

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SEA ALARM FOUNDATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE *PRESTIGE* INCIDENT

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SUMMARY

This report describes experiences of members of Sea Alarm Foundation during their involvement in the oiled wildlife response in the aftermath of the *Prestige* incident. The Foundation's delegation was invited by local parties to assist in the organisation and optimisation of the response activities concerning oiled wildlife. Sea Alarm's involvement was supported by ITOPF and the ship owner's insurer (P&I Club) and the IOPC Fund. After a short introduction to the incident, the oiled wildlife response in Galicia is described. Sea Alarm's own activities, and lessons learned, are presented in some detail.

THE *PRESTIGE* INCIDENT

On 13 November 2002, the tanker *Prestige* in heavy seas suffered hull damage near the coast of Galicia (Spain). It was towed to open sea where a few days later, on 19 November, the single hulled vessel broke in two and sank in water some 3.5 km deep, about 275 km west of Vigo.

Until it sank, the tanker could have lost as much as 20,000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil. After sinking it was reported that oil in amounts of ca 125 tonnes a day continued to leak through a series of holes. Later the French submarine *Nautilus* sealed most of the holes and leakage was reduced to ca. 2 tonnes a day).

When the tanker broke in two and sank off west Galicia, it was clear that bird and mammal populations were at risk along hundreds of kilometres of coastline. The Galician coast is well known as a key site on the wintering migration routes of Atlantic seabirds. Some important internationally protected bird reserves, including RAMSAR sites, are also located here. In addition, Galicia contains an important population of Eurasian otters (*Lutra lutra*), and is an area where dolphins and marine turtles occur. Within a few days of the incident, oil reached the coast and the first birds were washed ashore. Local authorities and specialist organisations became active to organise the necessary wildlife response activities and international groups were offering their services.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE WILDLIFE RESPONSE OPERATION

In this section, the wildlife response operation, as perceived by the Sea Alarm delegates, is described..

Responsibilities wildlife operation and management

The overall responsibility for the environmental response was with the Minister, the Conselleiro de Medio Ambiente de Xunta de Galicia, and through him the General Director of Wildlife Conservation. Overall coordination was delegated to two sub-directors based in Santiago de Compostela, while the day-to-day management of the operations was delegated to coordinators in the provincial departments of La Coruña, Pontevedra and Lugo.

