



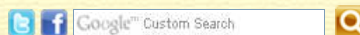
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Intrepid African penguin gets new lease on life

In October 2012, an adult penguin from the Boulders penguin colony was involved in a motor vehicle accident, suffering extensive injuries to its mandible and head.

The bird was stabilised and rehabilitated for two months by the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) before it was flown to Johannesburg. On 14 December, the NZG welcomed this very special visitor to its African penguin colony. AP559 or 'Beak' as we have been calling him on account of his badly injured beak, settled in quite well with our inland colony. All of our birds were very curious to meet their new friend, although he seemed to prefer keeping mostly to himself.



This picture shows the badly injured beak before reconstruction by Dr Gerhard Steenkamp, an internationally renowned wildlife dental expert.



When the brave little patient came to after the procedure, he had a beautiful new beak.



Beak now spends most of his time frolicking in the pool and preening himself with his newly-improved beak.



An X-ray shows the delicately placed stitches, pins, wire and dental acrylic that hold the lower left side of the beak together.

Four days later, we drove him to Onderstepoort, which is where the Faculty of Veterinary Science of the University of Pretoria is situated. Brave little Beak underwent CT scans before Dr Gerhard Steenkamp, an internationally renowned wildlife dental expert, began reconstructing the lower left side of his beak.

When the brave little patient came to after the procedure, he had a beautiful new beak, with the help of some delicately placed stitches, pins, wire and dental acrylic. The operation proved to be a great success, and Beak was brought back to the NZG for his recovery period.

Here he has been under the care of Dr Adrian Tordiffe, who has monitored his recovery closely. He was placed on a 14-day course of antibiotics to fight off any potential infections.

Quite the brave adventurer

We swam our very gentle and calm patient in a small splash pool for the first few days, but the little adventurer found his way up the ramp to the big penguin pool all on his own and went for his first proper swim soon after and enjoyed it thoroughly! During the first few days of recovery he was very sleepy and claimed a little spot in the colony for himself, which he never left.

He was very squirmy at feeding times, but got more comfortable as the days went by. He now spends most of his time frolicking in the pool and preening himself with his newly-improved beak. He has started exploring his new home a lot more now, checking out some of the nests and following the others around, and he is fitting in very well with the group.

On 12 January 2013, he really surprised us by coming right up to the feeding bucket (normally he would stay far away at feeding time) and taking his first fish all on his own! It was amazing to see, and we are so proud of our little Beak - he has come such a long way and has adapted remarkably considering his injury. Now he pushes his way to the bucket, alongside his 30 new penguin friends, and is starting to show his own special personality!

He has crept into our hearts and it is truly remarkable to have the privilege to watch him improve and get stronger every day. Dr Steenkamp will be visiting the NZG shortly to do a follow-up examination to make sure that his beak is healing well and that everything is still in place and holding well, and we are looking forward to hearing what he has to say.

Until then, Beak has proved to us that the endangered African penguin is most certainly the most resilient of species, and we need to do everything in our power to help save these incredible birds.

While Beak continues to thrive at the National Zoo, sadly the same cannot be said for the African penguin in the wild, which continues to be one of South Africa's most threatened and rapidly declining birds. The National Zoo is actively involved in conserving African penguins through an integration of support to government and wildlife conservation organisations, conservation breeding and research into important aspects of their biology ... for their survival.

By Tracy Shaw, Conservator, NZG

The National Zoological Gardens of South Africa is a proud facility of the National Research Foundation

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