to 31 December were abandoned African penguin chicks as African penguins that breed late in the year, start their moult this time of the year. As African penguin parents in moult are no longer able to hunt for their chicks, they leave their chicks behind. A total of 154 were admitted to the

¹ Robben Island is South Africa's largest coastal island with a penguin population. Robben Island was declared a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in April 2019.

centre in Cape Town, with a preliminary release rate of 78%. A total of 14 chicks are still in our care at the centre. When these chicks are successfully rehabilitated and released, the release rate will go up to 87%.

Most chicks were rescued from the mainland breeding colonies at Stony Point (Betty’s Bay), and released at one of Cape Town’s mainland colonies (Stony Point or Simon’s Town) or at the Cape Recife Nature Reserve in Port Elizabeth.

Although we admitted a low number of African penguin chicks due to fishing pressures and ocean changes caused by climate change, we are still seeing the same percentage of birds (overall and chicks) - **around 1% of the population**. Dr. Katta Ludynia, SANCCOB Research Manager, explains: “Our low numbers are definitely linked to the fact that there are no more penguins out there that could be sent to us. As a percentage of the numbers of adults breeding, we have always seen between 0.67 and 0.8% of chicks, similar to previous years.”



SANCCOB’s impact: From 2001 – 2018, SANCCOB rehabilitated and released 6 368 fledged chicks back to the wild; an average of 374 African penguins per year. The graph will be updated with the 2019- figure in April 2020

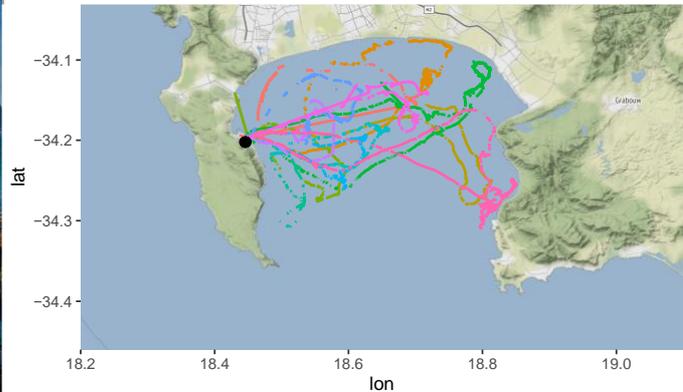
1.3 Electronic loggers to track penguins in Simon’s Town

In collaboration with Alistair McInnes (BirdLife SA) and Alison Kock (SANParks), SANCCOB commenced a very exciting study in Simon’s Town in May to understand which areas penguins are using for feeding during the chick rearing period. Birds from all the other main breeding colonies had been tracked in the last 15 years, but less was known about foraging areas for penguins in False Bay.

In May and June, a total of 13 breeding African penguins were fitted with electronic loggers that recorded their GPS locations and dive depths, and one bird was equipped with a camera so that video footage could be recorded of its behaviour at sea. The birds that were studied seemed to be staying inside False Bay, but were travelling further along the False Bay coast (towards Gordon’s Bay) than was seen in an initial study conducted by SANCCOB’s Chairperson, Dr. Sam Petersen, in 2003. This information is crucial for motivating the authorities to extend our Marine Protected Areas.



Dr. Nola Parsons trains Dr. Lauren Waller in transpondering African penguins at the Stony Point colony in Betty's Bay, and Gavin Petersen, SANCCOB's new Penguin and Seabird Ranger assists.



Map: Tracks of African penguins equipped with GPS loggers in Simon's Town in May and June 2019

1.4 Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response to oil spill in Algoa Bay

In July 2019, an oil spill occurred in Algoa Bay as a result of an accident during an offshore ship-to-ship bunkering operation between a SA Marine Fuels ship and a vessel in Algoa Bay. Birds were rescued by SANParks' rangers from Bird and St Croix as well as other islands in Algoa Bay, and admitted and washed at the newly created washing station at the SANCCOB centre in Port Elizabeth.

As Christian Triay, SANCCOB's Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response Manager, notes: "No environmental risk assessment has been conducted for the bunkering operations that have led to two oil spills since off-shore bunkering was permitted in 2016. This despite the fact that the bay is a marine biodiversity hotspot, and its seabird breeding islands fall within the recently declared Addo National Park Marine Protected Area MPA." SANCCOB will keep working to ensure that both the oil industry and government authorities take the appropriate preparedness action, that contingency plans are in place, and that there is regular engagement with all stakeholders such as the South African Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (previously known as DEA, now called DEFF) and the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA).

The good news after this catastrophic incident in July is that all the surviving birds have been released back into the wild and that the responsible vessel's Protection and Indemnity team agreed to reimburse SANCCOB for all reasonable oiled wildlife response costs.

The South African *Daily Maverick* published an interesting article on 23 January 2020. The article emphasises that industrial shipping activity in addition to over-fishing, pollution and an increase in bunkering are all contributing to the biggest drop in African penguin numbers seen in the bay (since monitoring began in the 1980s). Please find below a link to the article:

www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-01-23-shocking-drop-in-number-of-african-penguin-numbers-for-algoa-bay/



Top left: More than 100 African penguins were oiled in a bunkering accident in Algoa Bay, affecting marine wildlife in the Addo Elephant National Park Marine Protected Area. Left below: Port Elizabeth rehabilitator Zamokuhle Lazola and Nicky Stander (Rehabilitation Manager) wash an oiled African penguin. Right: Oiled African penguins waiting to be washed by the rehabilitation team.

