

## Save as Many Penguins As We Can



[http://w.bird-rescue.org/treasure\\_report\\_1.html](http://w.bird-rescue.org/treasure_report_1.html)

*In the following article, a volunteer animal rescue worker arrives at work to discover she is needed for a penguin rescue effort.*

As I wrapped my sweater around my waist and headed out the door for work, I had no idea what heartache today would bring. Entering my office where I work with a team of wildlife preservation experts, I saw the mayhem. My coworkers scurried around in a flurry of activity, with phones ringing and everyone speaking at once.

“Did you not get the call or even hear the news?”

My phone had been off and I’d left without listening to the news as I usually did.

“There is a van outside. Go quickly. We need you on the ground.”

I exited the office in a fog, catching pieces of what had just happened. Apparently, a ship names MV Treasure had sunk just off the coast and spilled over 1,300 tons of oil that was fatal to the already endangered African penguins. I watched the traffic moving slowly and realized the jam was partly due to so many people going to help. My eyes misted as I became aware of what happened, and my heart beat raced as it struck me that so many cared and set off to help as well.

When we arrived, the silence stunned us. We work with penguins regularly. They make loud, cacophonous noise non-stop in their day to day to lives. Total silence. Next, we saw them. Some were completely shiny black, drenched in poisonous oil. My impulse was to pull off my sweater and begin wiping them off.

We were brought into a make shift railway warehouse that had just gone up that morning as a rehabilitation center. Upon entering the room, I held back powerful nausea. The odors from the penguin excrement, people sweating, and fish they planned to feed them overwhelmed the room. One man had his arm in a sling with fresh blood visible on his bandages.

The traumatized penguins feel threatened. Not only did their world alter, but they cannot meet basic needs and many cannot even see because the oil has burned their eyes. They wobble and roll in the dense oil if they try to enter the water to catch food. One scratched, then attacked me this morning as I tried to clean if off. It’s jaws were so powerful, it lacerated right through my leather jacket.

After the briefing, we each stepped out with specific tasks. I observed the penguins wobbling and rolling in the dense oil in the black water, that formerly had been pristine blue. A huge, tin, circular make-shift pool held dozens of hurt penguins. I watched them trying to clean themselves off by licking themselves. The director told us to catch those first because ingesting the oil could kill them. As I restrained the penguin and tried to clean off the oil, it began to wing slap

me so the person next to me helped. Washing oil off took incredible muscle power, given how stubbornly sticky it is. Even with exhausting scrubbing, it took over an hour to wash each bird and even then the birds were not completely clean. The directors then encouraged us to switch tasks and move to the feeding area. This work was no less exhausting. The penguins resisted eating dead sardines as they were used to catching live ones. It took several of us to hold one bird still, pull open its mouth and cram the needed nutrition into them.

By nightfall, we had made incredible progress. Again, I felt overwhelmed with sentiment as I watch the sea of fatigued workers and volunteers leaving the area, and many staying behind to work through the night. I later learned there were over 45,000 volunteers. In the end after twelve weeks, the news that thousands of endangered penguins had been saved reached us. The mobilization and coordination of the effort was astounding. While tragic, at least the experienced leadership of the effort succeeded in saving so many that would have otherwise died.

### **Penguins Under Threat!**

Robben Island, South Africa, June 23, 2000

*A ship called MV Treasure just sank six miles off the coast of [South Africa](#). The ship carried 1,300 tons of [oil](#), which spilled into the ocean, threatening the [African penguins](#) there.*

The MV Treasure was a [Panamanian](#)-registered cargo ship transporting a load of 140,000 tons of iron ore from China to Brazil at the time of the incident. Due to ship issues, it crashed and spilled fuel oil into the Penguin filled ocean area. Deep-blue water and rocky beaches that had just been some of the most breath-takingly beautiful areas in the world were suddenly rendered into frightening, sticky messes.

Aside from causing the temporary closing of South Africa's ports and threats to species of [gannets](#), [cormorants](#), and [seals](#), MV Treasure's spill may be South Africa's worst environmental disaster, seriously threatening its population of African penguins. The worldwide population of African penguins is numbered at less than 180,000, and is declining. The Robben Island nature reserve, home to about 14,000 endangered adult African penguins and 6,000 chicks, was hit badly during their breeding season by the oil. Over 20,000 penguins have been oiled and approximately 2,000 have died so far. Luckily, the effort is ending and no more seem likely to die.

