

Introduction

Japan is an island nation in the North Pacific in close proximity to the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation and the Korean peninsula. The coastline of Hokkaido, the northernmost island group, features steep cliffs which host breeding pelagic birds; a number of important wetlands for breeding, migratory and wintering aquatic species; and most of the pinniped species found in Japan. In the Okinawa prefecture, the most southerly of the Japanese island groups, coral reefs and seagrass beds predominate, creating habitat for warm water species. RAMSAR sites throughout the country protect habitats that reflect the variety of climates found in the country.

The waters of the Sea of Okhotsk and Sea of Japan, as well as the northern Pacific Ocean, can be very rough, particularly in winter. Despite its calmer waters, the Seto Inland Sea can be treacherous due to strong currents in narrow channels leading to the open ocean.

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 – many marine birds that breed in Alaska and Siberia spend the winter in Japan. On Hokkaido, Notsuke-hanto and Notsuke-wan, a RAMSAR site, is one of the largest aquatic avian staging and breeding habitats in the world, hosting at least 211 species of migratory waterbirds. Tofutsu-ko, another RAMSAR site on Hokkaido, is also an important stopover point for geese, ducks and swans, as well as red-crowned crane and two species of coastal eagle. On Honshu Island the Hinuma RAMSAR site includes a brackish lake fed by high tide seawater and a freshwater river where more than 10,000 ducks and a variety of other types of waterbirds winter. South of Tokyo, in the Chibu region, the Fujimae-higata RAMSAR site's tidal flats are another important staging site for migration along the East Asia-Australia Flyway often hosting more than 20,000 birds. The Higashiyoka-higata RAMSAR site in Ariake Bay is important for spoon-billed sandpiper (CR) and black-faced spoonbill (E).

Species of special concern include crested shelduck, Baer's pochard, Bryan's shearwater and spoon-billed sandpiper (all CR); oriental stork, scaly-sided merganser, red-crowned crane, Bannerman's shearwater, black-faced spoonbill, Far Eastern curlew, great knot and spotted redshank (all E); and swan goose, lesser white-fronted goose, long-tailed duck, Steller's eider, common pochard, horned grebe, white-naped crane, hooded crane, Matsudaira's storm-petrel, short-tailed albatross, Stejneger's petrel, white-necked petrel, Chinese egret, Saunders' gull, black-legged kittiwake, Aleutian tern, Japanese murrelet, Steller's sea eagle, and snowy owl (all V).

Marine mammals – species found along Japan's coast include common, spotted and ribbon seal, the Endangered western Steller sea lion population, northern fur seal, and sea otter (E). Fur seals and sea otters, which are found only in small numbers around Hokkaido, are at high risk from oil spills due to their dependence on fur rather than blubber to maintain body heat.

Dugong (V) are found around Okinawa in the south of the country. Eurasian otters may forage along the coast.

The narrow-ridged finless porpoise (E), North Pacific right whale (E), blue (E), fin (V) sei (E) and sperm (V) whales are among the more than twenty species of cetacean found in Japanese waters. Seven species of beaked whales, which are highly sensitive to ocean noise, have been recorded in Japanese waters.

Marine reptiles – five species of sea turtle are found in Japanese waters. Olive Ridley (V) and leatherback (CR) turtles do not nest in Japan but are found in offshore waters at various times of the year. Hawksbills (CR) nest throughout the Ryukyu archipelago, green turtles (E) nest on the Nansei and Ogasawara Islands, and loggerhead turtles (E) nest on Honshu, Skioku, Kyushu and Nansei Islands.

The Yakushima Nagata-hama RAMSAR site hosts an important loggerhead turtle nesting beach and

nearby feeding area. Keramashoto Coral Reef, another RAMSAR site, has nesting populations of hawksbill, green and loggerhead turtles.

Regional Seas

Sea of Japan (also known as the East Sea)

Sea of Okhotsk

Pacific Ocean

Seto Inland Sea, also known as Setuchi

Past experience

In 1971 the *Juliana* ran aground in Niigata, spilling approximately 7000 tonnes of crude oil. In 1997 the *Nakhodka*, which was carrying approximately 19,000 tonnes of fuel oil, split in two in the Sea of Japan, impacting at least 1000 km of coastline. Wildlife was euthanised as part of that spill response. In that same year the *Diamond Grace* spilled 1300 tonnes of crude oil in Tokyo Bay.

Between 2000 and 2008 there was a chronic oiling situation on Tsushima Island, during which a local NGO and the Japanese Environmental Disaster Information Centre (JEDIC), provided impact assessment and wildlife response.

In October 2006 the ore carrier *Giant Step* grounded at Kashima Port during a storm. A local NGO and JEDIC provided impact assessment.

In 2018, the tanker *Sanchi* caught fire and sank in the East China Sea after colliding with the freighter *CF Crystal*. The oil slick that developed spread to over 100 square meters and reached the small island of Takarajima. No wildlife response was reported.

