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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Rescue the Remedy for Orphaned African Penguin Chicks

**(Cape Town, South Africa – 29 October 2008)** Rescuers have gone to the relief of hundreds of African Penguin chicks orphaned and in danger of starving to death in colonies around the Western Cape.

Earlier today CapeNature officials embarked on a mercy mission to rescue an initial 35 chicks from Dyer Island. More chicks will likely be collected from the island in the coming days. Dyer Island, situated about eight kilometres offshore from Gansbaai in the Western Cape, is an important breeding colony for about 4, 000 African Penguins.

The penguins have been taken to the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) which will hand rear the rescued fluff balls over the next three months, before releasing them back into their home colonies.

On several penguin colonies, including Dyer Island and Stoney Point near Betty's Bay, chicks that hatch late in the season (from September onwards) are frequently abandoned by their parents when the weather grows warmer and as food supplies diminish.

These chicks are unlikely to survive if left in the wild, and the problem is exacerbated by the fact that adult penguins begin their annual moult at this time of the year. During moulting the penguins shed their old feathers and grow new ones, leaving them not waterproof and therefore unable to swim, catch fish and unable to feed their chicks.

Rescued chicks are being transported to SANCCOB's specialist penguin rehabilitation facility in Milnerton, Cape Town by the Dyer Island Conservation Trust. On arrival the chicks will be given an electrolyte solution, and sorted into groups according to their size.

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**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).*

In the coming three months SANCCOB's team of dedicated staff and volunteers will have their work cut out feeding the ravenous youngsters, the smallest of which will have to be fed and hydrated every three hours. In addition to fish, the penguins get a daily dose of a special fish formula.

Venessa Strauss, Chief Executive Officer of SANCCOB, said the phenomenon of adult African Penguins abandoning their young is not unusual.

"In 2006, SANCCOB reared 841 orphaned chicks and last year another 481 needed our help. More than 80 per cent of the rescued chicks were released back into the wild to start contributing to the breeding population in the next couple of years.

"Our research shows that hand rearing African penguins has a significant effect on conserving the wild population, with hand reared and released chicks showing higher survivorship to breeding age and higher productivity than birds that fledged naturally in the wild," said Strauss.

Numbers of African Penguins have shown a catastrophic decline in recent years. In 2008 the African penguin population reached an all-time low of 26, 000 breeding pairs down from an estimated two-million pairs at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

"This makes each individual chick very precious to our efforts to conserve this already vulnerable species and research conducted by the Fitzpatrick Institute of the University of Cape Town found that the African penguin population is 19 per cent higher today thanks to SANCCOB's rehabilitation efforts," said Strauss.

SANCCOB has joined hands with other major conservation role players to address the catastrophic decline in African penguins by initiating the **Chick Bolstering Project**. Other partners include Bristol Zoo Gardens, IFAW, ADU at the University of Cape Town, CapeNature, Dyer Island Conservation Trust and Marine and Coastal Management.

SANCCOB completely relies on the help of the public to continue their work to save the African penguin. You can help SANCCOB to cover the costs of rearing the penguin chicks. If you would like to Adopt a Penguin chick for a loved one for Christmas, please visit our website [www.sanccob.co.za](http://www.sanccob.co.za) or contact 021 – 557 6155.

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



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