

Monterey Bay Bird Incident

Unified Command Update

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Outstanding volunteer effort saves birds

SANTA CRUZ, California --- Beginning Friday evening, October 23rd, dozens and then hundreds of oiled seabirds began washing ashore along the coast of Monterey and Santa Cruz counties. The oil, apparently a hydrogenated vegetable oil, matted their feathers and destroyed their waterproofing, leaving them unable to fly, forage, swim or even stay warm. Without assistance they would die of hypothermia, hypoglycemia, starvation or predation. But hundreds of volunteers, aided by private, non-profit wildlife organizations and government agencies, have apparently saved most of the birds -- over 400 in number.

Native Animal Rescue of Santa Cruz County was there first. They were soon aided by the California Departments of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and Fish and Game-Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR). On Saturday, approximately 120 oiled birds were taken to the nearly-completed Oiled Wildlife Veterinary Care and Research Center, operated by the OSPR and the University of California Santa Cruz Institute for Marine Science. The statewide Oiled Wildlife Care Network, also run by OSPR through the University of California Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, was activated, and many more organizations began to respond. The International Bird Rescue and Research Center, one of the world's premier wildlife response organizations, which had already received 70 birds from this incident, loaned their core staff.

On Sunday, as hundreds more birds were being picked up, students from U.C. Santa Cruz, Docents and Friends of Long Marine Lab, Friends of the Sea Otter, the Monterey and Santa Cruz SPCA, Peninsula Humane Society, the Lindsey Museum, and other organizations sent volunteers and staff members to help tube-feed the birds every four hours, to construct special cages and pools, and to begin the enormous task of washing all the birds. Dominican Hospital of Santa Cruz assisted with much-needed supplies of treatment drugs.

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The often-unsung heroes in all of this have been the people -- on some days, as many as one-hundred-and-forty people -- including private citizens, some just biking or driving by, who stopped to help. People from many walks of life, working together, ten to twelve hours a day, and united in a common goal, appear to be turning the tide. By Wednesday evening, about 150 birds were washed and are starting to recover in fresh- and salt-water pools. Soon, many of the birds should be healthy enough for release to the wild. So far, the survival rate is about 95 percent.

However, this amazing wildlife care effort was not entirely an accident. Most of the organizations that responded are members of the Oiled Wildlife Care Network. They train together every year, and are given supplies and necessary equipment by the Department of Fish and Game's Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response. And although it is not an accident, it is still remarkable when so many people -- students, retirees, government employees -- people of all ages -- come together and work so hard to save wild animals. It indicates how much value people place on their wildlife, and, most of all, it's a shining example of what teamwork can accomplish.

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