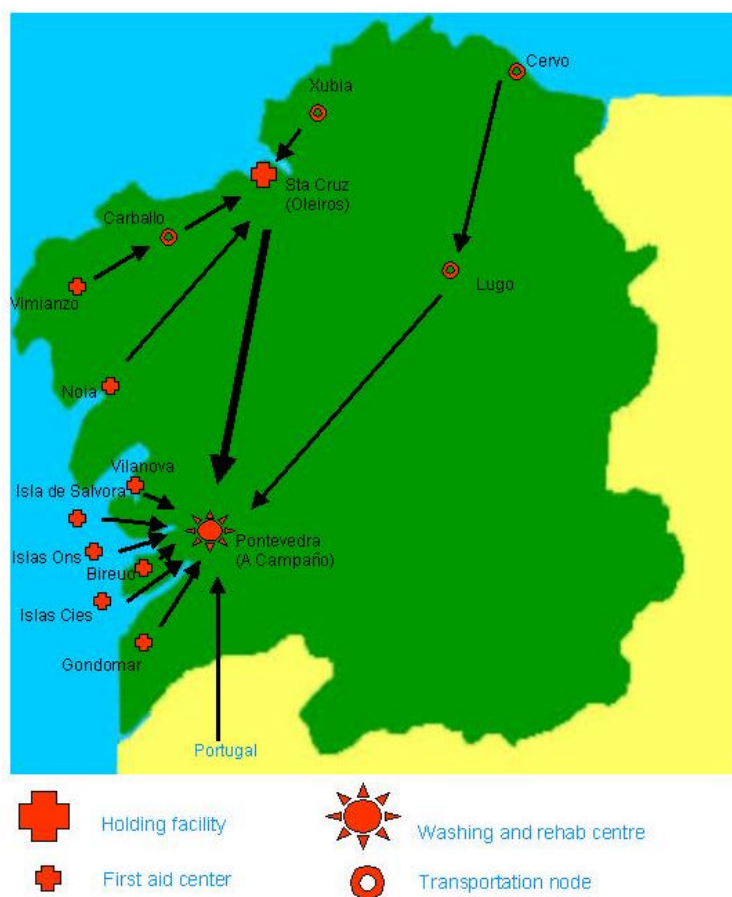
Other organisations involved

The number of organisations involved in the operation was rather limited and all fitted into the overall structure, under the Xunta (see organisation scheme). Spanish NGO's, including SEO Birdlife and Federations of Galician Environmental Groups were active in bird collection and worked with volunteers. The Spanish WWF Adena advised the Xunta in the early days of the spill. The invited foreign organisations included IFAW's Emergency Relief Team, Project Blue Sea/Ölvoegelhilfe and Sea Alarm. A number of other international organisations worked under the respective umbrellas of these organisations. IFAW's ER Team worked with the Xunta de Pontevedra and set up a washing and rehabilitation facility near to the city of Pontevedra (A Campiño). Project Blue Sea and Ölvoegelhilfe established two first aid centres, in Vimianzo and Noia, which they ran professionally with local volunteers. Three experts from the League pour le Protection des Oiseaux (LPO) and Nantes Veterinary School arrived on site and offered to assist under the established organisation structure. Sea Alarm's activities are described elsewhere in this report.

Overview of response operations

Live birds

All live oiled birds found in the province of A Coruña went through the holding centre in Sta Cruz/ Oleiros before being transported to the washing and rehabilitation centre in Pontevedra. In Vimianzo and Noia, forward holding centres were established where animals received first aid before delivery to Oleiros. Birds found on local beaches in Pontevedra Province went directly to the Xunta/IFAW centre in Pontevedra/A Campiño, or were given first aid in one of six field stations. Apart from birds from Oleiros and local beaches, the Pontevedra station also received birds from Lugo Province and Portugal. In fact this was the destiny for all live oiled birds collected in Galicia (see map).



All live birds arriving at Pontevedra entered a system of triage, only those considered in good enough condition were taken into the washing and rehabilitation procedures. Others were euthanised. The fate of birds in the washing and rehabilitation centre can be found in the statistics kept by IFAW. All successfully rehabilitated birds were released, mainly in Portugal.

Dead birds

The dead bird collection was organised by SEO Birdlife, in cooperation with two international experts, Kees Camphuijsen (NL) and Martin Heubeck (UK). Dead birds were collected by volunteers searching for live birds. Also beach cleaners (under supervision of the public works company Tragsa) separated the dead birds from the oil waste. Carcasses from all Galician beaches were transported to the holding centre in Oleiros, from where they were sent to the University of La Coruña for dissection¹. After dissection, corpses were returned to Oleiros from where they were sent to an incineration plant. Dissection data were analysed by the University of La Coruña in cooperation with international experts.

Other animals

During the spill response, animals other than birds were collected. These included sea turtles, dolphins, a seal and otters. The University of La Coruña coordinated the further treatment of these animals. Concerning dead animals, the University sent them to appropriate expertise centres elsewhere in Spain for necropsies. The same happened with live animals, which were sent to the renowned rehabilitation centres elsewhere in Spain or Portugal (seal).

Impact analysis

SEO Birdlife has analysed all collected data and made an impact assessment of the *Prestige* spill on wildlife and habitats. Preliminary reports already have been published on the Internet (www.seo.org).

PRELIMINARY QUANTITATIVE DATA ON THE WILDLIFE RESPONSE

Admissions and course of events

The arrival of live and dead birds since the start of the incident is presented in Figure 1. It shows several peaks, some of which can be explained by distinct changes of circumstances in the aftermath of the incident. A small peak on 18 November was most likely connected with the incident where the tanker first got into trouble close to the west coast of Galicia. The second peak (maximum around 24 November) seems to be connected with the breaking of the *Prestige*, when most oil was spilled. The third peak, around 8 December, coincided with a period of heavy storms (K. Stanzel, ITOPI, personal communication.), after Sea Alarm had left Galicia. The birds arriving in the Xunta/IFAW centre during in that period showed signs of exhaustion and seemed to be storm casualties with secondary oiling (Barbara Callahan, IFAW, personal communication.). The cause of the fourth and fifth peaks (*ca.* 7 & 29 January) is unknown to the authors.

