

Location



Introduction

The Russian coast of the Baltic Sea borders the Gulf of Finland (the easternmost waters of the Baltic Sea), shares borders with Finland to the north and Estonia to the south, and includes the Kaliningrad Oblast, situated on the main Baltic Sea, bordered by Lithuania to the north and Poland to the south.

The Oblast includes approximately 250 km of Baltic Sea and Fresh Lagoon coastline while the coastline on the Gulf of Finland, measuring 170 km, begins at the mouth of the River Narva to the south, goes through Narva Bay to the north (border with Estonia), around Gogland Island, and continues along the northern coast west to the entrance of the Gulf of Vyborg.

Many islands, including some 19 artificial islands created by the Russian Federation, and narrow channels create an intricate maze, and several large rivers contribute to making this gulf a brackish basin. For example, the Neva River, the largest of those entering the gulf, brings significant fresh water. Rocky shores predominate, with some steep cliffs in the north.

The Kaliningrad area to the south includes portions of the Vistula Spit (shared with Poland) and the Curonian Spit (shared with Lithuania) with more sandy beaches. These beaches are subject to significant erosion from water surges.

The climate in this region includes hot, humid summers, and cold, harsh winters. The gulf regularly freezes from December to late April; and strong westerly winds are common, causing floods, high waves and water surges.

There are some lingering border issues between Russia and Estonia.

Regional Seas and Biogeography

Baltic Sea (including the Gulf of Finland)
Baltic Sea Large Marine Ecosystem

Habitats

The coast of Baltic Russia consists of many small, shallow bays, small islands, marshes and some beaches. The area around St. Petersburg was originally swampland with numerous small islands. The city remains laced with canals. On the northern coast, particularly around the *Berezovye Islands*, are a number of archipelagos.

- > Intertidal mudflats with bays, inlets and channels with boggy areas, predominate on the northern coast and around the *Berezovye Islands*.
- > Shallow bays with reeds are found on the southern coast of the Gulf of Finland, west of St. Petersburg.
- > Sandy and stony beaches are also present in the southern Gulf of Finland with a few found on the Kurgalsky Peninsula.
- > Marshes, floodplains, coastal meadows and reedbeds predominate on the *Kurgalsky Peninsula*.

Biodiversity Hotspots

In this section, acronyms and abbreviations are used for some of the most common types of hotspots: Ramsar Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar), Baltic Sea Protected Area (BSPA), Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs), Nature Reserve (NR), National Park (NP), Important Bird Area (IBA), IMMA (Important Marine Mammal Area)

The Baltic Sea is a globally unique, sensitive, northern brackish-water ecosystem, with a mixture of species found in oceans and freshwaters.

-> PSSAs

In April 2004, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) classified the Baltic Sea as PSSA for its uniqueness which allows the implementation of specific measures to control the maritime activities in that area, including routing measures, strict application of MARPOL discharge and equipment requirements for ships.

-> Ramsar sites

The *Berezovye Islands* (also a NR, BSPA and IBA) are composed of islands with highly indented shorelines, many bays, inlets, channels, and extensive intertidal mud and sand flats where hundreds of thousands of migratory (particularly during spring) and breeding waterbirds are found.

The *Southern coast of the Gulf of Finland* (also a NR, BSPA and IBA) comprises a shallow sea bay with reeds, sand and stony beaches serving as a staging site for waterbirds, particularly during spring migration but also to a lesser extent during autumn migration and breeding season. Large numbers of these are threatened species.

The *Kurgalsky Peninsula* (also a NR, BSPA and IBA) borders an Estonian Ramsar site and supports large breeding and migrating populations of numerous species of waterbird with over a million ducks and gulls, as well as large numbers of waders.

-> BPSAs established by the Helsinki Commission

Other BPSAs are located in Russian waters, including in the southern part of the *Curonian Spit State NP* next to the Lithuanian border and the *Vyborgskii* in the *Vyborg Bay* which play a key role for migratory birds and marine species.

-> IBAs

The *Southern Shore of Finski Bay*, hosts up to 25,000 swans, 100,000 ducks and 200,000 gulls during the spring migration, with smaller numbers found during the autumn migration.

There are a number of other IBAs listed for the Russian Baltic coast, often overlapping with protected sites, however little detail regarding species and seasonality is available.

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 (VU), Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR). A more complete list of IUCN listed species is found in Appendix 1.

➔ At risk birds

The Russian Baltic sits along the East Atlantic Flyway and hosts significant numbers of migratory, wintering and breeding waterbirds. It is an important migratory route, especially for waterfowl, geese and waders nesting in the Arctic tundra.

In spring, the Gulf of Finland is a natural 'funnel', where the streams of migrants are drawn from the south-west. They reach maximum concentrations in the *Neva Bay* and the *Bay of Vyborg*. During summer and autumn migrations, thousands of swans, geese, ducks, sandpipers, gulls and terns concentrate along the coast of the Gulf of Finland. More than 30 species of water birds breed along the coasts of the Baltic Sea.

