CapeNature

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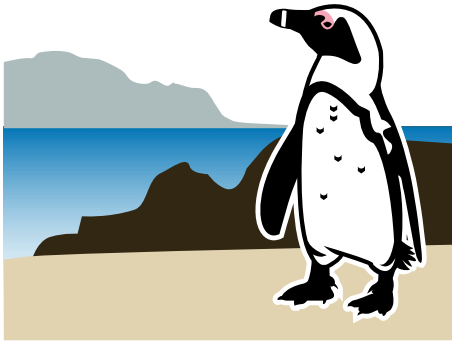
STONY POINT SEABIRD COLONY AND MPA UPDATE



Stony Point, home to one of the largest successful breeding colonies of African Penguin in the world. As the year comes to an end, we would like to give you some interesting feedback on what we've learnt inside the fascinating African Penguin colony at Stony Point.

MOULTING SEASON –

What is currently happening in the colony?

Summer time means moulting season for African Penguins at Stony Point.

Most of the African Penguins that you will see at the colony during this time of year are those that are either about to (fat and clumsy looking), currently busy going through (with feathers sticking out), or just finished up (thin and squeaky clean) their annual moult. All Penguins have to moult once a year. They do this to ensure their feathers are in tip top shape, as it is the structure of their feathers that ensure they remain waterproof when out to sea. During the year, the feathers experience wear and tear, and waterproofing is essential for the birds to be able to stay out in the cold sea for many hours while they look for fish to feed themselves and their chicks.

Moulting is the Penguin's most vulnerable phase of their annual lifecycle, and it is absolutely critical that they are not disturbed. This is because during moult, they do not feed for 21 days. They rely on fat resources built up prior to the moult starting. Any disturbance which causes the birds to use energy unnecessarily severely impacts their ability to survive their moult.

In addition, sardine, which is one of the main food sources of the Penguin, is experiencing a particularly bad year in terms of its recruitment. This places additional pressure on the Penguins to find enough fish to fatten up for the moult, further emphasising the importance of not disturbing them.

MOULTING —
the annual process when adult Penguins lose and replace their feathers to remain 'waterproof'.

NOV – JAN	=	The annual moulting period at Stony Point
4 WEEKS	=	Pre-moult 'fattening up' period. Birds can double their weight during this time.
3 WEEKS	=	Approximate moulting period when birds fast on dry land.
5–6 WEEKS	=	Post-moulting recovery period after which breeding can commence.

Seabird Breeding Colony Population Census 2017

During our daily monitoring in the colony, we keep a close eye on the number of seabird breeding pairs within this area. The population census for the sea bird breeding pairs for 2017 are indicated below:

ENDANGERED

AFRICAN PENGUINS

BANK CORMORANTS

CAPE CORMORANTS

NEAR THREATENED

CROWNED CORMORANTS

LEAST CONCERN

WHITE BREASTED CORMORANTS

Transponder Work at Stony Point

For decades, African Penguins were marked with individually numbered flipper bands. Some of these can still be seen on birds at Stony Point. This information has been hugely important to understand the long-term survival as well as the movement of Penguins along the South African and Namibian coast.

However, technology has moved on and instead of flipper bands, subcutaneous transponders (PIT) are now used instead. These tiny chips can't be seen from the outside but the individual numbers can be read using hand-held stick antennas and ground readers and continue to provide essential information on survival, movement, site fidelity and recruitment of the endangered African Penguin.

Since 2013, over 400 adult and almost 300 fledgling African Penguins have been marked with PITs at the Stony Point colony. Additionally, several hundred Penguins released from the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) at Stony Point carry these individual identifications. Colony staff regularly check breeding birds for PITs and two ground-readers are currently located inside the colony. These cables, that resemble huge mole snakes, record all birds with PIT that enter and leave the colony without the birds even noticing that they are being recorded.

The ground-readers detected over 330 different birds in the last year, most of which were originally transpondered at Stony Point but a few birds coming from other colonies were also detected.

Birds that were transpondered as chicks, either in the colony or prior to release from SANCCOB, are now being seen at the colony. These birds would be now looking for nest sites and choosing partners, some of them might have already started to breed at Stony Point.

The transponder work will continue in the coming years and more information on the movement of these Penguins is becoming available. So far, the data has shown that adult African Penguins breeding at Stony Point seem to have a relatively high chance of surviving and Stony Point seems to be a favourite spot as birds from other colonies are also being recorded here.

Penguin Palooza

The 2nd Annual Stony Point Penguin Palooza took place in October this year. The aim is to create awareness for African Penguin conservation and it forms part of the monthly celebrations around African Penguin Awareness Day, which took place on the 7th of October 2017. Visitors experienced rehabilitated Penguins being released back into the wild, a community market, educational activities and marine exhibitions.

Law Enforcement

Law enforcement officials recently had a water-shedding case against a suspect who was arrested for "attempting to fish in a Marine Protected Area (MPA)" under the Protected Areas Act. MPA legislation moved from the Marine Living Resources Act to Protected Areas Act in 2016.

CapeNature seized his vehicle used in transporting divers to diving spots under the Prevention of Organised Crime Act and then managed to get a preservation order in the High Court with the assistance of Asset Forfeiture Unit. This is the first case of its kind in South Africa where a vehicle was seized successfully without any abalone attached to it.

If you would like to report any suspicious activity, please call 082 453 0835.

Research

One of the research projects that CapeNature partnered in this year, together with Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, is a project that seeks to unravel the links between the foraging performance of African Penguins and Cape Cormorants, the bio-physical processes (fish and oceanography) within their foraging ranges and potential threats to these systems at a fine spatial scale around Stony Point and Dyer Island. Three types of devices were deployed, GPS, axydepth loggers and animal-borne video recorders (AVR). Seven penguins were deployed with Accydepth/AVR combination, and 16 penguins with Accydepth/GPS combination. GPS tracks from 8 Cape Cormorant individuals were collected. The final year of sampling for a research project partnered with Stellenbosch University took place this year. This project looked at factors contributing to the colony and population dynamics of African Penguins at Stony Point. The data for both projects is currently being analysed, and results will be available next year, so do look out for our 2018 newsletter!

Oiled and Injured Penguins

All injured/oil contaminated/physically compromised Penguins are recovered from the colony annually to be sent to the SANCCOB for assessment and rehabilitation. The survivors are then returned back to the wild.

2017 SEASON

0	44	16
OILED	INJURED	PHYSICALLY COMPROMISED

SANCCOB African Penguin Admissions from Stony Point:

- 82 rehab birds: 53 adults, 20 juveniles, 9 Blues
- 152 chicks
- 31 eggs, of those 28 hatched successfully

Other Seabird Admissions:

- 1 Cape Gannet
- 16 Cape Cormorants
- 3 White Breasted Cormorants
- 1 Kelp Gull