¹ It seems that at least part of the dead birds collected from beaches in Pontevedra province have been sent to the University of Vigo for analysis.

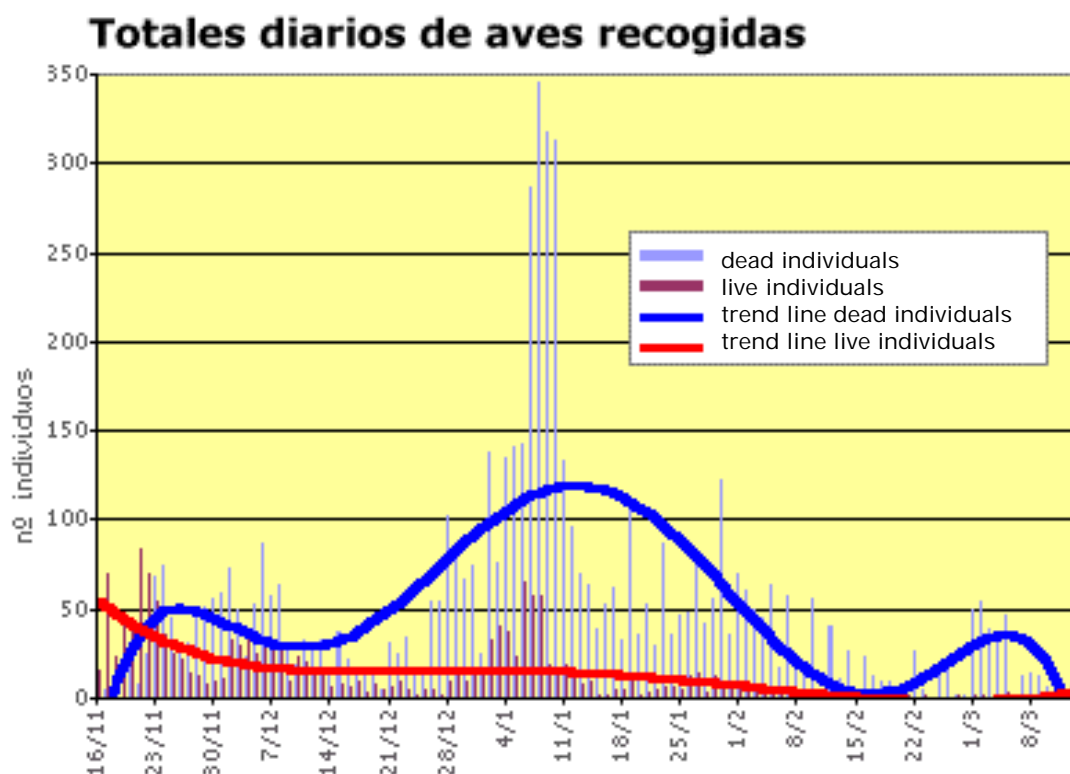


Figure 1: Admissions of live and dead birds between 16 November and mid March 2003 (copied from www.seo.org). Further explanation in the text.

Table 1 presents the total live and dead birds admitted to the various wildlife centres in three provinces of Galicia.

Table1: Data concerning Galicia (source: www.seo.org)

Province	Between	Live birds	Dead birds	Total
Pontevedra	16.11-14.02	491	700	840
A Coruña	16.11-16.02	1512	5476	6988
Lugo	16.11-14.02	284	1123	1407
Total		2287	8697	10984

All live birds were eventually transported to the Xunta/IFAW centre in Pontevedra for treatment. This included triage, pre-wash care, washing, rehabilitation and release. Over 260 birds have been released from this centre (see Table 2).

