

**Introduction**

Spain is bordered on the north by the Cantabrian Sea (Bay of Biscay) and France; on the southeast by the Mediterranean Sea and Balearic Seas; on the south by the Alboran Sea and the Strait of Gibraltar, which separates Spain from Africa; and on the west by Portugal and the North Atlantic Ocean. Also included within Spain are two autonomous archipelagos: the Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean (100 km off the northwest coast of Morocco) and the Balearic Islands in the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, there are several exclaves on and off the coast of Morocco, including Ceuta, Melilla, Islas Chafarinas, Peñón de Alhucemas and Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera.

The Spanish coast is approximately 2,370 km long, of which 1,660 km are on the Mediterranean and 710 km on the Atlantic.

The Alboran Sea, a transition zone between the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, is an essential habitat for the largest population of bottlenose dolphins in the Western Mediterranean; the last population of harbour porpoises in the Mediterranean; and one of the most important feeding grounds for loggerhead turtles in Europe.

**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 – the Strait of Gibraltar is part of an important bird migration route between northern Europe and Africa, with many species of birds found at different times of the year. In addition, Spain is sited along both the East Atlantic and Black Sea/Mediterranean Flyways utilised by migratory birds.

On the Mediterranean coast, the Ebro Delta Natural Park, a RAMSAR site, supports up to 30,000 pairs of nesting waterbirds and 180,000 wintering birds. Other Mediterranean RAMSAR sites important for wintering and migratory waterbirds include L'Albufera, Salinas de Ibiza y Formentera, S'Albufera de Mallorca, Lagunas de las Moreras and Paraje Natural Punta Entinas-Sabinar.

On the western Atlantic coast, the Bahía de Cádiz provides critical wintering and migratory bird habitat; and further north on the west coast the Complejo intermareal Umia-Grove supports the largest population of wintering shorebirds along the Atlantic coast. Within that area Parque Nacional de Doñana is the most important wetland in Spain for breeding, migrating and wintering birds with over 360 species recorded, including up to six million migrating birds and 400,000 wintering birds. It is also a major migratory bottleneck for storks and raptors.

Along the north coast, Rio del Eo, Ria de Villaviciosa, Ria de Mundaka-Guernika and Txingudi also host wintering and migratory waterbirds. The most important coastal wetland of the northern Iberian Peninsula is the Marismas de Santona where internationally important numbers of various species of nesting, migrating and wintering waterbirds are found

Species of special concern include the Balearic shearwater (CR), white-headed duck (E), and the following, all of which are listed as vulnerable (V): long-tailed duck, velvet scoter, marbled teal, common pochard, horned grebe, Leach's storm-petrel, Yelkouan shearwater, black-legged kittiwake, Atlantic puffin and the aquatic warbler which inhabits marshes and coastal areas.

Marine mammals – the seas off Spain, both Mediterranean and Atlantic, host numerous cetaceans, with at least 27 species confirmed. Many remain largely offshore but some species such as orca/killer whale, striped and bottlenose dolphin may be found in nearshore waters.

Marine reptiles – five species of marine turtle are reported in Spanish waters, however only the loggerhead (V) is found in significant numbers here. Most of these are juveniles from nesting beaches, those found around the Balearic Islands tend to be from the northwest Atlantic, those in eastern Spain from the Mediterranean. Other species reported are leatherback (V) green (E), and very rarely Kemp's (CR) and olive ridley (V) turtles.

## **Regional Seas**

Northern Atlantic Ocean  
Mediterranean Sea

## **Past experience**

Spain has experienced a number of large spills, including the Urquiola (1976), the Neretva (1992), the Aegean Sea (1992), the Prestige (November 2002), Mystery spill (Galicia, 2004), Don Pedro (2007) and Nava Serra (2007), of which the Prestige and the Galician mystery spill prompted significant oiled wildlife responses.

In the aftermath of the Prestige 21,500 birds were found oiled, of which more than 3200 were collected alive on Galician beaches. This incident quickly overwhelmed local resources and was managed with the help of a number of international organisations. Ten first aid centres were established along the Galician coast, two forward holding centres (Santa Cruz de Oleiros, in A Coruña and O Veral in Lugo) and a large temporary facility with a capacity of approximately 1500 birds was built in O Campiño. Oiled wildlife impact assessment was carried out by SEO Birdlife, assisted by the University of A Coruña and scientists from the Royal NIOZ (NL) and the University of Aberdeen/SOTEAG (UK). The Prestige oil spill not only had an enormous impact on Galicia and the country, it also impacted the European Community, which adopted new maritime regulations and policies for the prevention of (oil) accidents at sea in its aftermath.

During the Galician spill, 492 birds were collected and brought to a wildlife rescue centre for rehabilitation. Since 2007 there have been no major spills impacting wildlife.

