

Introduction

The Sultanate of Oman is located on the Arabian Peninsula, bordered on the southwest by Yemen, the southeast and east by the Arabian Sea, the northeast by the Gulf of Oman (Sea of Oman), the northwest by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the west by Saudi Arabia. It also includes two exclaves within the borders of the UAE; Musandam, which encompasses much of the Musandam Peninsula above the northern tip of the UAE, and Madha, located between Musandam and the Oman-UAE border.

The country's 2092 km of coastline varies from rugged cliffs in Musandam and Dhofar to low sand beaches with inlets and lagoons (some with mangrove swamps), long sandy beaches, and salt flats. A number of offshore islands make up the rest of the coastline, the largest being Masirah.

The Qurum Nature Reserve, a Ramsar site, supports nearly 200 species of bird and has one of the largest mangrove forests on the east coast of the Arabian Peninsula. The Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve, designated as a Marine Protected Area by Royal Decree, hosts nesting sea turtles and seabirds. In the Al Wusta region, which includes the Gulf of Masirah and Suqrah Bay, roughly one million migratory and wintering seabirds are found each year.

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 sites noted above, large numbers of terns, gulls, ducks, geese, wading and shorebirds winter or migrate through Oman each year stopping on Masirah Island, the Al Batinah coast, Khawr Rouri, Khawr Hassan and Jazirat Hino.

Species of special concern include the sociable lapwing (CR), great knot (E), common pochard (V), and Socotra cormorant (V).

Marine mammals – the Arabian Sea subpopulation of humpback whale (E) is not highly migratory, generally remaining in the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman and calving in the Gulf of Masirah. It is, therefore, considered geographically, demographically and genetically distinct. The Indian Ocean humpback dolphin (E) is found in nearshore waters. Sperm (V), blue (E), Brydes whales, orca, and at least 16 species of dolphins have been sighted off Oman's coast.

Marine reptiles – five species of sea turtle: leatherback (CR), hawksbill (CR), olive ridley (E), loggerhead (E), and green (E) are found in Oman. Of these only the leatherback, an irregular visitor, does not nest on Oman's beaches. Forty percent of breeding female loggerheads worldwide nest on Masirah Island, one of the largest aggregations in the world. Another key nesting site is the Ras Al Jinz Nature Reserve which hosts approximately 20,000 nesting green turtles.

Hawksbills and Olive Ridleys also nest on Masirah. Green and loggerhead turtles nest in summer at Ra'as Hamar, near Salalah. Muscat, Daymaniyat, and Ras al Hadd, are also turtle nesting sites. Smaller numbers are found on other Omani beaches including Bandar Jissah, Bandar Khayran and the Barr Al Jissah Resort. Nesting season runs from July to October.

Nine species of sea snakes are found in Oman's waters.

Regional Seas

Arabian Sea-ROPME Sea Area.

Past experience

Oman has not experienced any major oil spills. There have been a number of minor spills, including the tanker ASSIMI (1983) incident, the tanker SEIKI (1994) near the port of Al Fujayrah in the northern Gulf of Oman which led to minor contamination of Omani beaches, the tanker EVERTON (2004), and those arising from conflicts in the Gulf region. There is no reference to wildlife impacts in the aftermath of those incidents.

Response: the role of the authorities

The Pollution Operations Control Centre of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs (MECA) is the Competent National Authority for oil spill response. Staff from its Pollution Operations Monitoring Centre would oversee response. The Department of Marine Affairs of the Ministry of Transport and Communications and local port

authorities may be involved depending on the situation. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries may also be involved in responses where fish and other wildlife might be impacted.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

There are no formal guidelines for oiled wildlife response in Oman.

Response objectives and strategy

N/A

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation would likely be allowed, provided there are sufficient personnel and resources to respond, with euthanasia employed at the discretion of authorised veterinarians.

Impact assessment

MECA would oversee impact assessment, likely utilising personnel from the Marine Science & Fisheries Centre which is affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries Wealth, local oil spill response consultants, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), ESO and Five Oceans Environmental Services (5OES).

Notification and early response

At present, there are no formal guidelines in place for notification of, and early response to, oil-impacted wildlife, however, it is likely that MECA would notify the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) and other co-operators.

Wildlife responders

There are no experienced oiled wildlife responders in Oman, however, a number of individuals involved in wildlife rehabilitation may be able to assist in a response. These include the veterinarian from the Diwan of Royal Court, staff from ESO, Al Qurum Veterinary Clinic, 5OES and the Wildlife Rehabilitation and Breeding Centre (Barka).

Cooperation between stakeholders

Personnel from the organisations listed above have worked together on various wildlife rehabilitation and conservation projects in conjunction with MECA.

Oman is a ROPME member and signatory to the Kuwait Convention protocols and is a partner in ROPME's MEMAC system which includes the regional oil spill response plan.

Permanent facilities

There are no permanent facilities for oiled wildlife rehabilitation in Oman.

Cooperative sea turtle rescue and rehabilitation efforts have been carried out by several of the individuals and groups listed above, using the Aqua Culture Centre in the Marine Science and Fisheries Centre and the Sultan Qaboos University.

Current processes

In January 2017, MECA, Petroleum Development Oman, and the Petroleum and Environmental Services Company (PESCO) held a joint oil spill response drill.

In 2016, ESO helped coordinate a clean-up response to protect sea turtle nesting sites on the island of Masirah after a merchandise shipwreck.

Documentation and references

General references

ITOPF Country Profile

RAMSAR Country Profile

Birdlife International Country Profile

Oman: Fifth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity (2014)

Al-Gheilani, HM, and Jayabalan, N. Sightings of Whales and Dolphins in the Arabian Sea off Oman during 2007-2008. (2010)

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

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