

Introduction

Sri Lanka is an island nation southeast of India surrounded by the Indian Ocean. The Gulf of Mannar lies to the west, the Bay of Bengal to the east and Palk Strait to the northwest.

Much of the coastline consists of sandy beaches, coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, and rock harbours. In the northeast the monsoon season is December to March while in the southwest monsoons occur from June to October.

Kumana (Yala) National Park, a RAMSAR site in the south of Sri Lanka, is an important area for wildlife, supporting populations of migratory and nesting waterbirds, nesting sea turtles and other wildlife. Another RAMSAR site, Vankalai Sanctuary, also supports species of concern including dugongs, sea turtles and waterbirds. There are important wildlife habitats and populations in the Palk Strait/Palk Bay area that, while outside of the major shipping lanes, do support some vessel traffic and oil exploration activities.

At-risk wildlife

Avian Species – A variety of seabirds (gulls, terns, jaegers, boobies and petrels, etc.), waders (storks, flamingos, egrets, ibis, herons, etc.), ducks and shorebirds (plovers, sandpipers, knots, turnstones, stints, etc.) are found along the Sri Lanka coast. Sri Lanka is an important wintering site on the Central Asia-India Flyway for waders and shorebirds. Species of special concern include spoon-billed sandpiper, sociable lapwing, Christmas frigatebird, great knot, Asian woolly neck and lesser adjutant.

Marine mammals – Dugongs are found along the coasts of North West and North Sri Lanka. Coastal cetaceans found in the shallow bays, mangroves, tidal rivers, and estuaries of North and North West Sri Lanka include Indo-Pacific finless porpoise and Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin. From mid-March through April, super-pods of sperm whales gather in the Gulf of Mannar, an important calving ground. Cuvier's beaked, blue and sperm whales are found offshore.

Marine Reptiles – Olive Ridley and green turtles are common nesting species in South, West, and North West Sri Lanka with a small population of leatherbacks found here as well. Loggerhead turtles are occasionally found but considered rare. Muggers and estuarine crocodiles may be found in saltwater lagoons.

Regional Seas

Indian Ocean (South Asia Seas Region)

Past experience

In 1994 a reported 100 tonnes of fuel oil were spilled by the cargo ship Komsomolets Azerbaijan, in 1999 a Turkish cargo vessel, the MV Meliksah, sank off the Sri Lankan coast and in 2012 a Cyprus-flagged cargo vessel, the Thmothrmopolyseara, sank outside Colombo harbour. The amount of oil spilled from the last two vessels is not known and there were no reports of oiled wildlife response in any of the three incidents.

Response: the role of the authorities

The Marine Environmental Protection Authority (MEPA), which is overseen by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, is the lead agency for oil spill response under the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (NOS COP). The Sri Lankan Navy is involved in offshore spill response and the Coast Conservation Department has responsibility for oversight of coastal clean-up.

Tier I spills are handled by the local authorities and/or the Sri Lankan Port Authority with the NOS COP brought into force for Tier II and III spills. The Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) and the Ceylon Petroleum Storage terminals Limited (CPSL) respond to spills at their facilities.

Other members of the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) may be called on to

assist in a significant incident.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

The Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) is tasked with assisting in saving wildlife, in addition to advising on protection of marine protected areas, sanctuaries and other wetlands and assisting with impact assessment.

Response objectives and strategy

Objectives and strategies for oiled wildlife response are not clearly stated in the 2008 update of the NOS COP.

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

Given that the DWC is tasked with assisting in saving wildlife it seems that rehabilitation would be allowed, however no facilities presently exist for rehabilitation of marine mammals or seabirds, and facilities for sea turtles are limited.

Impact assessment

The Coast Conservation Department (CCD) advises on impact assessment, aided by the Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (DFAR) and the National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency (NARA). Under the NOS COP NGOs, particularly Biodiversity Education and Research (BEAR), The Turtle Conservation Project (TCP) and the Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka (FOGSL) would likely assist in impact assessment as part of a Damage Assessment Team (DAT).

Notification and early response

The MEPA will notify the Environment Authority and any relevant NGOs in the case of Tier II or III spills.

Wildlife responders

There are no wildlife rehabilitation facilities for birds or marine mammals in Sri Lanka, however FOGSL (birds), BEAR (marine mammals) and TCP (sea turtles) may be able to assist with impact assessment and post-release monitoring. TCP can provide expertise in sea turtle care and may have limited space for some turtles requiring cleaning and rehabilitation. All three groups have limited personnel and would likely require outside assistance in any significant incident.

The Department of Wildlife Conservation manages the Elephant Transit Home, a rehabilitation facility for orphaned elephant calves. While the facility is located inland and does not have marine wildlife experience, veterinary staff and equipment may be available during a spill response.

Cooperation between stakeholders

The groups listed above have a history of cooperation with government agencies and amongst themselves.

Sri Lanka is a signatory to the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) with Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and the Maldives, and to the MoU for Co-operation on the Response to Oil and Chemical Pollution in the South Asia Seas Region with Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Maldives (India signature pending).

Permanent facilities

There are no permanent marine mammal or avian rehabilitation facilities, although several facilities, TCP in particular, care for sea turtles on a limited basis.

Current processes

There are no current processes in place for rescue and care of oil-affected wildlife.

The NOS COP calls for periodic oil spill response drills and exercises. In 2016 The Sri Lanka Coast Guard held a joint response exercise with the Japan Coast Guard in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

Documentation and references

General references

General References

Sri Lanka NOS COP 2008

I TOPF 2010 Sri Lanka Country Profile

Birdlife International DataZone Country Profile

Ecosystems Management and Conservation Project, Environmental Assessment and Management Framework, Government of Sri Lanka

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