

## Location



## Introduction

The Russian Black Sea coastline, along the eastern side of the Black Sea and Sea of Azov, measures approximately 475 km and is bordered by Ukraine and the Sea of Azov to the west, and Georgia and the Black Sea to the south. Forty-five rivers flow into the Black Sea from Russian lands.

The climate of the Black Sea varies regionally. Along the Russian coast, summers may be humid and subtropical. Winters are generally mild, although clear, dry high-pressure events may cause temperatures to drop.

There are ongoing territorial issues between Russia and Ukraine.

## Regional Seas and Biogeography

Black Sea

Sea of Azov

The Black Sea Large Marine Ecosystem includes both the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The Black Sea is nearly self-contained, only connecting to the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas via the Istanbul Strait. The two seas are themselves only connected by the Kerch Strait.

## Habitats

Much of the Russian coastline along the Black Sea consists of ravines, valleys, and rivers. Many of the rivers are impeded by sandy spits. The Sea of Azov is a shallow sea with many bays and estuaries (limans).

-> **Estuaries:** Estuarine river areas with saline and brackish lakes leading to coastal shallows and lagoons are found in two locations of the Sea of Azov, the *Don River Estuary* in the *Taganrog Gulf* and along *Temryukskiy Zaliv Bay*

-> **Seagrasses:** Spots of seagrass beds are found along bays of the Sea of Azov and mainly along the Kerch Strait and the *Novorossiysk Bay*

## 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), Important Bird Area (IBA), IMMA (Important Marine Mammal Area)

### -> Ramsar sites:

The Russian Federation has two Ramsar sites on the *Kuban Delta* within the Sea of Azov, which are also Nature Reserves, Sanctuaries and IBAs: the *Akhtaro-Givenskaya group of limans* (estuaries) and the *Group of limans* between the *Kuban and Protoka Rivers*. Both include delta systems with lakes (saline, brackish and freshwater), coastal lagoons and shallows and host 1.2-2 million birds on migration, half a million wintering waterbirds, and breeding populations of 46 species.

### -> Parks, Reserves:

The *Delta of River Don Natural Park* (also an IBA) is composed of lots of meanders and meadows and hosts important populations of waterbirds and shorebirds during migration.

The *Tamano-Zaporozhskij State Natural Sanctuary* (also an IBA and IMMA) is located in the Taman bay along the Kerch Strait. It plays an important role for migratory birds but also for subpopulations of harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphin as a migratory pathway between the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea.

There are a number of other protected sites (natural parks, natural reserves, sanctuaries) along the Sea of Azov and the Russian Black Sea, however little detail regarding species and seasonality is available.

## -> IBAs

The *Kiziltash limans* consists of a closed bay with shallow water, islands and coastal inlets where a variety of waders, gulls and terns breed.

The *Akhtarski and Sladki Liman Temporary Reserve* comprises vast lowlands along the southeast Azov coast with shallow salty lakes connected by a dense network of canals overgrown with vegetation. In addition to breeding pelicans and terns, the reserve hosts thousands of gulls, terns, grebes and divers during migration.

The *Karkinitzky State Nature Reserve* hosts a variety of migratory, breeding and moulting waterbirds on the Black Sea coast and is bordered by the *Lebyazhyi Islands Nature Reserve* which includes a small archipelago in southeastern *Karkinitzky Bay*. Marine mammals may be seen offshore of these sites.

There are a number of other IBAs within the Sea of Azov for which limited information is available, however, it is likely that avian presence in these IBAs is similar to that found in the Kuban Delta sites.

## -> IMMAs:

The *Sea of Azov* is an important habitat area for marine life, including a distinct population of the Harbour porpoise, which migrate into the sea during the summer reproductive season.

The *Kerch Strait and Taman Bay* play an important role for subpopulations of Harbour porpoise and Bottlenose dolphin as a migratory pathway between the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. The *Taman Bay* is a particularly important habitat for the coastal local Bottlenose dolphin population of several hundred individuals.

## 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 Black Sea is situated on the Mediterranean-Black Sea Flyway, one of three flyways that connect Europe with Africa. Over 2 billion passerine and near-passerine species, 2.5 million ducks and 2 million raptors use this flyway in autumn, traveling from breeding grounds in the north to wintering grounds in the south. Smaller numbers of waders and seabirds are also found in Russia Black Sea waters.

