

Date: February 6, 1998

[Please Don't Touch Oiled Wildlife](#)

CONTACT: OFFICE OF OIL SPILL PREVENTION & RESPONSE (916) 445-9338

Sacramento, California — Winter storms have been washing oil-contaminated birds and oil tarballs from an unknown source onto the northern California coast. The U.S. Coast Guard and California Department of Fish and Game's Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) urgently ask the public to refrain from any attempts to "rescue" oiled wildlife or pick up dead animals they encounter. People who see oiled birds should not attempt to capture or move them. Instead, for birds found north of the San Francisco-San Mateo County line, call 415-663-8525. For birds found south of that point, call 408-469-1719, or notify a park ranger. Callers will be asked the bird's location, condition, and the time they saw it there.

Under direction of the Unified Command of the Coast Guard and Department of Fish and Game (DFG), wildlife professionals from the OSPR's Oiled Wildlife Care Network (OWCN) — and trained volunteers from Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and National Park Service staff — are recovering and treating affected wildlife. OWCN members participating in this emergency response include International Bird Rescue Research Center (IBRRC), Monterey SPCA, Peninsula Humane Society, Santa Cruz Native Animal Rescue, Santa Rosa Bird Rescue, and WildCare of Marin.

"Since there isn't a big oil slick on the beaches, people don't realize that there are tarballs floating around, offshore," said OSPR Wildlife Veterinarian and OWCN Program Director Jonna Mazet. "The oil is doing serious damage to northern California birds, and threatening recently-recovering populations of common murrelets on the central California coast."

Approximately 400 live, oiled birds have been captured and taken to care facilities. Another 800 dead, oiled birds have been collected. Some sensitive, threatened, and endangered species are at risk, including snowy plovers, brown pelicans, northern fur seals, harbor seals, and elephant seals.

The incidence of oiled wildlife in this area had decreased, but never stopped entirely, since a similar occurrence last November, at Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS). Since Saturday, January 17, the number of oiled birds coming ashore — from the Salmon River in southern Sonoma County to as far south as Carmel — has increased dramatically.

The U.S. Coast Guard and OSPR have collected and sent oil samples to their laboratories, and continue to investigate the situation. Anyone with information that would help investigators is asked to telephone the Coast Guard at 510-437-3073, or the Department

of Fish and Game's CalTIP hotline (Californians Turn-In Poachers and Polluters), at 888-DFG-CALTIP (334-2258).

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