

off the fence.

Great Penguin Rescue, The - Series

6 x 30'

EPISODIC BREAKDOWN

1. Episode 001

Michaela must learn quickly if she is going to graduate as a volunteer at the South African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB). She needs to master difficult skills including feeding both the powerful adult penguins and helpless chicks. Then there's the seemingly never ending work of cleaning up after the messy birds. But it's not all blood, sweat and penguin poo as she visits some of Cape Town's African penguin colonies to better understand the dramatic decline in penguin numbers in recent years. From a Penguin Festival and at Boulders Beach to the beautiful and rugged Dyer Island, Michaela gets a first-hand look into just why there are so few penguins left on the South African coastline. She even gets to enjoy the rare treat of releasing rehabilitated penguins back into the icy Atlantic Ocean.

2. Episode 002

In Episode 2 starts with Michaela still desperately trying to learn the ropes as a volunteer at SANCCOB in Cape Town. None of the tasks are easy as these seemingly cute penguins are really feisty and she ends up covered in bites and scratches! Then the moment everyone was waiting for arrives; the arrival of the first chicks in the chick bolstering project! It's a huge responsibility dealing with these tiny penguins that have been rescued from the wild, and Michaela is in the middle of a delicate balance between life and death, working as hard as she can to keep the young chicks alive. She also meets other interesting sea bird characters, including badly behaved cormorants and elegant albatrosses. There's no time to lose as more chicks are bound to come through the doors at any moment...

3. Episode 003

New arrivals are flooding into SANCCOB for the chick bolstering project. The latest batch has come from Dyer Island and surrounding colonies, where their parents have abandoned them. Some of the chicks are in bad condition; dehydrated and underweight, of which two become Michaela's favourites; namely the tiny Gregory Peck, who weighs only a few hundred grams, and Tiger, who despite his poor health is a real fighter. Michaela also travels to Bird Island to try and find out why an environment that can support a thriving population of gannets nearly 70 000 strong has in the last 8 years lost the last of their penguins. She also meets some of the centre's biggest bird personalities; Rocky the Rock-hopper Penguin and unofficial queen of SANCCOB, who mysteriously came all the way from Marion Island in the sub-Antarctic region by now most of the chicks are thriving, but a few are battling. Will Michaela's favourites 'Tiger' and 'Gregory Peck' survive? Only time will tell.

4. Episode 004

Michaela meets Betty's Bay penguin colony manager Cuan to collect abandoned chicks. There are two that she feels a certain bond with, and she names them Stony and Betty. But it's a stark reality check when just two days later one of them dies, despite round the clock care. Her other favourite, Tiger is also barely clinging to life. And the influx of chicks seems never evening! We then go from the skinny rescue chicks to Fat camp to meet some birds who for various reasons have put on a bit too much weight. Michaela tries to convince the fatties to do a bit of penguin aerobics, with limited success, and learns a bit about 'bumble foot'; the athlete's foot of penguins.

Home Pen reveals yet more crazy characters, including Milo the bent-beaked bully and String, a bird who loves attention and waddling around in circles. It's non-stop for Michaela, who by now has worked up quite a sweat!

5. Episode 005

It's time for Michaela to face her Achilles heel; tube feeding the penguins. It's a difficult task, which can stress the birds, or worse, kill them if done wrong. There is also an unusual visitor, an oiled pelican. Will she be able to fly again? Then Michaela's son Ollie and his friends visit for a fun filled tour of SANCCOB, where they learn about the plight of the African penguin. But it's not all fun as games as Michaela finds out that one of the birds she rescued herself has died. It's a tough moment made worse by the fact that Vet Nola needs to do an autopsy to find out the cause of the death. With Christmas coming up, Michaela is about to take some time off, but her timing couldn't be worse as new birds keep pouring into the centre. And what of Tiger? For this little guy life has not been easy and Michaela leaves with the uneasy knowledge that Tiger is far smaller and weaker than he should be.

6. Episode 006

The finale starts out with both good and bad news; Tiger has died, his digestive issues finally getting the better of him. But Betty is now a plump and healthy blue, ready for release. It's a wonderful moment for Michaela as she is able to take Betty back to the place where she was rescued as a starving chick and release her as a healthy young adult. As her time at SANCCOB comes to an end, Michaela checks in one last time with the hardworking staff of the Chick Rehabilitation Unit and their fragile wards, who are all thankfully looking good. Then it's party time to celebrate Michaela's stay at SANCCOB as well as all the incredibly dedicated individuals who work tirelessly in an effort to save the iconic African penguin from extinction. It's been a long and sometimes hard journey for Michaela, but she has learnt a huge amount and made many great friends, and some of whom could be swimming around in the Atlantic Ocean right now.