### → At risk reptiles

No marine reptiles are found in the Black Sea.

### → At risk mammals

Only three species of marine mammal are found in the Black Sea, the Black Sea Harbour porpoise (EN), the Black Sea Bottlenose dolphin (EN) and the Black Sea Common dolphin (VU). All are subspecies which are IUCN listed, as they are essentially confined to the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, Kerch Strait, the Bosphorus and the Marmara Sea.

The Black Sea Harbour porpoise and Black Sea Bottlenose dolphin subspecies may be further subdivided into subpopulations which restrict themselves to distinct areas in the region.

## Past experience with oil spill and potential risks

Russia (Black Sea) has experienced a number of oil spills threading or/and affecting wildlife.

In November 2007, the tanker *Volganef-139* broke into two due to a severe storm in the Kerch Strait, which connects the Sea of Azov with the Black Sea, spilling over 4000 tonnes of heavy fuel oil. Hundreds of birds were affected, and a few oiled cetaceans were reported as well. A team consisting of representatives from Sea Alarm, Wildlife Rescue Centre Ostend (Belgium) and WWF-Finland travelled on site to assess together with WWF Russian Caucasus Regional Office the area. The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) also sent two experts on site advising the wildlife response on the Russian side. An attempt to collect and rehabilitate oiled birds was set up by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and assisted by volunteers and the local NGO "For Taman Salvation". According to EMERCOM, 5186 birds were oiled. In total, 115 oiled birds that were collected and brought into a very basic camp to rehabilitate. On site, both teams decided that the lack of facilities precluded any attempts to rehabilitate the birds.

A few months later, The Environmental Watch on the North Caucasus (EWNC) with the cooperation of the Crude Accountability and WWF surveyed the beaches of the Taman Peninsula to monitor the status of the beaches. Although both organisations advised that euthanasia of the captured animals was the most reasonable response

option, the local responders made an attempt to rehabilitate the animals, but none of them survived in the process.

The Russian Bird Conservation Union (RBCU) is a Russian NGO focused on the protection of Russian bird diversity. RBCU has regional branches through Russia. In the aftermath of the *Volganefit-139* oil spill, RBCU followed closely the spill and information on Bird Hazing techniques was requested to Sea alarm.

Two cetaceans were found dead on the Russian shore, most likely a bottlenose dolphin and a harbour porpoise. The carcasses were thrown out before experts arrived. As no post-mortem examination was carried out, the causes of death were not identified.

In Ukraine, the Brema Laboratory, who act as coordinating centre of the Ukrainian National Network for Cetaceans Monitoring and Conservation (NNCC), together with the Black Sea Council for Marine Mammals (BSCMM), and the Southern Research Institute of Marine Fisheries and Oceanography in Ukraine were involved in assessing and monitoring the situation.

In 2021, a spill covering nearly 80 sq km spread from the tanker *Minerva Symphony* as it took on oil at the Yuzhno-Ozereyevka terminal near Novorossiysk. Impacts on wildlife have not been reported to date.

Although the Black Sea is not a major oil production area, the increased transit trade in crude and refined products increases the risk of spills. Pipelines from Russia, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan supply crude to terminals on the Russian, Ukrainian and Georgian Black Sea coast. The major areas of risk on the Russian coast of the Black Sea are in the Kerch Strait and near important harbours and oil terminals such as Novorossiysk, Sochi, Tuapse.

## 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

- Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution (Bucharest Convention) and its Protocol on Cooperation in Combating Pollution of the Black Sea Marine Environment by Oil and Other Harmful Substances in Emergency Situations (Emergency Protocol)

- Oil Spill Preparedness Regional Initiative for the Caspian-Black Sea-Central Asia (OSPRI)

## **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 in 2003 by the Ministry of Transport (MT), the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) and EMERCOM. It was 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.

The Black Sea Emergency Protocol's Contingency Plan for prevention and response to oil spills and harmful and noxious substances in the Black and Azov Seas was approved in 1999 and updated in 2002 by the Black Sea Commission.

