

Introduction

Bulgaria lies on the eastern side of the Balkan Peninsula. It borders Romania to the north, the Black Sea to the east, Greece and Turkey to the south, and Serbia and the Republic of North Macedonia to the west. The Balkan Mountains cross the entire country reaching to the edge of the Black Sea at Cape Emine, dividing the 378 km of coastline into southern and northern sections.

The northern Black Sea Coast features rocky headlands where the sea abuts cliffs up to 70 metres high. The southern coast is renowned for its wide sandy beaches, known as the Bulgarian Riviera. Saline and brackish lakes, lagoons, and marshes along the coast host a variety of wildlife.

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 – Much of the coast of Bulgaria hosts migratory and breeding waterbirds. Including places such as Strandzha, the Ropotamo Complex and Bakarlaka whose coastal areas and nearshore waters attract tens of thousands of storks. The brackish lagoon of the Mandra-Poda Complex near Bourgas, in addition to being another migratory stopover, is important breeding waterbird habitat and regularly hosts listed species such as the slender-billed curlew (CR) and the white-headed duck (E). Atanasovsko Lake, Burgas, Lake (Vaya) and the Manra Complex are combined in a protected area, known as the Poda Protected Site, which is managed by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB). This area hosts gulls, terns, waders and more than 100,000 white storks on migration, in addition to raptors and passerines and a number of resident waterbird species. The Shabla Lake Complex in northeast Bulgaria hosts large numbers of wintering red-breasted goose (V) and greater white-fronted goose.

Other species of concern include the lesser white-fronted goose (V), long-tailed duck (V), velvet scoter (V), common pochard (V), horned grebe (V), and Yelkouan shearwater (V). The Aquatic warbler (V) inhabits coastal reedbeds.

Marine mammals – There are three locally endemic marine mammals, found in Bulgaria. The Black Sea bottlenose dolphin (E), and Black Sea harbour porpoise (E) winter here. The Black Sea Common dolphin (V) is seen here less consistently, but all three species tend to be found nearshore, particularly the harbour porpoise. A number of other cetaceans, mostly offshore species may be seen in the region as vagrants or irregular visitors. The Eurasian otter forages along the coast of Bulgaria, particularly in the southern region.

Marine reptiles – There are no marine reptiles in the Black Sea.

Regional Seas

Black Sea

Past experience

In 1982, the UNIREA exploded off Cape Kaliakra, spilling an unknown quantity of oil. In 1987 the KRITI LAND spilled between 40 and 100 tons of crude oil at the Druzba terminal in Bourgas. In 2008 the ADALBERT ANTONOV spilt 250 litres of oily residue near the pier at Varna Port. In 2005, nearly four tonnes of black oil were spilt near the cape of Shabla.

In 2018, after severe weather with strong underwater currents, the wreck of the SS Mopang, which sank near Bourgas in 1921 after hitting a mine, began leaking. A response by Bulgaria and the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) responded to the initial leak and plans were being explored to remove the rest of the oil from the vessel.

There is no reference to any oiled wildlife impact or response in any of the above cases, however, in 2009 a mystery spill in Varna Bay oiled 3 swans. The birds were rescued by experts from the Department of Biodiversity and Protected Areas of the Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Waters (MEOW-Varna) and taken to the Varna Zoo for treatment and rehabilitation.

Response: the role of the authorities

The Executive Agency “Maritime Administration” (EAMA), within the Ministry of Transportation, Information Technology and Communications is the Spill Notification Point. Under the Bulgarian National Oil Spill Emergency Contingency (NCP) Plan, the Permanent Commission for Protection of Population in Case of Natural Disasters and Significant Industrial Accidents to the Council of Ministers would activate the NCP where necessary.

Onshore response would fall to the Coastal Emergency and Rescue Squadron (CERS) of the state Civil Defence. The Marine Emergency Rescue Squadron (MERS) within the EAMA would respond offshore. The Navy, within the Ministry of Defence, and the Regional Inspectorates on Environment and Water, within the Ministry of Environment and Waters (MOEW Varna and Burgas) which is responsible for environmental protection, would also be involved, depending on the size of the spill.

There are site-specific oil contingency plans for Varna, which is the host for the Bucharest Convention’s Emergency Response Activity Centre, and Bourgas, the other major port.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

There are no formal guidelines for oiled wildlife response in Bulgaria. However, during the 2009 incident, the Law for Biological Diversity (see below) was followed.

Response objectives and strategy

The Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water works based on the Law for the Biological Diversity. According to Chapter 3 ‘Preservation of vegetation, animal and fungus species’, should a person find a specimen helpless or dead, they must inform the nearest regional body of the Ministry of Environment and Waters or to the State Agency of the Forestry within three days. The animals will be sent for treatment to a wildlife rescue centre, veterinary clinic, or zoo.

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation is allowed and the rescue and treatment of the animals in distress would likely be carried out by national NGOs, but local expertise and permanent facilities for such a response is very limited.

Impact assessment

It is likely that the Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research, and the Institute of Oceanography within the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, would be involved should any impact assessment take place. The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) might be able to assist with this process, as well as provide data on what species are likely to be found in the country at various times of the year.

Notification and early response

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

Wildlife responders

Department of Biodiversity and Protected Areas of the Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Waters (MEOV-Varna) has experience rescuing wildlife and has taken birds to Zoopark Varna for rehabilitation. It is not clear how much capacity MEOV-Varna has for oiled wildlife response. The BSPB might be able to assist with field response. The Institutes of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences might also be activated but do not have facilities to take in animals.

Cooperation between stakeholders

Bulgaria is a signatory to the Bucharest Convention, the Odessa Declaration and the Strategic Plan for the Rehabilitation and Protection of the Black Sea, along with the other Black Sea countries. Bulgaria is also a signatory to the Sofia Convention, a declaration of the Ministers of Environment of the Bucharest Convention countries.

Permanent facilities

There are only limited facilities at Zoo Varna in Bulgaria. No other wildlife rescue or rehabilitation organisations are active at this time.

Current processes

In 2017, EAMA and EMSA conducted a drill in the Gulf of Varna.

Documentation and references

General references

ITOPF Country Profile 2011

Birdlife International Country Profile.

IUCN 2012. Marine Mammals and Sea Turtles of the Mediterranean and Black Seas. <https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/documents/2012-022.pdf>

Georgiev, D. G. (2005) Habitats of the Otter (*Lutra lutra* L.) in some Regions of Southern Bulgaria. IUCN Otter Spec. Group Bull. 18(1): 6 - 13

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, 2019

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.