
1500-Mile Military Flight in Brazil Rescues Hundreds of Stranded Penguins

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Once again Brazil got involved in an operation to save stranded penguins. Close to 400 rescued penguins took to the skies on a C-130 Hercules military aircraft bound for Pelotas, in southern Brazil where they were released back to their ocean home.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare assisted the Instituto Mamíferos Aquáticos (IMA) and Brazilian officials to save hundreds of juvenile Magellanic penguins that mysteriously stranded on the warm beaches of Salvador, 1,400 kilometers north of São Paulo.

The airlift departed from Salvador in the northeastern state of Bahia on Friday, October 3, and flew 2,500 kilometers (1,550 miles) to reach its destination. Upon landing, the precious cargo of juvenile penguins was loaded onto trucks and headed for an overnight stay at the Center for Recovery of Marine Animals (CRAM).

The next morning the rested birds were taken to Cassino beach. They were released with a smaller group of adult penguins that had been rehabilitated after becoming oiled. Experts hope these more mature and experienced birds will guide the younger animals south.

The Magellanic penguins (*Spheniscus magellanicus*) breed in large colonies in southern Argentina and Chile and migrate north as far as southwest Brazil between March and September.

According to experts, a flow of warmer water (1 degree Celsius higher than normal) caused the juvenile penguins to keep going north, past their usual range, where they are unable to find adequate food.

A cheerful crowd of onlookers watched as the birds entered the South Atlantic Ocean and quickly swam away. This release has gone into the record books as being the largest ever in South America with 373 penguins released at the same time.

"We are overjoyed to see these penguins waddle back to the ocean and have a second chance at life," said Valéria Ruoppolo of IFAW. "Hundreds of penguins died in this unusual event and while media reports have often linked global warming to the penguins' demise, at this point there is no way to know for certain why these animals stranded."

The rehabilitated penguins carry bands on their flippers. Information obtained about these banded and released birds is critical to helping scientists determine the success of rehabilitation and learn about their migratory habits.

IFAW's team of experts worked with the IMA in Salvador, Bahia, and the Instituto ORCA in Vitória, Espírito Santo, to help save the penguins. The Brazilian Institute for Environment and Renewable Resources (IBAMA) welcomed IFAW's expertise for the rehabilitation of the stranded penguins in three different states.

IFAW's staff worked closely with the authorities at IBAMA to advise on bird release criteria, banding and suitable locations to release these birds, where they can find enough fish to survive.

IFAW's experience in rehabilitation has saved the lives of tens of thousands of penguins. In 2000, IFAW helped save an entire species - rehabilitating and releasing 19,000 African penguins caught in the Treasure oil spill off South Africa. Today, IFAW's oiled wildlife response team is widely recognized as the world's finest.

Founded in 1969, IFAW works around the globe to protect animals and habitats, promoting practical solutions for animals and people.

International Fund for Animal Welfare

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