### **→ 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 for 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 (Black Sea) does not have an oiled wildlife contingency plan, however very basic guidelines have been addressed in the national oil spill contingency plan.

### **→ Response objectives and strategy**

There is no predefined oiled wildlife response strategy.

### **→ Euthanasia or rehabilitation?**

Authorities will allow rehabilitation of oiled animals and euthanasia may be permitted on humane grounds, however as there is no known capacity for response in Russia. International assistance would be required.

### **→ Impact assessment**

Dead animals are collected for counting before being disposed of by the authorities, however pre-or post-spill impact studies have not been done.

In case of an incident, several organisations could provide advice on wildlife impact assessment, including RBCU, the All-Russian Research Institute for Nature Protection, the Marine Mammal Council as well as the Black Sea NGO Network (BSNN), a regional association of NGOs.

### **→ 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 Black Sea region who would respond to an oiled wildlife incident.

WWF-Russia does not have a presence in the Black Sea 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 oiled wildlife facilities and no equipment for treating oiled wildlife in the Black Sea Region.

## → Current processes

OSPRI continues to engage with the Black Sea Commission's Advisory Group on Environmental Safety Aspects of Shipping.

The Black Sea Commission continues its work to maintain and update operational information for the implementation of the Regional Contingency Plan, including Environmentally Sensitive Areas maps.

## Documentation and references

- ITOPF Country Profile (2013): <https://www.itopf.org/knowledge-resources/countries-territories-regions/countries/russian-federation/>
- Sea Alarm Country Wildlife Response Profile (2009): <https://www.sea-alarm.org/publications/country-wildlife-response-profiles/>
- IMO (2021): <https://www.imo.org/en/About/Conventions/Pages/StatusOfConventions.aspx>
- OSPRI Annual Report 2020: <https://www.ospri.online/activities/annual-report-2019>
- Birdlife Data Zone: European Russia: <http://datazone.birdlife.org/country/russia-european>
- Ramsar Country Profile: <https://www.ramsar.org/wetland/russian-federation>
- UNEP WCMC- Ocean Viewer: <https://data.unep-wcmc.org/datasets/>
- Important Marine Mammals Areas: <https://www.marinemammalhabitat.org/imma-eatlas/>
- Russia investigates oil spill off Black Sea coast: <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/russia-investigates-oil-spill-off-black-sea-coast-2021-05-25/>
- Black Sea Commission: <http://www.blacksea-commission.org/>
- Black Sea NGO Network: <http://www.bsnn.org/>
- RBCU: <http://www.rbcu.ru/>

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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)**

Slender-billed curlew / *Numenius tenuirostris* / CR / Migratory (spring/autumn) / Wintering  
Sociable lapwing / *Vanellus gregarius* / CR / Migratory (spring/autumn) / Non-breeding nor wintering (passage)  
White-headed duck / *Oxyura leucocephalus* / EN / Resident / Breeding/nesting (summer)  
Common pochard / *Aythya ferina* / VU / Resident / Breeding/nesting (summer)  
Dalmatian pelican / *Pelicanus crispus* / VU / Resident / Breeding/nesting (summer)  
Horned grebe / *Podiceps auritus* / VU / Migratory (spring/autumn) / Wintering  
Lesser white-fronted goose / *Anser erythropus* / VU / Migratory (autumn/winter/spring) / Wintering (end summer/winter)  
Marbled teal / *Marmaronetta angustirostris* / VU / Resident / Breeding/nesting (summer)  
Red-breasted goose / *Branta ruficollis* / VU / Migratory (winter) / Wintering (autumn/winter)  
Yelkouan shearwater / *Puffinus yelkouan* / VU / Resident / Breeding/nesting (summer)

### ➔ At risk reptiles

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

### ➔ At risk mammals

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

Black Sea harbour porpoise / *Phocoena phocoena* ssp. *relicta* / EN / Migratory (present spring through autumn in Russian waters) / Various populations appear to have different breeding/calving patterns. Breeding season mainly in Summer and in Sea of Azov  
Black Sea bottlenose dolphin / *Tursiops truncatus* ssp. *ponticus* / EN / Resident / Feeding in Sea of Azov (spring-summer)  
Black Sea common dolphin / *Delphinus delphis* ssp. *Ponticus* / VU / Resident / Unknown