Table 2: Statistics centre Xunta/IFAW centre in Pontevedra (as of end March 2003, B. Callahan, personal communication)

Total intake:	1565
Died:	638
Euthanised:	543
Released:	263
Still in care:	121

SEA ALARM'S RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

Sea Alarm's oil spill services and objectives

Since its establishment, Sea Alarm has been active in developing:

- International networks of (oiled) wildlife rehabilitation expertise in Europe and the world.
- Means of cooperation with those responsible for the wider oil spill response, oil transportation industry, insurer companies and the oil producers.
- Contacts with relevant government departments and non governmental organisations.
- Innovative projects to identify centres of expertise and increase the preparedness in Europe for oiled wildlife incidents.
- Projects to increase information exchange and communication between wildlife rehabilitators and bridge the gap between rehabilitators and other responders including industry and governmental agencies.
- International cooperation to professionalise oiled wildlife response activities.

These activities have created a large potential of services that through Sea Alarm could be offered in Europe.

The objective of Sea Alarm in oil spill incidents is to organise assistance in order to help local parties to:

- Establish an effective, efficient and reasonable oiled wildlife response,
- Find the appropriate expert solutions to any problems that parties could run into, and
- Assess day-to-day developments in the actual spill and plan for different scenarios.

The Prestige involvement

Start and preparation

Sea Alarm's response activities started Monday 18 November 2002 after contact with ITOPF who had already identified a potentially large problem with wildlife. On behalf of the P&I Clubs and the IOPC Fund, ITOPF accepted Sea Alarm's proposal to become active in the spill, and if necessary assist local parties in ensuring an efficient oiled wildlife response. The costs of Sea Alarm's involvement were covered by the P&I Club.

Between the initial request and the Sea Alarm staff's arrival in Galicia (23 November), four days were spent determining the seriousness of the situation, which organisations and authorities were involved, what had been set up, if they needed any assistance, and what expertise would be required. At the same time, key experts in Sea Alarm's network were informed and updated on the situation and were asked to standby in case required.

Invitation

The formal invitation to become involved came from both WWF Adena and SEO Birdlife on 22 November. They asked for assistance in the 18 coastal centres set up in the municipalities along the Galician coast. These were focal points where local volunteers could receive equipment to search and catch live birds, and where live birds could be given first aid before transport to one of the washing and rehabilitation centres².

² These centres were closed before Sea Alarm's arrival in Galicia because the taken approach did not work well

Sea Alarm asked RSPCA, the Dutch and the Belgian networks to make preparations to send experts to Galicia. In consultation with ITOPF, it was agreed on 22 November that Sea Alarm should travel to Spain first to check the facilities and prepare for the first wave of six experts from the UK, Netherlands and Belgium. Flights were booked and on 23 November, Hugo Nijkamp and Jim Conroy flew to La Coruña.

After arrival

On the evening of their arrival, Messers Nijkamp and Conroy liased with Kathi Stanzel and Tosh Moller (ITOPF) and were briefed about the situation on site. They also met with Antonio Sandeval and Carlotta Viada of SEO Birdlife, and with Janine Bahr (Ölvoegelhilfe Germany) and Sacha Regmann (Project Blue Sea, Germany). The next morning a meeting took place with Esiquiel Navio of WWF Adena.

Work on site

These briefings initiated a period during which Sea Alarm's delegation gradually became more and more involved in processes that took place in what was perceived as the command structure for the wildlife operation, led by the regional government, the Xunta de Galicia. The involvement had several different aspects:

- Structure and efficiency of the response organisation
- Formalisation of response operation
- Advice on response strategy
- Improve the visibility of overall coordination
- Exchange of information between parties involved
- Offering expertise and making it available
- Trouble shooting and problem solving
- Discussions on follow-up

Structure and efficiency of the response organisation

In order to assess the efficiency of the response organisation, the delegation had to determine how the response operation was set up, who was in charge and examine the practicalities of the various operations. This took some days of meetings with various actors and trips into the field. Gradually, actors and geographical details of the different operations were identified and their efficiency assessed. Maps that Sea Alarm made were copied by parties and used for planning and information exchange.