## **Response: the role of the authorities**

Under Spain's National Contingency Plan (Plan Ribera), and the related National Maritime Plan and National Plan for Seashore Protection, the Direccion General de la Marina Mercante (Directorate General of the Merchant Navy/DGMM) is responsible for oil spill response in Spain's territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone. Under DGMM's coordination, the Sociedad de Salvamento y Seguridad Maritima (Maritime Safety and Rescue Society/SASEMAR) provides at sea response. SASEMAR has 20 Marine Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCC) along the coast for oil spill response and at-sea rescue.

Each of the autonomous communities has a regional contingency plan. For spills occurring in or entering nearshore waters or impacting the shoreline, the Civil Governor of the affected province directs and coordinates response, convening a technical coordination committee. Shoreline clean-up is provided by municipal councils and coordinated by the Civil Protection Board. Where more than one province or autonomous community is affected, the Ministerio del Interior (Ministry of the Interior) and local government representatives assume responsibility.

In larger incidents the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean (REMPEC) may be called to assist within the Mediterranean.

The Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico (Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge/ MITERD, formerly MITECO) is the authority in charge of shoreline clean-up operations, with Autonomous Governments also required to be prepared for shoreline operations.

## **Oiled wildlife response**

### Formal guidelines?

While there is no formal plan in place, MITERD has two Direcciones Generales (Directorates General) that would be involved with any wildlife response. One is the Direccion General de Biodiversidad, Bosques y Desertificación (Director General of Biodiversity, Forests and Desertification) which has responsibility for protecting species, and the Direccion General de la Costa y el Mar (Director General for the Coast and the Sea), with specific responsibility for the coast and sea.

### Response objectives and strategy

The wildlife response objectives and strategy are determined largely by the regions in the case of minor incidents, however it is likely that rescue and rehabilitation would occur where there is capacity and that neighboring regions could be called on to assist where necessary. In the case of a large spill, the above-mentioned national agencies would determine the objectives and strategy.

### Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

As the government manages wildlife rehabilitation centres throughout the country, rehabilitation would be allowed. Euthanasia may be employed on welfare grounds.

### Impact assessment

In addition to the regional government agencies which oversee impact assessment, university-based and independent marine research and conservation groups or organisations would likely be brought in to assist where needed with this process.

In particular the Sociedad Espanola de Ornitologia (SEO BirdLife), a Birdlife International partner, has developed sensitivity maps for avian species throughout Spain and is active in conservation. They would likely be involved in impact assessment.

### Notification and early response

SASEMAR would be the first agency notified of a spill and would, in turn, notify regional authorities in the areas affected, with national authorities being brought in to oversee larger incidents. The regional authorities would then notify the appropriate regional centres/responders based on potential species involved.

### **Wildlife responders**

All wildlife response facilities and individuals in Spain are either government managed or government authorised (for more detail see Permanent Facilities below). The national government oversees marine animals and has specific centres for turtles and dolphins.

In addition to these facilities and individuals, Submon, a Catalan NGO active oiled wildlife response preparedness, would respond to impacted wildlife.

Many of these responders have limited experience with oiled wildlife, however, there is interest in further training and capacity building.

### **Cooperation between stakeholders**

The regional agencies, especially those that share borders, work with each other. The government wildlife centres and independent marine conservation and research organisations also have some history of cooperation.

Spain is a signatory to the Barcelona Convention (with other states bordering the Mediterranean), a member of the European Community Task Force and has observer status under the Bonn Agreement (between states bordering the North Sea).

### **Permanent facilities**

The main permanent facilities for oiled birds in Spain are located in Barcelona, Girona, Menorca, Mallorca, Cadiz, Granada, Malaga, Almería, A Coruña, Pontevedra, Santander, Valencia, La Alberca, Murcia, Asturias, San Sebastián, Gorniz, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Sta. Cruz de Tenerife, Ceuta and Algeciras. Permanent rehabilitation centres for marine mammals and sea turtles are located in La Alberca, Valencia, Santander, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Premiá de Mar, Barcelona, Palafolls, Mallorca, Málaga, Almería, Algeciras, Pontevedra, Lueca and Valencia.

### **Current processes**

In 2020, a workshop was held involving authorities from most coastal regions, including personnel that would be involved at the technical level, focusing on oiled wildlife response preparedness. Representatives from the Direccion General de Biodiversidad, Bosques y Desertificación and from the Direccion General de la Costa y el Mar also attended. This workshop followed up on efforts begun in an initial 2007 workshop.

In 2013, more than 30 people, mostly Civil Protection managers and technicians, participated in a POSOW (Preparedness for oil-polluted Shoreline cleanup and Oiled Wildlife interventions)-based national training course in Catalonia.

Further training is planned for 2021.

SUBMON is a member of the EUROWA network.

## **Documentation and references**

General references

ITOPF Country Profile (2015)

REMPEC Country Profile

Birdlife International Country Profile

WISE Marine (Marine Information System for Europe)

Sea Alarm MEDITERRANEAN Regional Wildlife Response Profile v.07 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.

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.