

AFRICAN PENGUIN CHICK BOLSTERING PROJECT

PROJECT UPDATE: 15 June 2012

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Tracking the lives of 3 new fledging African penguins and updates on SANCCOB's Chick Rearing Unit



Green-foot, a fledgling African Penguin, shortly after being released with a satellite transmitter on the shoreline at Robben Island. Photo: Katrin Ludynia.

The Chick Bolstering Project (CBP) is a multi-partner project which contributes towards saving the African penguin, through bolstering abandoned and weak chicks and rearing chicks from eggs. The research element of the project focuses on foraging behaviour of juvenile penguins, and a long term goal of the project is to establish the viability of an artificial colony for African penguins along the South African coast line. Evidence from recent research suggests that the introduction of fledgling chicks has a significant impact on conserving wild populations (Barham et al, 2008). In 2011, Dr. Richard Sherley (Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town) attached satellite transmitters to five fledgling African penguins which were hand-reared by SANCCOB as part of the CBP. The rationale behind the deployment of the transmitters is to get a better understanding of the behaviour of African penguin chicks and insight into the mechanics that lead fledglings to either return to the colonies from where they were hatched or to disperse to other sites as adults. For 2012, the CBP is funding the deployment of six additional transmitters.



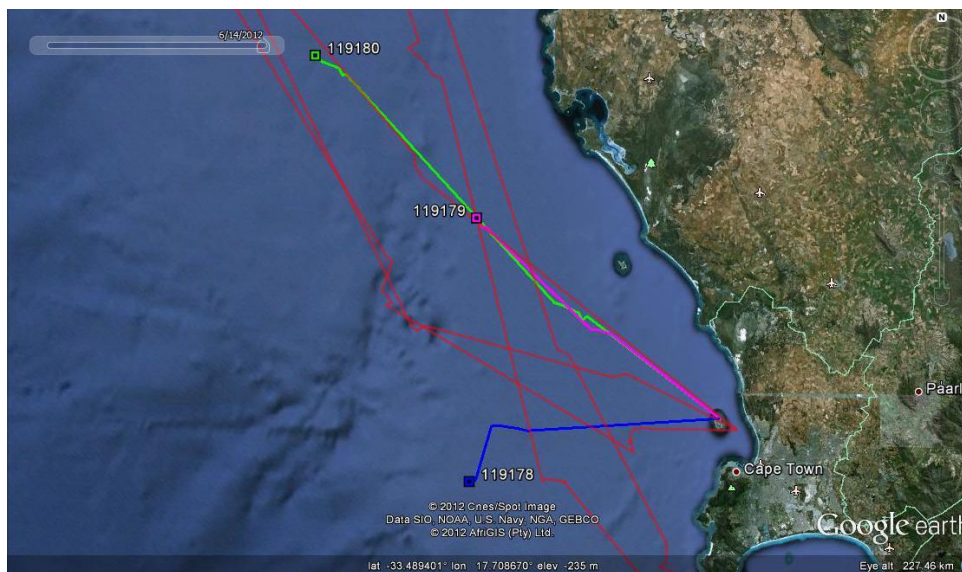
A SANCCOB box used to transport the three African penguin fledglings. Photo: Katrin Ludynia

On 11 June 2012 Dr. Sherley travelled to Robben Island to meet with Dr. Katrin Ludynia, Kate Robinson and Corlia Meyer (all from the Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town) and select three healthy, naturally-reared African penguin chicks ready to fledge from the resident colony. Weighing all above 3 Kg, three fledglings (christened Pinky, Green-foot and Blue) were selected and fitted with the transmitters. As with the previous release in 2011, the transmitters were affixed to the birds' feathers on their lower back using a waterproof tape and superglue. This year, the devices are programmed to transmit for everyday in June, July and August and every other day after that. The aim is that they last up to 180 days, but ultimately these will fall off as the glue becomes brittle and the tape wears off. On 12 June, Pinky, Green-foot and Blue were released together with a group of adult foraging African penguins from a commonly used departure point.



Blue, an African penguin fitted with a transmitter, making its way to the shore at Robben Island.
Photo: Katrin Ludynia

The first transmissions from sea were received in the early hours of 13 June 2012 and found all three birds already offshore and over 40 km from their release site. On 14 June 2012, the three transmitters were still transmitting and the birds latest positions can be seen in the image below. Pinky (119179) and Green-foot (119180) have so far followed a very similar pattern to the fledglings released offshore of Robben Island last year (last year's transmitter tracks are in pale red) and have headed north-west away from Robben Island and Cape Town. Pinky's latest track was 90 km from the release site and 40 km north-west of Dassen Island, while Green-foot had already covered 150 km from Robben Island and was 70 km west of Saldanha Bay today. Blue (119178) had travelled due west about 80 km from Robben Island and made a turn to the south, very similar to what the fledgling 'Nicky' did last year. The latest updates on the three African penguins can be found online on the news section of [Penguin Watch](#).



The tracks (pink, blue and green) of the first three naturally-reared fledgling African Penguins fitted with satellite transmitters as of 14 June 2012. The paths taken by five hand-reared fledglings tracked in 2011 are shown in pale red. Map created by RB Sherley using Google Earth.

Chick Rearing update

Also part of the Chick Bolstering Project, is the establishment of a first-ever Chick Rearing Unit (CRU) at SANCCOB in Cape Town to build local expertise to hand-rear abandoned African penguin chicks from eggs. Officially opened on 25 November 2011, the CRU is a culmination of extensive research on and fundraising for such a facility, and affirms SANCCOB's commitment to reverse the decline of seabird populations through the rescue, rehabilitation and release of ill, injured, abandoned chicks and oiled African penguins and other vulnerable seabirds. Working together with colony managers at Boulders Beach, the CRU has admitted 68 abandoned eggs this year alone. Of the 68 eggs that were admitted, 37 have been successfully hatched, 22 were deemed not viable for hatching and 9 are still being incubated.

