

Introduction

The Arctic coast of Russia extends more than 40,000km, reaching from Norway and Finland on the Barents Sea to the maritime boundary with the United States on the Bering Sea. Geographic features include areas of permanent ice, fjords, deep bays, riverine estuaries, rocky shores, bogs and steep rocky cliffs. The seas in this region tend to be shallow with significant sediment movement along the shoreline. Sea ice is present in most of the region either seasonally or permanently, including glaciers that reach the coast. Large river deltas provide important habitat for breeding and nesting avian species. Offshore islands and sea ice are utilised by marine mammals.

There are a number of archipelagos and islands in the region which are important for marine wildlife including Franz Joseph Land, the Wrangel Island Reserve UNESCO site, and five RAMSAR sites: Karaginski Island in the Bering Sea, Ob Estuary Islands and the Brekhovsky Island in the Yenisei Estuary in the Kara Sea, and the Onega Bay Islands and Kanddalaksha Bay (with 850 islands) in the White Sea area of the Barents Sea. These sites support breeding, nesting and moulting birds, and some sites are also haulout and pupping areas for marine mammals.

At Risk Wildlife

In this section some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (V), Endangered (E) or Critically Endangered (CR).

Avian Species – each summer Arctic Russia is an important breeding and nesting area for a number of aquatic avian species. Some species nest on rocky offshore islands and others on coastal beaches and wetlands. Many seabirds go through a flightless moult in the region. Species of special concern include the spoon-billed sandpiper (CR), the Siberian crane (CR), Short-tailed albatross (V), Kittlitz murrelet (V), red-legged kittiwake (V), red-breasted goose (V), lesser white-fronted goose (V), long-tailed duck (V), Steller's eider (V), velvet scoter (V), and horned grebe (V).

Marine mammals – a number of whales and dolphins are found year round in Arctic Russian waters, including the beluga or white whale, narwhal, bowhead whale (a CR subpopulation is found in the Barents and Kara Seas) and white-beaked dolphin. Beluga whales are commonly found very close to shore. Humpback and grey whales summer in the region. Pinniped species including harp, common, grey, largha/spotted, bearded and ribbon seal, as well as northern fur seal, Steller's sea lion and walrus (V) may be found on the coast and offshore islands or on ice floes. Polar bears (V) are found throughout the Arctic and sea otters (E) are present around the Commander Islands in the Bering Sea.

Marine Reptiles – there are no marine reptiles found in the Russian Arctic region.

Regional Seas

Arctic Regional Sea, which includes the following Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs): Arctic Ocean, Barents Sea, Bering Sea (West), Chukchi Sea, Kara Sea, Laptev Sea and Siberian Sea (East).

Past experience

There have been no major spills in the Russian Arctic; however there have been some small to medium spills in other parts of Russia including the Black Sea/Sea of Azov, the Sea of Okhotsk and the Baltic. There has been some impact on wildlife and attempted rehabilitation, however, limited resources and experience resulted in reduced success.

Response: the role of the authorities

The State Marine Pollution Control, Salvage and Rescue Administration (MPCSA) within the Ministry of Transport is responsible for oil spills at sea. The Ministry of Emergencies is responsible for oil spills on land. Larger incidents also involve the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergencies and Disaster Response (EMERCOM). There are regional Maritime Rescue and Coordination Centres at various points along the coast, which also have plans specific to their region. In the Pechora Sea (within the Barents Sea) where there is a large oil drilling platform there are rescue vessels present near the platform at all times.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

There are no formal national guidelines in place for oiled wildlife response, however the Ministry of Emergencies, which has responsibility for oil on shore, is also responsible for wildlife.

Response objectives and strategy

N/A

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation is allowed in Russia but the Arctic region has no infrastructure in place to support it at present.

Impact assessment

Under Russian law the Ministry of Natural Resources oversees impact assessment. Information gathered is used in the process of determining fines levied on the spiller. It is likely that personnel from the Murmansk Marine Biological Institute and the P.P. Shirshov Institute of Oceanography at the Russian Academy of Sciences would be involved in the assessment.

Notification and early response

There are no processes in place for notification of oil impacted wildlife and early response to such situations.

Wildlife responders

There are no wildlife response organisations in Arctic Russia and no marine wildlife rehabilitators in the region. Several institutions and individuals in Russia have some wildlife rehabilitation experience and would likely be able to assist with impact assessment and knowledge of marine species, e.g. the Murmansk Marine Biological Institute, Kola Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences (MMBI KSC RAS), and the P.P. Shirshov Institute of Oceanography.

Cooperation between stakeholders

Personnel from various science institutes work together on wildlife biology and conservation projects. WWF-Russia cooperates with government agencies and biologists on marine environment issues and is working to include wildlife response into oil spill response plans and to encourage development of oiled wildlife response training in the region. See also Current Processes.

Russia is a signatory to the Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response (MOSPA) in the Arctic developed by the Working Group on Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR) of the Arctic Council, and has bilateral agreements with the USA for response in the Bering and Chukchi Seas and with Norway for response in the Barents Sea.

Permanent facilities

There are neither permanent wildlife rehabilitation facilities, nor any personnel with extensive experience in oiled wildlife rehabilitation. Staff at the Moscow State Academy of Veterinary Medicine and Biotechnology are presently exploring options for developing a marine mammal rehabilitation centre in Russia. However, due to the remoteness of the Arctic region, with few human settlements, no roads and minimal infrastructure it is unlikely that permanent facilities would be developed in the Arctic in the near future.

Current processes

Members of the oil industry in Russia are now required to include protection of Arctic biodiversity in their processes, companies are exploring options for oiled wildlife response in the region, based on a governmental Decree. In 2017 two training sessions, the Euro-Asia Basic Oiled Wildlife Responder course and an awareness oiled wildlife response course were conducted in the region for relevant oil industry, government and NGO personnel. Under MOSPA, the EPPR is conducting response exercises, developing an Oil Spill Response Gap Analysis, and developing a database of Arctic Response Assets.

Documentation and references

General references

General references

ITOPF Country Profile

Plan for Main Activities During the Year of Ecology (Decree No. 1082-r of the Government of Russia. 2 June 2016).

<http://www.undp.ru/index.php?iso=RU&lid=1&cmd=news&id=1338>

Birdlife International Country Profile

WWF-Russia personal communication

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RUSSIAN FEDERATION (ARCTIC)

Country Wildlife Response Profiles
A Summary of oiled wildlife response
arrangements and resources worldwide

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