

# N.Z.'s lost penguin to hitch home on research ship

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The emperor penguin that washed up lost on a New Zealand beach more than 3,000 kilometres (1,900 miles) from its Antarctic home, and was taken to Wellington Zoo on June 24, 2011. The penguin will be shipped back to sub-antarctic waters later this month on a scientific research vessel, Wellington Zoo said Wednesday.

A wayward Emperor penguin that washed up in New Zealand will be shipped back to sub-antarctic waters later this month on a scientific research vessel, Wellington Zoo said Wednesday.

The adult male penguin, nicknamed "Happy Feet", was found wandering on a beach near the capital in June and taken to the zoo to recuperate when he became ill after eating sand and sticks.

With the bird, only the second Emperor penguin ever recorded in New Zealand, restored to full health, zoo chief executive Karen Fifield said

plans had been finalised to ship him back to the Southern Ocean.

Fifield said the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) ship Tangaroa would set sail from Wellington on August 29 with the penguin aboard.

The ship, which will carry out research into Southern Ocean fisheries, will release the bird four days into the voyage near Campbell Island, which is within the normal feeding range of Emperor [penguins](#).

"This is an excellent result for everyone involved, and for the penguin, and is a great example of organisations working together for the best outcome," Fifield said.



A medical team readies the operation room in preparation for surgery on an ailing Emperor penguin (C) at the Wellington zoo on June 27, 2011. One of New Zealand's top surgeons was enlisted to operate on the penguin found lost on a beach near Wellington. Surgeon John Wyeth performed a delicate two-hour operation on the bird, nicknamed "Happy Feet" to remove sand and sticks from its stomach.

The hope is that Happy Feet will swim home to Antarctica, where Emperor penguins live in [colonies](#) ranging in size from a few hundred to more than 20,000 pairs.

"The NIWA team are looking forward to having this extra special guest onboard the vessel with us for the journey," research manager Rob Murdoch said.

"Happy Feet has captured the hearts of New Zealanders and people across the world, and we're pleased to be able to help safely return him to the [Southern Ocean](#)."

While aboard the ship, Happy Feet will be housed in a specially designed crate that Fifiield said would keep him "cold and comfortable", with a vet and two NIWA staff to look after him.

The penguin will be fitted with a satellite tracking device before he is released, so scientists and the public can track his progress on the zoo's website.

It is thought the bird fell ill on the beach after mistaking sand for snow and eating it in a bid to lower his temperature, clogging his gut and leading to a series of operations to clear his stomach.

A diet of "fish milkshakes" at the zoo has seen Happy Feet's weight increase four kilograms (nine pounds) to 26 kilograms, giving him sufficient reserves for what will still be an arduous 2,000 kilometre (1,250 mile) swim home.

The [Emperor penguin](#) is the largest species of the distinctive waddling creature and can grow up to 1.15 metres (3ft 9in) tall.

The reason for Happy Feet's appearance in New Zealand remains a

mystery, although experts say Emperor penguins take to the open sea during the Antarctic summer and this one may have simply wandered further than most.

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