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The Wildlife Recovery Story from the Pt. Pedernales Oil Spill

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Vandenberg Air Force Base--Located in an abandoned fire station a couple of miles from a beach impacted by the September 28 Point Pedernales oil spill, the Department of Fish and Game's Office of Oil Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) veterinarians and staff are very busy. When notified of the spill, OSPR activated its Oiled Wildlife Care Network, and sent its Veterinary Operations staff to the spill site to rescue as much wildlife oiled by the spill as possible.

By Thursday afternoon, 86 birds had been brought to OSPR's mobil veterinary van for treatment. Of those, 45 oiled birds had died. Twenty-four birds able enough to make the trip were flown to the International Bird Rescue and Research Center (IBRRC) in Berkeley for more intensive treatment and rehabilitation.

The number of birds rescued -- or retrieved dead -- changes hourly as about 20 people search the beaches and return to the Vandenberg site each day. On Thursday, about 100 oiled birds were observed from a distance but had yet to be captured.

The Department has characterized this relatively uninhabited section of the California coast as "extremely sensitive" due to the presence of diverse fish and wildlife species. OSPR, a division of the Department, will ultimately be responsible for evaluating the environmental impact of this oil spill.

The protection and rescue of wildlife on such a scale, and under such trying conditions as these, couldn't be accomplished without the cooperation of others. Wildlife Branch Director Paul Kelly credits outstanding interagency cooperation from a large group, including Vandenberg AFB, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Coast Guard, Clean Seas, and Torch Operating Company. The trained volunteers in numerous animal welfare organizations such as Pacific Wildlife Care, the Santa Barbara Wildlife Care Network, and IBRRC are indispensable at times like these.

"We wouldn't be here and be as effective if it weren't for the great cooperation we've received," Kelly said. "It's helped us do our job much better."

"This has been our best operation yet for OSPR, despite not having a permanent facility in this area, and the reason is the excellent cooperation we've received from everyone, from all the agencies involved to the trained volunteers we've utilized," said Jonna Mazet, D.V.M., Program Director of OSPR's Oiled Wildlife Care Network.

At the Vandenberg AFB old firehouse site, two mobile vet laboratories are operational. The oiled birds are brought in via one of two wildlife care transport trailers. These mobile facilities are not equipped for complicated and long-term rehabilitation of injured birds, but they are an essential triage and staging units in which the birds are stabilized prior to being relocated. When the birds are brought in, they are immediately processed and their condition is recorded in a log. They receive medical evaluation, medication and are cleaned of as much oil as possible.

Deidre Goodfriend, of IBRRC, said she has worked with oiled animals in about six similar operations in California and three in other countries. "It is always better in California because of the quick response," Goodfriend said. "It's always emotional to see animals in distress, but at least we know we are helping them out."

Meanwhile, the operation continues on. Most of the birds captured so far have been caught using hand nets; but Kelly said that they will start using the net capture guns system, where a net is literally shot from a pistol towards the bird from a distance of up to 30 feet. This enables workers to grab birds that are otherwise difficult to catch.

Thus far, only one bird on the Endangered Species List, a brown pelican, has been captured and treated. No sea otters have been effected although they are at risk since they frequent these waters. The Oiled Wildlife Care Network is ready and able to treat any animals they find. "We know there are more animals out there who need our help, and we're ready for them, Kelly said.

[Western Grebe Brought in for Treatment](#)
[Rehab Staff Working on Bird](#)
[Close-up of Rehab Staff Working on Bird](#)
[Bird Rescue Hospital](#)

 [Aerial View of Oil Slick](#)
[Aerial View of Skimming Operation](#)
[DFG Emergency Vet Lab on Wheels](#)
[Paul Kelly, Dr. Jonna Mazet & Tim](#)
[Williamson](#)
