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EDITORS PLEASE NOTE: Picture opportunities are available on Thursday, 12 March 2009 when the rescued Pelican will be released at Tygerberg Zoo at 11H00. Please book an appointment directly with Venessa Strauss.

Rescued Great White Pelican Back On Its Feet

(Cape Town, South Africa – 12 March 2009) One of the largest flying birds in the world, a Great White Pelican, will be released at Tygerberg Zoo outside Cape Town on Thursday.

The bird has been cared for by the SANCCOB (Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds) since January when a member of the public brought the injured adult Great White Pelican into its rehabilitation centre. The pelican was found at Rietvlei Nature Reserve, weak and with severe wounds on its feet and legs.

“We’re not exactly certain what caused the bird’s injuries, although they appeared to be burn wounds,” said Venessa Strauss, CEO of SANCCOB.

“It’s taken more than two months of dedicated care and nursing by our staff and volunteers to help the bird regain its strength and, even though the wounds have healed completely, the webbing of its feet has been permanently damaged”.

SANCCOB is one of the world’s most respected rehabilitation centres for coastal birds and cares for thousands of seabirds – mostly African penguins – every year at its facility in Bloubergstrand, Cape Town. SANCCOB relies entirely on organisations like the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW – www.ifaw.org) and the public for funding in order to do its vital work rescuing, rehabilitating and releasing seabirds.

On Thursday morning the Pelican will be given the freedom of the Tygerberg Zoo, when it joins a clutch of resident Pelicans in an open enclosure.

Board of Directors: *S Steward (Chairman), C McClelland (Treasurer), Adv. M Edmunds, A Moldan, S Ozinsky, Prof. L Underhill, Dr. C Nxomani, Dr. S Petersen, V Strauss (CEO).*

“At its new home in the Tygerberg Zoo the bird will join the resident Pelican colony of 17 birds, some of which are free to come and go as they fancy, while at the same time the zoo ensures that they are fed and have a safe place where they can stay if they choose,” said Strauss.

“We believe that Tygerberg Zoo is the best possible placement for this particular Pelican, given his past injuries”.

The ‘patient’ currently weighs in at 6.18 kilograms which is well within the range of adult male Pelicans who weigh between five and 15 kilograms with a whopping wingspan of up to three and a half metres. Their impressive bills are used for eating about 1.5 kilograms of fish each day!

Throughout most of the world, populations of large birds such as Pelicans are decreasing. However, in the Western Cape of South Africa the population of Great White Pelicans has been on the increase for the past 30 years. This is because the Pelicans have learnt to feed on offal at farms in the Greater Cape Town area. In recent years, health regulations have steadily tightened up on the disposal of offal in this way, and Pelicans are again learning to fend for themselves.

Since 2002, young birds on Dassen Island, South Africa, have been consistently tagged and banded with colours corresponding to the year of their hatching. A bird ringed as a nestling in 1972 in Namibia was found still breeding 27 years later in 1999.

The world's population is thought to total about 90 000 pairs, of which about 80 per cent are in Africa.

Within southern Africa, there are four main concentrations of breeding birds. The largest breeding concentration is in Botswana, and the other three regular breeding localities are on the coast, namely Dassen Island in the Western Cape, Lake St Lucia in northern KwaZulu-Natal and the Walvis Bay Guano Platform in Namibia.

If you would like to DONATE towards the cost of rehabilitating penguins, Pelicans and other seabirds or CONTRIBUTE towards the feeding and care of the thousands of penguin chicks who are hand-reared and prepared for release at SANCCOB, please visit our website www.sanccob.co.za or contact 021 – 557 6155.

SANCCOB is proudly supported by:
The International Fund for Animal Welfare



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