

Introduction

Azerbaijan is located in the southeastern Caucasus, bordering the Caspian Sea to the east, Armenia and Georgia to the west, the Russian Federation to the north, and Iran to the south. It shares the Caspian Sea with Iran, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan, although the terms of such shared use are presently being negotiated.

The country's 800km of coastline, which includes the Absheron and Sara peninsulas and the Kura sand bar, consists of extensive deltas, shallows, islands and salt marshes which are important habitat for wildlife. As of 2018, the Ghizil-Agaj State Reserve is being expanded and upgraded to become a National Park which will include the first Marine Protected Area in the Caspian Sea.

A major pipeline runs from Baku to Georgia and Turkey, creating the potential for inland spills through the middle of the country, with possible impact on terrestrial mammals and birds.

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 – large numbers of migratory and wintering waterbirds are found along the Azerbaijani coast particularly on Yashma Island (20,000 to 30,000 shorebirds), the Pirallahi Bay, Absheron National Park and archipelago (2000-3000 birds annually), the Kura Delta, and the Gizil-Agach State Reserve. Breeding colonies of wading birds such as herons, bitterns, egrets, as well as gulls AND terns are found at some of these sites. The Gizil-Agaj Reserve hosts the largest breeding colony of storks in Europe.

Species of special concern include Siberian Crane (CR), Sociable lapwing (CR), slender-billed curlew (CR), white-headed duck (E) Lesser white-fronted goose (V), Long-tailed duck (V), velvet scoter (V), Marbled teal (V), common pochard (V), horned grebe (V). Several IUCN listed bird of prey species might be impacted should there be an inland spill.

Marine mammals – Absheron National Park hosts a resident population of 100-200 endangered Caspian seals, the only marine mammal in Azerbaijani waters. Migratory populations are found on many of the offshore islands from April to November.

Marine reptiles – there are no marine reptiles in the Azerbaijani part of the Caspian Sea.

Regional Seas

Caspian Sea

Past experience

In 1998, a spill on Gil Island killed thousands of waterbirds and another spill at Dashlar and Zenbil Islands that same year affected waterbirds and seals. In 2015 there was a fire on a State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) oil rig causing multiple deaths, however there were no reports of oiled wildlife.

Response: the role of the authorities

As of late 2017, Azerbaijan had developed a National Marine Oil Spill Contingency Plan, which is not signed off as of 2018. Processes are in place to integrate oil spills into a national emergency response plan under the Ministry of Emergency Situations, under its role in "drafting and implementing government policy on the prevention of emergency situations and consequence management in cases of spills of crude oil and oil products as a result of incidents."

It is not clear at this time what role the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MENR), which had been the the competent authority responsible for oil spill response and preparedness, will play but it is likely to be involved in any oiled wildlife response. The State Veterinary Surveillance Service, under the Ministry of Agriculture, would most likely be in involved in animal welfare aspects of a response.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

There are no formal guidelines for oiled wildlife response, however some oil companies maintain their own oiled wildlife response plans, equipment and personnel. Water shortages in the country may affect response capacity. The eight companies partnering on the pipeline have developed a regional mobile plan for oil spill response with storage buildings and equipment placed every 450km along the route.

Response objectives and strategy

N/A

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation has been allowed in the past, with euthanasia permitted based on international oiled wildlife response standards.

Impact assessment

MENR would likely be involved in impact assessment. The Geological Institute at the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS) has worked on marine mammal impact assessment during the Caspian seal virus incident. The Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (a Birdlife International partner), The Institute of Zoology at ANAS and Baku State University's Faculty of Ecology and Soil Sciences might also be involved.

Notification and early response

There is no system in place for notification of and early response to oiled wildlife.

Wildlife responders

There are no experienced oiled wildlife responders and no wildlife rehabilitation organisations in the country.

Cooperation between stakeholders

Personnel from a number of organisations and agencies worked together during the Caspian seal disptemper virus incident.

Azerbaijan is a signatory to the Tehran Convention for the Protection of the Caspian Sea, the Aktau Protocol for oil spill response in the Caspian, the Moscow Protocol for land-based oil spill response, and is a participant in the Caspian Regional Environment Programme (CEP), the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN) and the Caspian Sea Conservation Network.

Permanent facilities

There are no permanent facilities for oiled wildlife response or wildlife rehabilitation.

Current processes

Azerbaijan is involved in the Oil Spill Preparedness Regional Initiative (OSPRI), which is working with the states of the Caspian and Black Seas and Central Eurasia to create or update their oil spill response plans and harmonise response plans in the region to improve cooperation.

The national emergency contingency plan is being updated to include oil spill response. At least one oil company provides its personnel with ongoing training in oiled wildlife response through an internationally recognised NGO.

Documentation and references

General references

Birdlife International Country Profile

RAMSAR Country Profile

2014 Report to the Convention on Biodiversity

Caspian Seal Conservation Action Plan (2007)

General references

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