Formalisation of response operation

At the behest of ITOPF, Sea Alarm assisted the Xunta to write an operational plan for the wildlife response operation. This reflected the current response structure, recommendations for optimisation and a description of the different scenarios that could be expected in the further developments of the incident. Sea Alarm drafted the basic plan and discussed it with both the Xunta and ITOPF. The Foundation presented the Plan at a meeting organised by the Consellería (the Xunta's Ministry of Environment), where it was accepted by the expert organisations involved in the wildlife operation. Together the Xunta and Sea Alarm finalised the Operational Plan. Sea Alarm then assisted the Xunta in presenting the Plan to representatives of the IOPC Fund Convention visiting the Ministry.

Advice on response strategy

As part of the Operational Plan, Sea Alarm developed response strategies as preparation for three possible scenarios, i.e. a further worsening of the situation (Major impact scenario), a continuation of the present situation (optimisation scenario), and the end phase of the incident (phase out scenario). The Xunta implemented the strategy for the major impact scenario immediately after the document was finalised.

Basic approaches for the phase out strategy were discussed with different parties during the second Sea Alarm mission. These were meant to activate the key persons' thinking about what to do once the numbers of birds found along the coasts of Galicia dropped significantly.

Visibility of daily coordination

The political structure within the Xunta had an established command structure that was very difficult to understand especially to those outside the government organisation. As long as the wildlife problem was concentrated along the coasts of a single province (as was the case in the beginning of the incident, when the Province of A Coruña yielded most oiled animals), this worked well. In the second part of the incident, when oiled animals increasingly were found in the Province of Pontevedra, the overall coordination became less and less visible and viable.

In the beginning, Sea Alarm Foundation worked hard to get the wildlife response groups represented in the command centre in La Coruña. Initially, it tried to persuade SEO Birdlife to set up such a centre in their temporary Terra Nova office. At the same time ITOPF tried to arrange office space in the Tower, from where the overall response was coordinated. Meanwhile, the Sea Alarm delegation monitored the situation at all field stations from day to day and shared information with key actors. During the missions, Sea Alarm coordinated between autonomously operating organisations and units and was available as an intermediate to solve any rising problem.

Exchange of information

By keeping close contacts with all parties involved on a day-to-day basis, Sea Alarm was able to exchange information between them. Because of its daily contacts with ITOPF (breakfast meetings and telephone discussions) the Foundation could inform other parties about the results from aerial inspections, weather forecasts and other relevant information from the Tower. This information function was important because parties in the wildlife operation had relied mainly on newspapers for their information. At the same time, Sea Alarm was able to keep representatives of ITOPF updated on progress within the wildlife operation, who in turn were in regular contact with the P&I Club and IOPC Fund.

Offering expertise and making it available

The Sea Alarm delegation was continuously in contact with Board Members and expert groups within its own international network. This enabled the delegation to help parties in Galicia solve specific problems and give expert advice. This was especially important in the beginning of Sea Alarm's involvement, when several parties were seeking expert approval for their work or strategic set-up. In the specific case of Oleiros, where Xunta had decided to build a relatively large centre, the veterinarian team in charge of the centre requested expert advice. To this end, Sea Alarm arranged that the Xunta invite Tim Thomas (RSPCA) to come and assist. Tim Thomas joined the Sea Alarm delegation and visited Oleiros and other bird care centres in the operation.

On an almost day to day basis, Sea Alarm kept contact with a partner in Portugal (Zoomarine) in order to monitor the situation in Portuguese waters, where oil was perceived as a continuous threat, and exchange relevant information.

Sea Alarm's internal organisation

Staff involved

The services offered to the Xunta, other responsible parties in Galicia and ITOPF were supplied by Sea Alarm's Director and members of its Board, in particular Jim Conroy and Tim Thomas, who helped on site. The Belgium Society for the Protection of Birds was requested to send Gérard Jacobovitz, to assist Sea Alarm's staff for a week on site (see Appendix).

Press

Sea Alarm kept low profile during its two missions. Information given in a few interviews for radio and newspapers (only in Netherlands and Belgium) was factual.

