

Introduction

Iran is bordered on the north by Turkmenistan, the Caspian Sea and Azerbaijan, on the west by Turkey and Iraq, on the southwest by the Persian Gulf, on the south by the Gulf of Oman and on the west by Pakistan and Afghanistan. The country's 3160 km of coastline includes 2440 km on the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman in the northwest Indian Ocean and 720 km on the Caspian Sea.

Along the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman are mangroves, seagrass beds, salt marshes and salt pans. The Iranian coast of the Caspian Sea includes wetlands, sandy beaches with shallow waters, and intertidal mudflats.

Protected areas on the Persian Gulf include the Hara Biosphere Reserve which is important for wintering waterbirds and foraging green turtles, the Miankaleh Biosphere Reserve, some of which is also a RAMSAR site and supports nesting, migrating and wintering waterbirds such as pelicans, cormorants, egrets, flamingos and geese, the Sheedvar Island RAMSAR site hosts the largest colony of terns in Iran and provides nesting grounds for green (V) and hawksbill (CR) turtles. In the Govater Bay and Hur-e-Bahu Ramsar site, the western most population of the marsh or mugger (V) crocodile is found along with wintering waterfowl. The Nakhilu, Morghu and Ummal Karam Island Ramsar site is an important breeding site for critically endangered hawksbill turtles and also hosts breeding terns and egrets.

On the Caspian Sea the Bujagh National Park, another RAMSAR site, hosts the endangered Caspian seal and a variety of geese and swans. The Gomishan Lagoon Ramsar site hosts thousands of waterbirds in winter, including the sociable lapwing (CR) and is another area where Caspian seals are found.

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 – In addition to the protected areas listed above, RAMSAR sites and protected areas on the Persian Gulf/Gulf of Oman which host significant avian populations, particularly in winter and on migration, include: the Shadegan marshes, the mudflats of Khor-al Amaya and Khor which are important for wintering ducks, including the marbled teal (V) and for resident Imperial eagle (V); the Deltas of Rud-e-Gaz and Rud-e-Hara; the Khuran Straits, Rud-e-Shur, Rud-e-Shirin, and Rud-e-Mindab; Bushire Bay and Heleh Protected Area and Bahu Kalat Protected Area on the Pakistan border.

Marine mammals – Fourteen species of marine mammal have been reliably recorded in Iranian waters, the majority in the Persian Gulf, with smaller numbers in the Gulf of Oman. Many of the sightings occurred around Qeshm Island and Hormozgan Province. Other species of special concern include the Indo-Pacific finless porpoise (V), Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin (V), sperm whale (V) and dugong (V), fin whale (V) and humpback whale (E, Persian Gulf subpopulation). Fin and humpback are rare in Iran. The only marine mammal in Caspian waters is the Caspian seal (E) and few are sighted in Iran.

Marine reptiles – Hawksbill (CR), green (E), olive ridley (V), and loggerhead (V) sea turtles are found in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. Iran hosts some of the most important nesting populations of the hawksbill in the Persian Gulf on the Nakhiloo, Ommolgorm and Kharko Islands and mainland beaches of the Naiband Marine-Coastal National Park. Hawksbills feed within coral reefs in the area. There are only a few records of green turtles nesting on Iranian beaches, particularly at Sheedvar Island, but Iranian waters provide important foraging zones for this species.

Regional Seas

Caspian Sea
Persian Gulf
Gulf of Oman

Past experience

There have not been any major oil spills along Iran's Caspian Sea coast. In the Persian Gulf, the Gulf War oil spill is regarded as the worst oil spill in history. It caused considerable damage to wildlife in the Persian Gulf, especially in areas surrounding Kuwait and Iraq.

Other serious spills occurred during the Iran-Iraq war, in particular in 1983 when 38 million gallons of crude were released from the Nowruz Field. More recently 500 tonnes of light crude were released in the Straits of Hormuz in 2005, and in 2007 an area of 800 square kilometres was contaminated near Bandar Abbas and may have resulted in the death of 79 dolphins.

Ongoing conflict in the region has resulted in minor spills between 2007 and 2020.

Response: the role of the authorities

Under the National Plan for Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Cooperation (2003), the Ports and Maritime Organisation (PMO), Environment Protection Office's Maritime Search and Rescue is the Competent National Authority overseeing oil spill response. The Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME)'s Marine Emergency Mutual Aid Centre (MEMAC) is called in for larger responses and those crossing international borders.

The Department of Environment's Marine Environment and Wetlands sector would oversee any wildlife response and serves as the country's Focal Point for ROPME.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

There are no formal guidelines for response to oiled wildlife, however the use of dispersants is restricted near sensitive coastlines.

Response objectives and strategy

N/A

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

N/A

Impact assessment

It is likely the Department of Environment's Marine Environment and Wetlands sector would oversee any impact assessment. The Iranian National Institute for Oceanography and Atmospheric Science, which holds data on all three Regional Seas at the Iranian National Center for Ocean Data (INCOD), would also play a role in impact assessment, particularly through its Marine Biology Division of the Ocean Science Research Group.

The University of Marine Science and Technology Khorramshahr and the Natural Resources and Marine Sciences' Marine Biology division at Tarbiat Modares University may also be involved.

Notification and early response

N/A

Wildlife responders

As of 2020, most NGO activity, particularly those involved in environmental issues, has been restricted. There do not appear to be any marine wildlife responders in the country.

Cooperation between stakeholders

Iran is a signatory to the Kuwait Convention and is a Member State of the Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment (ROPME), for the ROPME Sea Area which includes Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

In addition, Iran cooperates with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan on the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea's Caspian Regional Plan on cooperation in cases of major oil spills.

Permanent facilities

There are no permanent facilities for oiled wildlife response in Iran.

Current processes

MEMAC (the Marine Emergency Mutual Aid Centre, under the framework of the Kuwait Regional Convention For Co-operation on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution), holds regular exercises for the region and meetings of Regional Response Officers.

Documentation and references

General references

ITOPF Country Profile (2011)

Birdlife International Country Profile

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J. Cetacean Res. Manage. 11(1):49-63

MEMAC (<http://memac-rsa.org/en/home>)

Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention)

Sea Alarm Middle East Regional Response Profile v.07 rev 2020

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