The countless islands of the Gulf of Finland are important breeding sites for seabirds and the seas are resting and feeding areas for large numbers of divers, ducks and seabirds on passage and in winter.

The HELCOM Red List (link below). includes approximately 20 species which are considered regionally threatened populations.

➔ At risk reptiles

Sea turtles are rare visitors to the Baltic Sea. Leatherbacks are the species most likely to be found, however, there are no reports of leatherbacks in Russian Baltic waters.

➔ At risk mammals

While four species of marine mammal are resident in the Baltic Sea (Grey seal, Harbour seal, Ringed seal and Harbour porpoise), only the Ringed and Grey seals are found in Russian Baltic Sea waters.

Ringed seal numbers in the Gulf of Finland are critically low, estimated to be approximately 100 animals, so although the species is not globally threatened, this local population is at significant risk and is considered genetically isolated. In 1991-1992 a mass mortality of Ringed seals occurred, with more than 150 dead, mostly adult, seals found along the coasts and on the islands of the Gulf of Finland.

All species above, other than the Grey seal, are listed on the HELCOM Red List as Vulnerable.

The Eurasian otter may forage along the shoreline in this area.

Other cetacean species occasionally enter the Baltic but are not regular visitors, and none have been reported in Russian waters.

Past experience with oil spill and potential risks

The Baltic Sea has always been an important route for shipping activities and, at present, also for oil transportation as there are several important oil terminals in Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Since 2001, the Baltic Sea has experienced a notable increase in tanker traffic volume due to the inauguration of the Primorsk terminal at St. Petersburg. At present, oil movements within the Baltic are dominated by the export of Russian crude and refined oils. Intensive shipping throughout the region and oil exploration in the eastern and northern Baltic has increased since 2017.

Oil pollution prevention is further hampered by the intricate shape of the coastline with its many islands and narrow channels, as well as by darkness and cold weather. HELCOM statistics on ship accidents quite clearly indicate that the highest risk for accidents is in the entrances to ports, the Gulf of Finland and the southwestern Baltic, including the Danish straits.

Historically, the Baltic Sea experienced significant numbers of spills each year. Prior to that, in 2013 several small bunkering spills occurred in the port at St. Petersburg, in 2001, the *Baltic Carrier* spilled 2700 tonnes of oil impacting approximately 20,000 seabirds, and the *Fu Shan Hai* spilled 1200 tonnes of fuel oil, affecting between 1100 and 1600 seabirds. In 2006, a mystery spill of 8 tonnes of heavy fuel oil impacted approximately 3000 birds. The response to that spill resulted in 500 birds surviving to release.

Many illegal oil spills along the shipping routes kill large number of birds each year while no oil is detected on shores. About ten dead seals are found at the coasts of the islands each year.

Increased surveillance and the efforts of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM) as well as individual countries within the region have dramatically reduced the occurrence of such incidents. 2017 saw the all-time lowest number of detected spills in the region.

International and Regional Treaties and Agreements

→ Oil spill and HNS Response

d CLC Convention 69

CLC Protocol 76

CLC Protocol 92

FUND Protocol 76

FUND Protocol 92

FUND Protocol 2003

LLMC Convention 76

LLMC Protocol 96

OPRC Convention 90

HNS Convention 96

HNS PROT 2010

OPRC_HNS 2000

BUNKERS CONVENTION 01

→ Marine Biodiversity Protection

- Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – also known as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)

- Gulf of Finland Agreement between the Russian Federation and Finland

Oil Spill Response and HNS Spill Response

→ National Contingency Plan?

The Russian Federal Contingency Plan for Oil Spill Prevention and Response at Sea was adopted by the Ministry of Transport (MT), the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) and Ministry of the Russian Federation for Civil Defence, Emergency Situations and Liquidation of Consequences of Natural Disasters (EMERCOM) in 2003 and updated in 2014.

The Russian Federation has developed oil spill contingency plans for all of their regions, the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, NW Pacific, the Caspian Sea and the Arctic. Oil spill response can be activated at the local, regional and federal level.

→ Role of Competent National Authorities

Under the 2014 update of the plan, EMERCOM, the Federal Marine and River Transport Agency, the Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Natural Resource (FSSSNR) of the MNR, as well as relevant authorities in the region where the spill occurred, are notified.

The competent national authority for oil spill management and clean-up is the State Marine Pollution Control, Salvage and Rescue Administration (SMPCRSA), within the MT. It utilises the State Maritime Search and Rescue Coordination Centre (SMRRC) in Moscow and eight Maritime Search and Rescue substations (MRRCs) serving as national and international contact points for marine pollution emergencies.

