

Abstract

The Magellanic Penguin (*Spheniscus magellanicus*) as an Indicator of Chronic Oil Pollution Off the Coast of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina (1987-2008)

Sergio Rodriguez Heredia¹, Julio Loureiro¹, C. Karina Alvarez¹, G. Delgado¹, and Valeria Ruoppolo²

¹Fundacion Mundo Marino, AV. X n° 157 San Clemente del Tuyu, Buenos Aires, Argentina;

²IFAW, Av. Benedito Ferreira Silva, 472, São Paulo – SP, CEP- 04786-000, Brazil;

Marine pollution by oil spills is one of the greatest threats to coastal biodiversity in the world, and seabirds are the main victims of this scourge. In Argentina, tanker accidents involving large numbers of seabirds have been sporadic events, but the occurrence of chronic oiling from various sources presents a constant and frequent worry along the Atlantic coast of South America (Gandini et al., 1994; García-Borboroglu et al., 2006, Heredia et al., EOW 2007). Magellanic penguins (*Spheniscus magellanicus*) migrate in winter between Argentina and Brazil, and during this phase of its annual cycle they are most affected by these chronic events, coming ashore weak and oiled. Buenos Aires Province has five ports and terminals and migrating birds are most affected in northern Argentinean ports (Borboroglu et al., 2006). Fundación Mundo Marino, located in San Clemente del Tuyú, Buenos Aires Province (36°22'S/ 56°44'W) has a Marine Fauna Rescue and Rehabilitation Center that has been operating since 1987 as a pioneer institution on the rehabilitation and release of seabirds, sea turtles and sea mammal species. From 1987 until 2008, 2234 Magellanic penguins have been rescued and treated. Of those, 78.4% (1753/2234) were oiled, clearly showing that oiling is a major threat to seabird species off the coast of the Buenos Aires Province and suggesting that proper national and international enforcement regulations could reduce this needless mortality.