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## Penguin Happy Feet becomes a Wellington celebrity - 150 years of news

Andrea O'Neil · 13:25, Jul 15 2015

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FAIRFAX NZ

Penguin Happy Feet is treated by Wellington Zoo vets Baukje Lenting, left, and Lisa Argilla in June 2011.

A tropical sea turtle found on a Lyall Bay beach last week was not Wellington's first aquatic tourist to be lost far from home.

An emperor penguin nicknamed Happy Feet attained worldwide fame in June 2011 when it was found at Peka Peka on the Kapiti Coast.

"The ABC, *USA Today*, the BBC, the *Times of India* and dozens more - the same impulse that caused Wellingtonians to drop everything and head for Peka Peka in the dead of

"In the age of the iPhone, 3D and surround sound, nature still has the capacity to both awe us and remind us of the fragility of life."

The metre-tall male penguin was 4000 kilometres from its home in the Antarctic, and did not adapt well to New Zealand's shores. Penguins swallow ice to cool down and Happy Feet tried to do the same with sand, twigs and other beach debris.

He was taken to Wellington Zoo's vet clinic The Nest or Te Kohanga, where several operations over a fortnight flushed his stomach out.

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"A captivated crowd of about 50 watched through the glass as vets worked quickly, discussing where best to insert a catheter and squeezing antibiotic ointment into his sand-filled, ulcer-covered eyes," the *Post* reported.

Hundreds more visitors flocked to see the penguin recover through August - British actor Stephen Fry even dropped by while filming a television show about language with the zoo's chimpanzees.

The problem was what to do next - Happy Feet could not legally be returned to Antarctica because he risked infecting penguins there with diseases picked up on his travels. Meanwhile he was clocking up bills at the zoo, his salmon diet costing \$10,000 alone.

"It's a bloody expensive bird, I can tell you that much," philanthropist Gareth Morgan told the newspaper, having organised a public fundraiser bolstered cash from his own pocket.

The cost irked some newspaper readers, like Waikanae man Barry Prince.

"It would have been much cheaper to have sent Happy Feet humanely to his happy hunting grounds and employed a taxidermist to make an exhibition for Te Papa, frozen his innards and sent them to a zoo to feed some poor hapless leopard seal," he wrote.

After 10 weeks in Wellington, Happy Feet boarded research ship Tangaroa and headed for the Campbell Islands, 700 kilometres south of Bluff.

With a friendly shove from those aboard, he returned to the chilly seas on September 4. A week later his satellite tracker stopped transmitting - it may have fallen off, or Happy Feet might have met an unhappy end.

Wellington Zoo vet Lisa Argilla admitted the \$30,000 spent on Happy Feet's recovery could have disappeared in a gulp.

"Nature can be a bit cruel. It's definitely survival of the fittest. Fingers crossed he's one of the fittest."

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