

Introduction

Kazakhstan borders the northern and northwestern Caspian Sea (about 2,300 km. of coastline) between Russia in the west and Turkmenistan in the south. It also borders the Aral Sea (1,070 km), a landlocked sea between Kazakhstan in the north and Karakalpakstan, an autonomous region of Uzbekistan, in the south. To the north and west of the country is Russia, with China to the East, and Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to the South.

The Ural and Volga river deltas that feed into the northern coast of the Caspian Sea, create extensive coastal wetlands-reed beds and shallow marshes, which support high large concentrations of migratory and breeding seabirds. These wetlands are especially important to spring-autumn migration as a stopover along the Siberian-Eastern African flyway. Other important wildlife habitats in Kazakhstan include the Tyuleny Islands archipelago, Komsomolets Bay, Karakol Lake where 11,000-13,000 birds overwinter, and the seacoast to the south from Aktau.

Access to many of these important habitats will be difficult, and the north of the Caspian Sea is frozen for 4-5 months each year, which would present further logistical challenges in mounting an oiled wildlife response.

At Risk Wildlife

Avian Species - the Caspian Sea is located on several major avian migratory routes and thus of conservation value to all of Eurasia.

The wetlands of Ural River Delta are important habitat for water birds. The delta and adjacent shoals are of significance in spring and summer for tens of thousands of molting river and sea ducks, gray geese and mute swans. The open water in the northern Caspian Sea, as well as the associated reed beds, are important feeding, roosting and nesting habitat for many aquatic species. Offshore islands are utilised for nesting and roosting.

Species of special concern include European white pelican, Dalmatian pelican, pygmy cormorant, greater flamingo, white-headed and marbled duck, red-breasted and lesser white-fronted goose, slender-billed curlew, sociable plover and great black-headed gull.

Also at risk are several listed scavenging species-white-tailed eagle, Egyptian vulture, and Pallas' fish eagle-which may become oiled while feeding on polluted carcasses.

Marine mammals - the endangered Caspian seal, one of only two species of freshwater seals in the world, is only found in the Caspian Sea. In 2000 a canine distemper outbreak resulted in a large die-off, significantly reducing an already declining population.

In winter, the seals are concentrated in the Northern Caspian at the edge of the ice cover. In summer many migrate to the Middle and Southern Caspian however, part of the herd remains in the North. In Kazakhstan, the seals are found near offshore oil exploration areas.

Marine Reptiles - no marine reptiles occur in the Caspian Sea.

Regional Seas

Caspian Sea

Aral Sea

Past experience

According to the Caspian Environment Programme, each year there are two to three pipeline accidents resulting in a loss of more than 200 tons of oil and an additional 10-15 accidents where losses reach 10-15 tons. One incident occurred in 2004, spilling approximately 200 tonnes. No wildlife casualties were reported during the incident.

Response: the role of the authorities

As of 2012, Kazakhstan was in the process of updating and approving a revised National Oil Spill Prevention and

Response Plan for Offshore and Internal Water Bodies of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The National Crisis Management Centre and Ministry of Emergency Situations share responsibility for oil spill response. The Ministry of Environment Protection is likely to have decision-making authority on wildlife- capture, treatment, and permission to handle. The Veterinary Control and Inspection Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture would work with the Ministry of Environment Protection in determining rescue and rehabilitation procedures. The Ministry of Education and Sciences (National Academy of Sciences, Institutes of Virology and Microbiology) would be involved in monitoring disease and mass mortality events and could provide information on Caspian seal distribution and assist with population monitoring.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

The national plan does not include guidelines for oiled wildlife response. A number of oil companies undertaking exploration activities in Kazakhstan are including oiled wildlife response in contingency planning.

Response objectives and strategy

While there are no national response objectives or strategies, oil companies which are developing wildlife response plans will have individual objectives and strategies, contingent on national approval.

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

It is likely that rehabilitation would be allowed (overseen by the Veterinary Control and Inspection Committee) in instances where there is support for a professional response, in conjunction with authorities, as noted above.

Impact assessment

The following authority departments would likely get involved in impact assessment of oiled wildlife: The Ministry of Environmental Protection, local Emergency Response Departments, the Ministry of Education and Sciences-National Academy of Science, Institute of Zoology (Almaty) and the Ministry's Institute of Virology and Microbiology (Almaty). The Veterinary Control and Inspection Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture would also be involved in any investigation of wildlife mortalities.

Notification and early response

There is no national system for notification and early response regarding wildlife. Members of the oil industry that have plans in place will have included oiled wildlife notification and response systems.

Wildlife responders

The Institute of Zoology and the Institute of Virology and Microbiology could assist in a wildlife incident as they have undertaken some capture and handling of birds and seals. The Almaty Zoo has experience in caring for aquatic birds and maintains a captive breeding program for endangered aquatic avian species. The Karaganda Zoo (near Astana) has experience in husbandry and care of aquatic birds.

The Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK) works with Birdlife International, the RSPB (UK), and the Frankfurt Zoological Society (Germany) on avian conservation projects, thus may be able to contribute to any oiled wildlife response.

Kaz EcoProject, a private environmental monitoring and analysis company which surveys and monitors birds, mammals and other species may be able to provide support.

Cooperation between stakeholders

Kazakhstan is a signatory to the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention) of 2003, which includes the Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents ("Aktau Protocol"), with Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia and Turkmenistan for shared assistance during an oil pollution incident.

Through the Oil Spill Preparedness and Regional Initiative (Caspian Sea- Black Sea – Central Eurasia) known as

OSPRI, industry and the region's governments work cooperatively to enhance oil spill response capability.

Permanent facilities

There are no permanent facilities dedicated to oiled wildlife or wildlife rehabilitation in general.

Current processes

While not specifically addressing oiled wildlife, the North Caspian Consortium (oil and gas industry), regional Kazakh authorities and the Ministry of Emergency Situations held a large scale oil spill response drill in the north Caspian in 2013.

Documentation and references

General references

Tehran Convention, Caspian Environmental Information Centre (http://kaspinfo.net/?page_id=384) accessed online 10.14

Kennedy, S. et al. 2000. Mass Die-off of Caspian Seals Caused by Canine Distemper Virus. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*.6 (6) 637-639

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