

Introduction

The Republic of Lebanon (Al Jumhuriyah al Lubnaniyah) is located in the Middle East, bordered on the west by the Mediterranean Sea, on the north and east by Syria and on the south by Israel. The country's approximately 225 km of coastline, mostly within a 3-7 km wide maritime plain known as the Lebanese Coastal Zone, consists of three significant bays, a number of commercial and fishing ports, seagrass beds and sandy beaches which are largely in the south, and rocky offshore islands and rocky shorelines in the north, a few with steep cliffs.

Three RAMSAR sites are of importance to marine wildlife. The Palm Islands Nature Reserve (PINR), a RAMSAR site along the north coast, supports two species of marine turtle, at least 40 species of migratory birds and has historically had Mediterranean monk seals in its waters, although they are now much rarer there. Tyre Coast Nature Reserve (TCNR) in southern Lebanon, which is also a World Heritage Site, hosts marine birds and turtles. The Deir el Nouriyeh cliffs of Ras Chekaa are an important headland along the Central Asian and African-Eurasian Flyways.

Civil unrest and an economic crisis contribute to instability within the country, which have contributed to some environmental issues.

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 – Lebanon is situated within the East Asia/East Africa Flyway, one of the world's most important avian migratory routes between Africa, Europe and Asia. Thousands of birds stop to rest and feed on the Lebanese coast during spring and fall, with high concentrations occurring along the central coast in autumn and along the north coast in spring.

Species of special concern include the sociable lapwing (CR), the saker falcon (E) which forages in the intertidal zone, marbled teal (V), common pochard (V) and Yelkouan shearwater (V).

Marine mammals – a few marine mammals inhabit the waters around Lebanon. The Mediterranean monk seal (E) is a rare visitor to nearshore areas. The sperm whale (E) is found in offshore waters. Cuvier's beaked whale and several species of dolphin are also seen offshore.

While not a marine mammal, the Eurasian otter, a species that forages in the intertidal zone, is also found in Lebanon.

Marine reptiles – three species of sea turtle are found in Lebanese waters: green (E), loggerhead (V) and leatherback (V). Loggerhead turtles are the most common nesting species with smaller numbers of green turtle nests. Nesting season begins in May, and peaks at the end of June. Hatchlings go to sea approximately 60 days later, thus nesting beaches are active from mid-May to late August. Leatherbacks forage along the coast.

In 2019 an extensive survey, nest protection, and public awareness project was undertaken with support from UNEP, SPA/RAC's Marine Biodiversity Centre and the Mediterranean Action Plan of the Barcelona Convention. Based on the survey, three areas are considered important nesting sites: Al-Mansouri, Al-Abbasiyeh and Al-Addousiyeh, three are of moderate importance: TCNR, Ras-EI Ain and PINR, two of low importance: Al-Kharayeb and Adloun, and two of very low importance: Al-Quasmiyeh and Sarafand. Of all sites where nests were found, only PINR is located in the north, the others are in the area between Sarafand/Al-Addousiyeh and the Israeli border. The Al-Mansouri site has been monitored by private citizens since 2000, however most of the other sites had not been monitored since 2005.

Regional Seas

Mediterranean Sea

Past experience

A number of small spills have occurred at the country's major terminals, the largest being the 1100 tonnes of white product spilled in Beirut. During hostilities with Israel in 2006, a power plant at Jiyeh was hit, spilling an estimated 15,000 tonnes of fuel oil, creating a 10 km slick that covered about one-third of the Lebanese coast and suspected to have impacted green turtles and numerous seabirds, however the ongoing conflict prevented any significant response to wildlife.

Response: the role of the authorities

Lebanon has drafted a National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCP), however it is not yet in force.

The Service of Regional Departments and Environmental Police, within the Ministry of the Environment, is the Competent National Authority.

The Directorate General of Land and Maritime Transport, within the Ministry of Public Works and Transport, is the spill notification point in the country, however most spill response activities are carried out by private enterprises. These companies have completed sensitivity mapping and risk assessment.

The Ministry for Oil is responsible for onshore response and REMPEC would likely play a role in most responses. In 2006 an Oil Spill Operations and Coordination Centre (OSOCC) was established to improve coordination of response activities and support international assistance. Its status is unclear at this time.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

There are no formal guidelines for oiled wildlife response in Lebanon, however the draft NOSCP lists the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture as cooperating on oiled wildlife impact response.

Response objectives and strategy

N/A

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

It is likely that rehabilitation would be allowed but the role of euthanasia as part of rescue and rehabilitation efforts is not clear.

Impact assessment

The Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture would oversee impact assessment. There are a number of universities with environmental or oceanography departments or faculties which may be involved in impact assessment. The Holy Spirit University-Kaslik has within its Life and Earth Sciences faculty, an Oceanography and Marine Environment department. The Lebanese University has an MSc programme in Biodiversity Management and Conservation of Natural Resources. Beirut Arab University has a BSc programme in Environmental Sciences and the American University of Beirut has programmes in Ecosystem Management, and Environment and Water. The Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL) works on marine biodiversity projects and may be able to assist as well.

Notification and early response

There is no system for notification and early response to wildlife.

Wildlife responders

There do not appear to be any NGOs or agencies with experience in oiled wildlife response, however, the Orange House Project has experience in rearing sea turtles and SPNL is active in protecting high marine biodiversity areas (HIMAS) along the entire coast of the country. These two NGOs may be able to assist in a response, but experienced international responders would be needed for any significant event.

Cooperation between stakeholders

SPNL and the Orange House Project work cooperatively on sea turtle conservation. SPNL is also active in the consortium of 12 Mediterranean NGOs in conservation of the Mediterranean area of the Africa-Eurasia flyway.

Lebanon is a signatory to the Barcelona Convention, which promotes cooperation on oil spill response among states bordering the Mediterranean.

Permanent facilities

There are no permanent facilities for wildlife rehabilitation, however the Orange House Project has facilities to rear eggs and hatchling sea turtles in southern Lebanon.

Current processes

In 2016 a NOSP Gap Analysis workshop was held, supported by UNDP and REMPEC as part of the Sustainable Oil and Gas Development in Lebanon (SODEL) Project. A POSOW course was held that same year, led by locals who had participated in a Train the Trainer course in Brest.

Documentation and references

General references

ITOPF Country Profile (2011)

REMPEC Country Profile (2020)

Birdlife International Country Profile

Sea Alarm Middle East Regional Wildlife Response Profile v07 2020

Badreddine, A., Samaha, L., Abderrahim, M., Limam, A. and Ben-Nakhla, L. Ed.2020. Conservation of the Marine Turtles in Lebanon. Results of the 2019 monitoring of the Marine Turtles along the Lebanese coast. SPA/RAC Conservation of Marine Turtles in the Mediterranean Sea project.

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