Response: the role of the authorities

The National Contingency Plan for Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response, which went into effect in 1996, was designed to work in tandem with other national plans such as the Basic, Operational and Local Plan for Disaster Prevention, the Basic Environment Plan and the Plan for Cleaning of Spilled Oil.

The Japan Coast Guard, formerly the Maritime Safety Agency, which maintains 66 offices and 52 stations in 11 regions, is the competent national authority for oil spill response.

The Ministry of the Environment oversees any oiled wildlife response under the Marine Pollution and Disaster Prevention Law. As of 1997, the law requires governments of each prefecture to provide wildlife rehabilitation and natural resource impact assessments.

Oiled wildlife responseFormal guidelines?

The Ministry of the Environment Nature Conservation Bureau's Wildlife Division is the official national response department for oiled wildlife, however, there are no national guidelines and each prefecture is responsible for wildlife response and damage assessment.

Response objectives and strategy

As there are no national guidelines for wildlife response, response objectives and strategies for each spill will depend on the knowledge and interest of the head of the prefecture where the spill occurs, well as the availability of personnel with oiled wildlife experience.

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation would be allowed, with euthanasia employed based on welfare concerns.

Impact assessment

The Wild Bird Society of Japan is actively involved in the protection of threatened avian species and would be involved in impact assessment. The Sea Turtle Association of Japan was involved in monitoring nesting turtles, does tagging and tracking and records and investigates beached dead turtles, thus would likely be involved in impact assessment of these animals.

The Wildlife Research Centre, Kyoto might be involved in cetacean impact assessment. Tottori University Joint Department of Veterinary Medicine on Honshu does some work with wildlife and might be involved in impact assessment there.

Notification and early response

As above, systems for notification and early response will vary between prefectures based on the knowledge and interest of the head of the affected prefecture.

Wildlife responders

The Ministry of the Environment has set up wildlife centres in Kushiro, Sado and Iriomote which have research and conservations programmes as well as wildlife rehabilitation centres. Similar centres are being constructed in Haboro, Yambaru and Tsushima, with further centres planned in other areas. The Wild Bird Society of Japan has two bird sanctuaries in areas where wintering and migrating waterbirds congregate. WBSJ does not rescue or rehabilitate birds, however they may be able to assist with other response activities.

Cooperation between stakeholders

Personnel from the various wildlife centres would likely work together in the event of a response. Cooperation may vary from island to island.

Japan is a signatory to the Association of South East Asian Nations Oil Spill Response Action Plan (ASEAN-OSRAP) and has MoUs with South Korea, for the Sea of Japan, and with the United States for pollution preparedness. It is a Member State of the Action Plan for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Northwest Pacific Region (NOWPAP) with the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation for cooperation on spill response under the Regional Oil and HNS Spill Contingency Plan. Japan also partners with the Sulu-Sulawesi Oil Spill Response Network in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

In addition, the National Park Division, Nature Conservation Bureau of the Ministry of the Environment is a Founding Member of the IUCN Asia Protected Areas Partnership along with similar agencies in Thailand, Viet Nam, Lao People's Republic, Maldives, Malaysia, China, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, India, Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Bhutan, Mongolia, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Permanent facilities

The Ministry of the Environment has been setting up a number of wildlife centres focusing on protection and habitat improvement for threatened species. Most do not presently support rehabilitation; however, the Ministry of the Environment's Hokkaido Seabird Centre provides rescue, rehabilitation, release and post-release monitoring of seabirds in the north.

There was a second centre in the Fukushima region, however, it is not clear whether this facility is still active.

Current processes

N/A

Documentation and references

General references

IТОPF Country Profile

Birdlife International Country Profile

State of the Worlds Turtles (SWOT). Volume 13:Japan

Japan National Contingency Plan for Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response (Translation:https://www.pcs.gr.jp/doc/esymposium/12170/96_koichi_yunoki_e.pdf)

Sea Alarm East Asia Regional Response Profile v.11 2020

Terms and Conditions

These Country Wildlife Profiles are provided in good faith as a guide only and are based on information obtained from a variety of sources over a period of time. This information is subject to change and should, in each case, be independently verified before reliance is placed on it. Country Wildlife Profiles may have been issued solely to incorporate additional or revised information under one heading only. Each Profile has therefore not necessarily been completely verified or updated as at the stated Date of Issue.



JAPAN

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

Sea Alarm hereby excludes, to the fullest extent permitted by applicable law, any and all liability to any person, corporation or other entity for any loss, damage or expense resulting from reliance or use of these Country Wildlife Profiles.

© Sea Alarm Foundation, 2020

These Country Wildlife Profiles may be reproduced by any means for noncommercial distribution without addition, deletion or amendment, provided an acknowledgment of the source is given and these Terms & Conditions are reproduced in full.

These Country Wildlife Profiles may not be reproduced without the prior written permission of Sea Alarm Foundation either for commercial distribution or with addition, deletion or amendment.