

New Zealand's lost penguin sets sail for home

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The emperor penguin nicknamed "Happy Feet" sits in a special crate before making the four-day journey to the Southern Ocean east of Campbell Island. The emperor penguin washed up on a beach just outside the New Zealand capital Wellington in mid-June -- weak, emaciated and more than 3,000 kilometres (1,900 miles) from the Antarctic colony where he hatched about three-and-a-half years ago.

A wayward emperor penguin that found international fame after washing up lost on a New Zealand beach made a low-key exit from Wellington Monday aboard a research ship bound for his home waters.

The giant bird, dubbed Happy Feet, set sail on the New Zealand fisheries vessel Tangaroa in a custom-made insulated crate with his own veterinary team in attendance and a contingent of media to bid him farewell at the dock.

The relatively quiet departure was in marked contrast to the scenes at

Wellington Zoo Sunday, when thousands of well-wishers turned out to farewell him at the animal hospital where he has spent two months recuperating.

Happy Feet was found on a beach just outside Wellington in mid-June -- weak, emaciated and more than 3,000 kilometres (1,900 miles) from the Antarctic colony where he hatched about three-and-a-half years ago.

Only the second [emperor penguin](#) ever recorded in New Zealand, he was close to death and needed surgery to remove sand and sticks from his stomach before he could be fattened up on a diet of fish milkshakes.

The bird, which now weighs about 27.5 kilograms (60.5 pounds), attracted international attention during New Zealand sojourn and there are plans for a book and documentary recounting his story.

The juvenile male will be released into the [Southern Ocean](#) four days into the Tangaroa's voyage, where the hope is he will rejoin other emperor [penguins](#) and eventually make his way back to Antarctica.

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