



MEDIA RELEASE

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Release of African Penguins in Plettenberg Bay on World Oceans Day

Plettenberg Bay, 29 May. World Oceans Day, observed annually on 8 June, is a chance to remember and celebrate the vitally important role of oceans and the diverse life they support. This year the theme is “Our Oceans, Our Future”. This World Oceans Day, a group of NGOs has teamed up to help create a brighter future for the “Endangered” African Penguin.

Adult and juvenile penguins are often seen in the waters around Plettenberg Bay and are occasionally found on the beaches, injured, sick or moulting on the mainland where they are vulnerable to predation. Over the last four months, the Tenikwa Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre has admitted five penguins: two with injuries, one with avian malaria and the other two were moulting. The penguins have recovered well and have met the health, feather waterproofing and swimming requirements to be released.

They will be released at Lookout Beach in Plettenberg Bay at 09h00 on 8 June. The release is a collaboration between BirdLife South Africa, Tenikwa Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre, the Nature’s Valley Trust, BirdLife Plettenberg Bay and CapeNature. Members of the public are encouraged to come experience the moment, and can meet the team near the Lemongrass parking area.

There is however a greater purpose behind releasing penguins in Plett. Penguins rehabilitated at Tenikwa Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre are usually transported to existing penguin colonies to be released. BirdLife South Africa with the support of its partners is leading on an ambitious new plan to start a new mainland penguin breeding colony in Plettenberg Bay. It was decided that rehabilitated penguins should rather be released from Plettenberg Bay as a part of this process.

“Establishing new colonies for penguins along the south coast is a vital conservation tool because the distribution of the penguins’ favourite prey, sardine and anchovy, has shifted away from the West Coast, where many of the penguin colonies are, to the southern coast and Agulhas Bank” says Christina Hagen of BirdLife South Africa who is leading the project. “Because of a lack of breeding sites in the area, the penguins have been unable to adapt to this change. Plans for the Plettenberg Bay colony are still being formulated but information on this exciting conservation intervention can be expected soon” she explains. This exciting and innovative penguin conservation work is being funded by Pamela Isdell.

“This is an exciting project for Plett, and while there is still much more work to be done, releasing penguins here helps to raise awareness of the project and saves the penguins some of the stress of being transported long distances to other colonies” says Dr Mark Brown, Programme Director of the Nature’s Valley Trust.

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Notes for the editor:

African Penguins

1. African Penguins are under threat from a scarcity of food (driven by a shift in distribution of their prey and localised depletion from fishing around breeding colonies), oil spills, predation by seals and gulls and a lack of suitable breeding habitat.
2. The South African population has decreased from approximately 141 000 pairs in the 1950s to fewer than 19 000 pairs in 2015.
3. For more information visit: <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/seabird-conservation/african-penguin-conservation>
4. A national penguin release protocol, from admittance to release, has been followed for each of the five penguins.

The new colony project:

1. The project is a partnership between BirdLife South Africa, Nature’s Valley Trust, BirdLife Plettenberg Bay, with support from CapeNature and the Department of Environmental Affairs.
2. This project forms part of the conservation actions identified by the Biodiversity Management Plan for the African Penguin.
3. The colony will be protected from predators using a combination of fencing and scent deterrents. It will be established using a combination of social attraction techniques (decoys, sound recordings, and artificial burrows) and translocation of young penguins.
4. The other site under consideration is in the De Hoop Nature Reserve, at the site of a natural penguin colony establishment attempt.
5. More information about this project will be communicated in July 2017.
6. This penguin conservation work is funded by Pamela and Neville Isdell through the support of, amongst others, the “Pamela Isdell Fellow of Penguin Conservation).

World Oceans Day

1. The theme is Our Oceans, Our Future
2. For more information: <http://www.un.org/en/events/oceansday/>

BirdLife South Africa

1. BirdLife South Africa’s mission is to conserve birds, their habitats and biodiversity through scientifically-based programmes, through supporting the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources and by encouraging people to enjoy and value nature.
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