

Race to save oil slicked penguins on remote British island

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An undated photo of rockhopper penguins on the French islands of Amsterdam and Saint-Paul in the southern Indian Ocean. A race to rescue up to 20,000 endangered penguins from an oil spill in an isolated south Atlantic British island group was underway Thursday after a cargo ship ran aground.

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Oil-slicked Rockhopper penguins were being collected and taken off three Tristan da Cunha islands to the main island to be stored in a shed for treatment, cleaning and eventual release.

"Five hundred Rockhoppers were brought ashore on Tristan this

morning," Tristan da Cunha administrator Sean Burns said in an online statement.

But specialist cleaning fluid was in short supply and hinged on a second ship being chartered from Cape Town, a journey of several days over 2,800 kilometres (1,740 miles), after a salvage vessel arrived on Monday.

"A crucial next step is to confirm a second vessel to depart from Cape Town in the next few days with all the necessary equipment and supplies to clean up the birds, keep them healthy and hopefully return them to the ocean," said Burns.

"It will be a race against time," he added.

The MS Oliva ran aground on Nightingale island on March 16 skippered by a Greek captain and carrying a crew of 21 Filipinos who were rescued safely. It has since broken in two main parts.

"Unfortunately, the birds cannot be fed in captivity until a ship can travel from South Africa with a load of frozen fish, along with an experienced cleaning team and other essential supplies," said John Cooper of the Agreement on the Conservation of [Albatrosses](#) and Petrels in Australia.

"News of this 'second vessel' and its sailing date is still awaited," he said in a statement.

The archipelago is the home to most of the world's Rockhopper penguins which are classed endangered, with Burns saying Wednesday he hoped an earlier estimate of 20,000 affected [penguins](#) would prove to be too high.

Tristan da Cunha is an active volcanic island with 263 British residents

described as the most isolated community in the world on the islands' website and has no hotels, airport, night clubs, restaurants, or safe sea swimming.

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