EU contacts

The Civil Protection and Environmental Emergency Unit of the European Commission was informed about Sea Alarm's involvement in the response to the incident.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some basic provisions must be in place in order to make the wildlife response operation successful, including:

- An explicit organisation structure, known to all parties
- Scenario planning as a basis for a reasonable approach
- Accurate exchange of factual information between relevant parties
- Daily contacts help optimising collaboration between parties and help to avoid or resolve any conflict
- Quick access to expert information and expertise elsewhere in Europe and the world
- Direct and regular information exchange with ITOPF and overall coordination centre (e.g. on weather forecasts, results from overflights, etc)

These aspects are more normally part of the role that a wildlife response group would play within a command centre, but in Galicia such a command centre did not exist and those in charge had to be made aware of the importance of the integration of wildlife issues within the overall response effort, unfortunately with little success.

For some period of time, there was a belief amongst most involved foreign parties that the coordinator of the overall operation was located in La Coruña. In the beginning of the incident, when this province was most seriously hit by the spill, this was true. But in the second half of the response, when the problems gradually were shifted to the coasts of Pontevedra, the coordination role was taken by the Consellería in Santiago. This confused many.

The operation worked quite well even without the presence of an identified crisis centre or overall coordinator. The reason was that the involved parties were professionally organised in their operations and were able to work autonomously on their specific tasks. However, this had a few drawbacks.

- External organisations involved did not know to whom they had to turn when they ran into a certain problem. Regularly Sea Alarm was asked to assist because it was the only foreign party with all the direct necessary contacts in the Xunta system.
- Every centre which treated birds kept its own records of animals entering and leaving. Centrally, however, these data were not collected on a daily basis. No single centre knew about the overall situation and no-one was apparently available to make preliminary analysis of these data, efficiency or problem identification.
- There was no forecast information available to any single station about how the oil problem developed at sea, apart from the newspapers. In other words, no direct link to reliable expert information in the Tower existed. The information from the newspapers (large oil slicks at sea) often contradicted the expert's observations from overflights (small scattered patches).
- Although Xunta officers in charge may have developed their own strategies, their decisions were not prepared nor shared with parties involved, and in some cases they could not be anticipated for. This was the cause of some misunderstandings, irritation and a few conflicts.

The spill was dealt with by officers who operated within a rather complex government system in which each province had a degree of autonomy. They dealt with the wildlife response next to their normal work, which also continued. Nobody was identified with the sole role of co-ordinating all aspects of the response in the whole region of Galicia. Instead, each provincial department of Xunta could act quite autonomously. Because the unusual situation of the oil spill did not change the usual organisation structure, rivalry and competition between the different Xunta departments seemed to prevent optimal cooperation and data sharing. In the case of complex sharing of governmental responsibilities, there is a clear need for pre-spill contingency planning in which a clear chain of command is described that temporarily replaces the normal situation.

CONCLUSION AND FOLLOW-UP

The *Prestige* incident was an ideal opportunity to demonstrate what an organisation like Sea Alarm has to offer under these circumstances. Together with its partners, the Foundation will further develop these services based on lessons learned so as to be more readily available at a next incident, which hopefully never happens.

Sea Alarm will stay in touch with all parties and be available to assist any future development towards a larger preparedness in Galicia and other regions in Europe.

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SEO Birdlife: Antonio Sandoval, Carles Carboneras, Carlota Viada

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Belgium: Jan Rodts, Gérard Jacobovitz

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Vimianzo& Noia: Blue Sea's Sacha, Holger, Tania, Uwe; Ölvogelhilfe's Janine Bahr; Juan
Emmanuel Risi (Nantes Veterinary School), Nadine (LPO)
Kees Camphuysen (CSR Consultancy, NIOZ, NL)
Martin Heubeck (University of Aberdeen, UK)

Appendix

Sea Alarm's team

Mission 1:

Hugo Nijkamp (Director Sea Alarm Foundation)
Jim Conroy (Vice Chairman Sea Alarm Foundation)
Gérard Jacobovitz (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Belgium)
Tim Thomas (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty against Animals, UK)

Mission 2

Hugo Nijkamp (Director Sea Alarm Foundation)

Colophon:

A publication of Sea Alarm Foundation
Secretariat: Quai aux Briques 22
B-1000, Brussels
T: +32.2.503 25 90
F: +32.2.502 74 38
E: secretariat@sea-alarmnet.org
Text: Hugo Nijkamp, Jim Conroy
Photography: Hugo Nijkamp
Design/layout: Nancy Schrijvers
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