Rescue, Rehabilitation and Release of African Seabirds at SANCCOB

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Introduction

I completed a 3-month seabird rehabilitation internship at SANCCOB in Cape Town, South Africa. SANCCOB is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1968. Their mission is to rescue, rehabilitate and release injured, endangered, abandoned or ill seabirds in South Africa. They have two locations in Cape Town and Cape St. Francis. SANCCOB is well known for their work with the endangered African penguins as well as their excellent oiled wildlife response skills. They work with a variety of seabirds including cormorants, gulls, albatrosses and petrels.

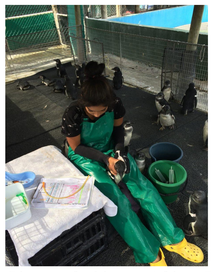


Figure 1. Picture of tubing an African Penguin to provide water for those that required medication

Activity

I completed a 3-month seabird rehabilitation internship where I was able to work with various seabirds. Some of the seabirds I worked with included African penguins, gulls, petrels, cormorants, darters and albatross. I learned to handle, feed, tube, admit, weigh, bleed, conduct physiotherapy and medicate the seabirds. As an intern I had the opportunity to supervise various pens and delegate the work that had to be done for different parts of the center. There were a total of 7 different pens dedicated to different seabirds and their level of injury or illness. The pens were the Indoor ICU, which included the most injured birds, the outdoor ICU was the injured birds that were healthier and could withstand being in outdoors, Pen 1 which had birds of flight such as gulls that were sick, Pen2 had smaller penguins and those that could not swim for more than a few minutes. Pen 3 contained the African penguins that could swim for an hour and Pen 10 was used for the chicks during chick season. There were also areas such as the Nursery, the Chick Rearing Unit and Home Pen which were taken care of by various rehabbers and 6 month volunteers. I also worked in the indoor and outdoor ICU unit and the chick pen during chick season. I tracked and recorded the fish intake, weight, feeding behaviors, and medication for birds that I took care of each day.



Figure 2. A few of the African Penguins swimming as part of their daily exercise to determine if they are fit to be released and withstand swimming in the wild.

Outcomes

During my co-op chick season occurred in which chicks that are abandoned by their parents while their parents molt and are unable to go into the water and gather food, were admitted into SANCCOB. From October through January, chicks were being admitted into SANCCOB so that they can be taken care of while their parents molt. Since October 20 279 abandoned chicks were admitted into SANCCOB. These chicks were kept in Pen 10, where they were fed, medicated and cleaned throughout the summer months until they are old enough and healthy enough to be released onto the beaches of Cape Town. These beaches include Boulders Beach and Betty's Bay. I was given the opportunity to attend a release where I had released 11 African Penguins on Boulders Beach that I had personally taken care of. Weekly, I was able to watch the birds that I had been taking care of move throughout the different pens and be able to be released and regarded as healthy and fit to live in the wild again. My co-op experience has made me more involved and passionate about animal conservation. Overall, I obtained an extensive amount of animal handling experience that I am able to use when working in research facilities or other rehab centers.



Figure 3. All of the African Penguins released were exploring Boulders Beach in Cape Town.

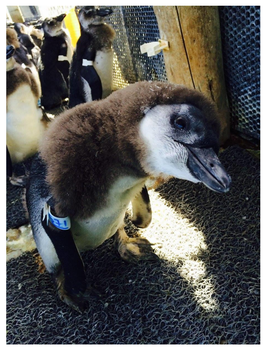


Figure 4. An African Penguin chick located in Pen 2 at SANCCOB.



Figure 5. A few of the African Penguins released out of the boxes and into the wild at Boulders Beach in Cape Town.



Figure 6. A few chicks that have been abandoned by their parents, rescued and transported from various beaches in Cape Town to SANCCOB.



Figure 7. A chick at the Chick Rearing Unit (CRU) at SANCCOB.

Reflection

During my time at SANCCOB I was able to become a leader while being exposed to new cultures and new ideas as I worked with a variety of international volunteers and rehabbers. As an intern, I had the responsibility of supervising various pens and one challenge I faced was having the ability to delegate responsibilities and tasks to people who come from different countries and speak a variety of languages. Being given the opportunity to handle and care for various animals in hopes of releasing them was very rewarding. Seeing the penguins I worked with daily being released onto the beaches of Cape Town was a memorable experience. It was great to be able to be taken seriously in a working environment. Being able to give back to the community and learn more about the conservation of wildlife first-hand while providing aid to various seabirds was a rewarding experience. Through this experience I have grown to love animals even more and I would like to be more involved in animal conservation efforts. At the end of this experience, I walked away with an abundance of animal handling experience, memories and amazing friendships. My co-op experience has shown me that I do love caring for others and that pursuing a career in the medical field or veterinary field would be an excellent fit for me.

Literature cited

"SANCCOB – Penguins, Rescue, Rehabilitation, Research Internships." SANCCOB – Penguins, Rescue, Rehabilitation, Research Internships. Web. 06 Feb. 2016

Acknowledgments

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For further information

Please contact *volunteers@sanccob.co.za*. For information on volunteer programs and internships. More information SANCCOB can be obtained at *www.sanccob.co.za*.