1.5 Advocacy efforts for no-fishing zones around breeding colonies

Given the continued rate of decline of the African penguin, the South African Department of Environmental Affairs, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) and other stakeholders drafted the Biodiversity Management Plan for African penguins (BMP), which was gazetted in 2013. The 2nd Biodiversity Management Plan for the African penguin (gazetted in 2019), proposes new actions to conserve the species and halt the decline of the African penguin within the next five-year timeframe. For instance, it proposes plans to limit fishing around penguin breeding colonies, and introduces zones for shipping and bunkering.

Together with other marine scientist and conservation organisations², SANCCOB also submitted a document to the new Minister of DEFF, Barbara Creecy, to urge her to consider the science relating to the island fishing closures, appealing to her to continue with the fishing closure experiment given the current perilous state of the African penguin.

Robben Island and Dassen Island in the Western Cape, as well as Bird Island and St Croix Island³ in the Eastern Cape have been part of a fishing closure experiment run by DEFF over the last decade⁴. When no-fishing zones were in place around these islands, the body condition and survival of African penguin chicks improved at some islands, so no fishing around breeding colonies will, most likely, have a long-term positive effect on the population trends of the species.

² This document was drafted by seabird scientists, and endorsed by the primary non-profit organisations and academic institutions involved in seabird research and conservation in South Africa, namely SANCCOB, BirdLife SA, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) SA, University of Cape Town (UCT), Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU).

³ The two latter islands harbour the largest population of African penguins. SANCCOB's researchers have been actively involved in the research during the experiment and continue to promote spatial fishing restrictions through continuous research as well as through direct feedback into government working groups.

⁴ Researchers tested bans on forage fish from 20 km around the breeding islands, and this showed the benefit of no-fishing zones or no-take zones around colonies (Pichegru *et al.*, 2010; Sherley *et al.*, 2015; 2017)

2. Financial report

All funds (a total of R23 920.62) were used in 2019 – an amount of R 11 960.32 was used for research; and R11 960.32 for the Ranger project at the breeding colonies. Your donation contributed to the rescue of African penguin chicks at four important breeding colonies in South Africa and the world (Stony Point penguin colony; Simon’s Town penguin colony and the breeding colony on Robben Island) and supported research activities focused on the understanding of penguins’ foraging behaviour and survival linked to food availability.

3. Looking forward: working on the cause (not symptoms) and long-term goals.

While it is a pleasure to share with you SANCCOB’s challenges and successes for this year, unfortunately the outlook for African penguins is increasingly bleak. The new data from DEFF, which was officially shared with us in September, shows that fewer than 20 000 breeding pairs remained in 2019. Of those, only approximately 13 300 breeding pairs were recorded in South Africa, compared to last year’s total of 15 200. Despite these dwindling numbers, we remain grateful for your partnership, which has been invaluable in slowing the decline.

There are many factors that can be attributed to the decline of the African penguin population, however the single most important threat – the depletion of fish – needs further addressing by a range of conservation, rehabilitation and government partners we are to save the endangered African penguin from extinction. However, given the slow progress made in this regard (as it involves diplomacy and gentle pressure on responsible government institutions), the rescue and hand-rearing of African penguin chicks and the rescue of abandoned eggs remain an immediate important conservation measure for this charismatic bird. We hope to keep on working in partnership with you in 2020/2021!



A SANCCOB volunteer reaches for a sardine to feed an African penguin.

Addendum i: Admitted sea and coastal birds from 1 January 2019 up to 31 December 2019

Species	IUCN Status	Table View	Port Elizabeth	Total
African penguin	Endangered	608	337	945
Cape gannet	Endangered	101	79	180
Hartlaubs gull	Least Concern	308	1	309
Grey headed gull	Least Concern		2	2
Bank cormorant	Endangered	2		2
Reed cormorant	Not assessed	5	11	16
White breasted cormorant	Least Concern	4	1	5
Crowned cormorant	Near threatened	85		85
Cape cormorant	Endangered	100	25	125
Kelp gull	Least Concern	207	32	239
Greater Flamingo	Least Concern	3		3
Lesser Flamingo	Near threatened	4 (+560) from Flamingo rescue	3	567
Grey heron	Least Concern	4		4
Black headed heron	Least Concern		1	1
Goliath heron	Least Concern		1	1
Southern Rockhopper	Vulnerable	4		4
King penguin	Least Concern	1		1
African black oystercatcher	Near threatened	5	2	7
Sooty shearwater	Near threatened	3	2	5
Corry's shearwater	Least Concern		1	1
Northern giant petrel	Least Concern	5	1	6
Southern giant petrel	Least Concern	2	1	3
Red tailed tropic bird	Least Concern	1		1
Kitlitz plover	Least Concern	3		3
Blacksmith lapwing	Least Concern	1		1
Pied avocet	Least Concern	3		3
Great white pelican	Least Concern	3		3
Leaches storm petrel	Vulnerable	1		1
Parasitic jaeger	Least Concern	1		1
White chinned petrel	Vulnerable	1		1
Sub antarctic skua	Least Concern	2	1	3
Red knobbed coot	Least Concern	1		1
Indian yellow nosed albatross	Endangered	1		1
Grey headed albatross	Endangered		1	1
African darter	Near threatened	1		1
Egyption goose	Least Concern	6		6
Swift tern	Least Concern	10	1	11
Sandwich tern	Least Concern	2		2
Antarctic tern	Least Concern	1		1

Common tern	Least Concern	3		3
Tern species			3	3
Cattle egret	Least Concern		2	2

Thank you for your ongoing support of SANCCOB.