EMERCOM is responsible for shoreline clean-up, in cooperation with local authorities. The FSSSNR has responsibility for oiled wildlife response. Relevant federal, regional and municipal bodies may also be involved. Working groups with relevant agencies and authorities may be convened in the case of federal or transboundary spills.

Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response

→ Formal guidelines?

Russia (Baltic Sea) does not have a specific oiled wildlife contingency plan in place, however very basic guidelines have been addressed in the national contingency plan.

→ Response objectives and strategy

There is no predefined oiled wildlife response strategy.

→ Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

The authorities will allow rehabilitation of oiled animals and euthanasia may be permitted on humane grounds.

→ Impact assessment

Corpses are collected for counting before being disposed of by the authorities, however, no pre- or post-spill assessments have been conducted to date.

In case of an incident, several organisations could provide advice on wildlife impact assessment, including Baltic Fund for Nature (BFN) of the St Petersburg Society of Naturalists (SPNS) and the Russian Bird Conservation Union (RBCU).

→ Notification and early response

In case of an oiled wildlife incident, the MT would notify the FSSSNR. It is not clear how other potential responders would be notified.

→ Wildlife responders

There is no reference to any wildlife rehabilitation centre or dedicated organisation in the Russian Baltic region who would respond to an oiled wildlife incident.

WWF-Russia does not have a presence in the Baltic region but, having been active in previous oiled wildlife incidents, might be able to assist. Similarly, RBCU could possibly provide assistance to rescue and ring birds.

In the event of a major spill international assistance would be needed.

→ Cooperation between stakeholders

Cooperation in oiled wildlife response between stakeholders and the authorities is conducted under the framework of the Government Commission on Preventing and Eliminating Emergency Situations and Ensuring Fire Safety.

→ Permanent facilities

There are no permanent facilities for oiled wildlife response in Baltic Russia

→ Current processes

As part of the HELCOM Response Working Group, the HELCOM Expert Working Group on Oiled Wildlife Response (EWG-OWR or WILDLIFE), chaired by Sea Alarm, is working to strengthen cooperation between the Baltic States in the field of oiled wildlife response through the exchange of information, organisation of capacity-building events and supporting cross-border cooperation on oiled wildlife response. It also interacts with the other HELCOM Working Groups dealing with onshore and at-sea response for a better integration of oiled wildlife during emergencies.

Documentation and references

- ITOPF Country Profile (2021): <https://www.itopf.org/knowledge-resources/countries-territories-regions/countries/russian-federation/>
- Sea Alarm Country Profile: <https://www.sea-alarm.org/publications/country-wildlife-response-profiles/>
- IMO (2021): <https://www.imo.org/en/About/Conventions/Pages/StatusOfConventions.aspx>
- Birdlife Data Zone Profile: European Russia: <http://datazone.birdlife.org/country/russia-european>
- Ramsar Country Profile Russia: <https://www.ramsar.org/wetland/russian-federation>
- State of the Baltic Sea: Biodiversity: Marine Mammals: <http://stateofthebalticsea.helcom.fi/biodiversity-and-its-status/marine-mammals/>
- HELCOM: <https://helcom.fi/>
- HELCOM Red List of Birds: <https://helcom.fi/baltic-sea-trends/biodiversity/red-list-of-baltic-species/red-list-of-birds/>
- HELCOM Red List of Marine Mammals: <https://helcom.fi/baltic-sea-trends/biodiversity/red-list-of-baltic-species/red-list-of-marine-mammals/>
- Karkinitzky and Lebyazhyi Island Nature Reserves: <https://zapovedcrimea.ru/lebyazhie-en>
- Oil spill preparedness in the Baltic Sea countries: https://commons.wmu.se/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=baltic_master2
- Overview of the status of the network of Baltic Sea marine protected areas (2013): <https://helcom.fi/media/publications/Overview-of-the-status-of-the-network-of-Baltic-Sea-marine-protected-areas.pdf>

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Appendix 1

➔ At risk birds

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Long-tailed duck / *Clangula hyemalis* / VU / Migratory (winter) / Non-nesting
Steller's eider / *Polysticta stelleri* / VU / Migratory (winter) / Non-nesting
Velvet scoter / *Melanitta fusca* / VU / Migratory (winter) / Non-nesting
Horned grebe / *Podiceps aurata* / VU / Migratory (winter) / Non-nesting
Black-legged kittiwake / *Rissa tridactyla* / VU / Migratory (winter) / Non-nesting
Lesser white-fronted goose / *Anser erythropus* / VU / Migratory (winter) / Non-nesting
Common pochard / *Aythya farina* / VU / Resident / Nesting (spring/summer)
Snowy owl / *Bubo scandiacus* / VU / Migrant (winter) / Non-breeding

➔ At risk reptiles

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Leatherback turtle / *Dermochelys coriacea* / VU / Very rare migrant / Non-breeding

➔ At risk mammals

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)