

Introduction

The UK is an island nation situated in the Northeast Atlantic, surrounded by the North Sea to the east, the English Channel to the south, the Irish Sea to the southeast and the Atlantic to the north-northeast. Coastal conditions along the more than 6,000km of shoreline vary greatly from sandy beaches to rocky cliffs to tidal mudflats and large estuaries.

At Risk Wildlife

Avian Species - the seas around the UK are rich in birdlife with internationally important populations of northern gannet (55.6% of the world population) and Manx shearwaters (79.9% of the world population) breeding there. In addition, wintering populations of common scoter and IUCN red-listed species including the long-tailed duck, velvet scoter, sooty and Balearic shearwater are increasing locally. Large numbers of common guillemot, razorbill, puffin, three species of diver, five species of grebe (including little grebe) and five species of tern, also occur in UK waters. Many species of gull, including the northern fulmar breed and are present in the area throughout the year.

Esuarine species include a range of wildfowl such as geese and swans, as well as other wading species; of the later, the black-tailed godwit and European curlew are listed as Near Threatened.

Marine mammals - Common (harbour) and grey seals are resident, with harp, hooded and ringed seals sometimes present. Eight species of whale and eight species of dolphin or porpoise are found in UK waters. European otters' coastal feeding habits put them at risk during oil spills as well.

Marine Reptiles - Leatherback, loggerhead, green, hawksbill, and Kemp's Ridley sea turtles have been recorded in UK waters, with leatherbacks being the most common-feeding offshore in summer. The others are more often seen as stray juveniles.

Regional Seas

North-East Atlantic

Past experience

The UK has experienced a number of major oil and HNS incidents:

Torrey Canyon (Scilly Islands, 1967)

Olympic Alliance (Dover Strait, 1975)

Amoco Cadiz (Portsall France, 1978)

Eleni V (Great Yarmouth, 1978)

Christos Bitas (Wales, 1978)

Braer (Shetland, 1993)

Sea Empress (Milford Haven, 1996)

MSC Napoli (Devon, 2007)

Mystery Polymer Spill (Southeast coast, 2013)

The most notable of these are the Torrey Canyon, MSC Napoli and Sea Empress, where large numbers of birds were affected. In the course of responding to these spills, wildlife agencies have gained significant experience in dealing with oiled animals, particularly birds.

In addition, as part of cooperative responses to larger incidents, staff from the RSPCA have attended spills in Europe and internationally.

Response: the role of the authorities

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), is an Agency of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The Agency is responsible for developing, promoting and enforcing high standards of marine safety, responding to maritime emergencies, minimizing the risk of pollution of the marine environment from ships and where

pollution occurs, minimizing the impact on UK interests.

The National Contingency Plan for Marine Pollution from Shipping and Offshore Installations (NCP), under review in 2014, includes wording that designates the RSPCA (England and Wales), the SSPCA (Scotland) and the USPCA (Northern Ireland) as lead agencies for wildlife response except in areas that have local arrangements, e.g. the Shetlands. It further designates the RSPB as being involved in the coordination of response to birds affected by oil, gas and other hazardous substance spills.

In addition the Environment Group is the primary source for advice on public health and environmental issues during responses. It has no powers of direction or enforcement. In smaller responses the EG may only be called upon when specific advice is requested.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

While there are no formal guidelines in the NCP, the RSPCA, SSPCA and USPCA are designated as lead agencies for rescue and treatment of oiled wildlife other than in places where special arrangements are in place (e.g. Shetland). The NCP recognises that these organisations have in place high standards for capture, cleaning and rehabilitation. The EG is charged with directing third party welfare efforts toward these agencies.

The RSPB will be involved in coordination of response to oiled wildlife (monitoring and impact assessment activities regarding oiled birds).

On Shetland, an oiled wildlife response plan is in place under the Wildlife Response Coordinating Committee of the Shetland Oil Terminal Advisory Group (SOTEAG). That plan names the SSPCA and Hillswick Wildlife Sanctuary as lead organisations for rescue and rehabilitation of birds and marine mammals respectively.

Response objectives and strategy

The organisations charged with wildlife response in the UK place a high priority on both the individual animal welfare and the conservation value of response. Careful triage is utilised to ensure these priorities are met.

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

UK wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organisations have a triage system in place, developed over time, to ensure birds likely to survive are prioritised and animals in poor condition are euthanized on welfare grounds.

Impact assessment

In England, under the Pollution Response in Emergencies: Marine Impact Assessment and Monitoring (Premiam) project, whose permanent members are the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and the Environment Agency (EA), a Premiam Monitoring Coordination Cell (PMCC) is formed within minutes/hours of an incident. Membership in the PMCC is determined by the nature of the incident, with Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) brought on board where there are conservation issues to address.

Notification and early response

While not specifically stated in the NCP, it is likely that the MCA or the PMCC would notify the lead agencies for wildlife response-RSPB, RSPCA, SSPCA, and USPCA as needed.

Wildlife responders

In England and Wales, the RSPCA responds to oiled wildlife, particularly birds and seals, but also to sea turtles. They maintain four rehabilitation centres where oiled wildlife can be rehabilitated (see under permanent facilities). In Scotland the SSPCA admits oiled wildlife to its National Wildlife Rescue Centre in Clackmannanshire (a large facility which became operational in 2012), and maintains a smaller facility on Orkney, which has limited capacity. British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) rescues all types of marine wildlife throughout the UK, and is considered the primary response organisation for cetacean strandings. BDMLR maintains trained staff and specialised equipment, including RIBs for water rescue, at various points throughout the UK and has assisted with both water and land based

bird, turtle and mammal collection during various spills.

Other relevant organisations include the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Scottish Nature, Natural England, Country Council of Wales, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (NRDA, impact assessment) and the British Trust for Ornithology (primary ringing agency for post release monitoring).

In Northern Ireland there is less capacity and experience. It is likely that during a major response the organisations from other parts of the UK would be called in to assist.

Cooperation between stakeholders

The organisations listed above have a long history of cooperation during wildlife emergencies, including oil and HNS spills.

Permanent facilities

In England there are four RSPCA wildlife centres (West Hatch in Somerset, East Winch in Norfolk, Stapeley Grange in Cheshire and Mallydams Wood in East Sussex) capable of caring for oiled wildlife.

In Scotland, the SSPCA's National Wildlife rescue Centre in Clackmannanshire would admit oiled wildlife.

In Northern Ireland there are no permanent facilities for oiled wildlife response.

Current processes

The RSPCA is active in the European Oiled Wildlife Responders group which has recently completed guidelines for wildlife rescue and rehabilitation during a spill.

In 2014 discussions began on revision and updating of guidance on oiled wildlife response in the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan.

Documentation and references

General references

General references

National Contingency Plan (under review as of 2014)

ITOPF Profile

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UNITED KINGDOM

*Country Wildlife Response Profiles
A Summary of oiled wildlife response
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