Different types of methods were used in the cleanup of the oil spill, two of which included workers loading [kelp](#) covered in oil into trucks and vacuuming up pools of oil with specially designed vacuums. In addition, [booms](#) were used to keep the oil from entering Cape Town Harbor. South African company Bio-Matrix was contracted to help clean up the oil slick that was polluting the penguins' habitats. The company used a Canadian product, also called Bio-Matrix, made of [sphagnum](#) moss properties, which are notable for their natural ability to soak up oil.

The African penguin rescue effort was one of the largest bird rescue missions undertaken thanks to its many volunteers and teams of professionals. The rescue effort consisted of washing and rehabilitating already-oiled birds and capturing non-oiled birds as a preemptive measure. The birds had to be washed gently with tooth brushes and warm water, taking an hour to clean each. Within ten days of the Treasure spill, 20,251 oiled African penguins were admitted into the rehabilitation center in Cape Town, and 90% of the oiled birds were rehabilitated and released. Another 19,500 non-oiled penguins were relocated successfully.

The rehabilitation effort was greatly funded by the [International Fund for Animal Welfare](#), which worked together with the local rehabilitation center, the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds ([SANCCOB](#)), and the [International Bird Rescue](#) Center (IBRRC), whose oiled wildlife team took action the same day the cargo ship sank. The rehabilitation process required over 130 international team members supervising over 45,000 volunteers who came with no experience at all, 400 tons of fish to feed the penguins, 7,000 tons of beach sand used in bird pens, and 302 25-litre containers of [detergent](#) to wash the oil off the penguins' feathers.

The hungry penguins were no longer able to catch their usual food, so they needed to be hand fed dead fish. Used to eating live sardines, they forcefully resisted. The workers had to restrain the penguins, hold open their jaws and push

food down the birds' throats to get them the nourishment they needed. This could take over an hour per penguin. Workers were not only exhausted, but harmed in the process.

Powerful wing slaps, sharp spines on tongues, strong jaws and razor-like beaks all make up the arsenal of tools penguins used to inflict wounds on those trying help, who they perceived as just further threats. These wounds caused great pain, tore through thick clothing and may last a lifetime. Seeing the penguins so frightening brought the volunteers to tears. Also taken aback by the stench of penguin dropping, rotting spilled fish, perspiration and vomit, the rescuers pushed on to help. When not fighting, the normally noisy birds sat in complete silence, even more anguishing to watch. The professional bird experts had to both save the penguins and counsel the volunteers who had never encountered such circumstances before.

Fortunately the bird experts showed great skill in their leadership. They raised up a make-shift warehouse in little time, then carefully organized the effort at break-pace speed. Every minute mattered. Everyone stood together. In the end, everyone saved the vast majority, over 90%, of the at risk endangered penguins.

### **“Endangered Penguins Caught in Oil Spill” Video Transcription**

Link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baTD3xwBo2M>

Nightingale Island in nearby Tristan da Cunha are some of the most remote islands in the world. Over a thousand miles in any direction from inhabitant lands. As such these are the most least polluted environments on earth. That was until last week when a ship sailing from Brazil crashed head line into the island and spilled over 800 tons of fuel oil into the sea. Nightingale Island is a vital breeding ground for the already endangered Northern Rockhopper Penguin and now the island's entire population is at risk. I arrived over a week after the incident had occurred and yet I was still one of the very first humans to see the full extent of this horrific event. I saw hundreds of Rockhopper penguins covered in sticky black fuel oil. Several of them were pruning themselves trying to get the oil off their feathers, and in the process ingesting the oil which is poisonous to the birds. Fortunately a relief crew arrived a few days ago from South Africa, but still there are only a dozen of them and they are confronting a tragedy that's far beyond the scope of a few hands. Luckily yesterday over 750 fuel covered penguins were collected and are in the process of being cleaned now. There is an added element of tragedy for the people of Tristin, a population of less than 300 who have always prided themselves on the pollution free state of their islands. I also noticed several baby fur seal pups born this last season with patches of oil on their fur and with obvious effects from the spill. Still it is the penguins who take priority since they are endangered. The remaining population has been penned in to prevent them from going back into the sea. This was such a difficult thing to witness and I hope I never have to see it again.

Digital Nomad: Nightingale Island Oil Spill. NGS/National Geographic Stock.

**Prompt: In a well-developed paragraph, describe the effects of the spill on the penguins and the rescue efforts that followed. Support your paragraph with information from all three sources.**