

Fourth session

Oil incidents and seabird mortality: to a better coordination and cooperation assessing numbers of birds affected in certain oil spills

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Oiled Seabirds; more than just counting

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Every year, as many as 3000 oiled birds are captured alive along the Netherlands coast. Rehabilitation centres along the coast are especially equipped to help these casualties. The centres are supported by the Foundation National Committee Seabirds Free of Oil, which is a concerted action of the Netherlands Society for the Protection of Birds and the Netherlands Society for the Prevention of cruelty to Animals. In case of major oil incidents, the Netherlands Society for the Protection of Birds co-ordinates activities to distribute oiled birds into the various rehabilitation centres. Numbers and species are recorded for each of the centres and when maximum capacity is reached in one of the centres, birds are transferred into another centre.

In rehabilitation centres, care is directed onto the individual bird. Birds are washed, fed and medicated and on average some 50% of the casualties is set back to sea. Helping individual birds is of limited value for bird populations. However, oiled seabirds are clear signs of what is happening at sea and may be used for educational purposes. Besides all this, also individual birds deserve our help. In order to assess the fate of rehabilitated birds, most are ringed at release. Unfortunately, there is no money available to set up a proper research project.

As a result of a relatively small oil spill in the Borcea incident in 1988, 4,650 oiled birds were received in rehabilitation centres. Some 25% of the casualties could be released. On behalf of the rehabilitation centres, the Netherlands Society for the Protection of Birds claimed Dfl. 225,000.= compensation in a civil procedure against the ship-owner. On 15 March 1991, the Netherlands Society for the Protection of Birds was entitled to proceed with its claim, but the

precize amount is still under negotiation. The captain of the Borcea has already been found guilty and is convicted by an action of justice.

A proper registration of life oiled birds is still a problem. In case of an oil incident, the Netherlands Society for the Protection of Birds will easily maintain an up-to-date list of numbers and species for each rehabilitation centre, but it is often unknown where these casualties were actually picked up. Once a year, a complete list is received of all oiled seabirds which were treated in captivity by each of the rehabilitation centres. These data are sufficient for our own use, but lack detail to make them of good use for the database of the Dutch Seabird Group.

Samenvatting 'Olielachtoffers, meer dan tellen alleen'

Jaarlijks worden er langs de Nederlandse kust zo'n 3000 levende met olie besmeurde vogels gevonden. De vogelasielen langs de kust hebben speciale faciliteiten om hulp te kunnen bieden, daarin gesteund door de Stichting Nationaal Comité Zeevogels Olievrij. Bij grote calamiteiten coördineert Vogelbescherming de distributie van olielachtoffers over de verschillende asielen. In de asielen worden de vogels gewassen, verzorgd, krijgen medicijnen en ongeveer 50% wordt uiteindelijk weer uitgezet. Tengevolge van de olielozing door de Borcea in 1988, kwamen er in totaal 4650 levende olielachtoffers in de asielen terecht. Uiteindelijk werd hiervan 25% weer uitgezet. Vogelbescherming heeft namens de asielen een gezamenlijke schadeclaim van f 225.000,= via een civiele procedure bij de rechtbank ingediend. Op 15 maart 1991 heeft de rechter Vogelbescherming ontvankelijk verklaard. In de strafzaak werd de kapitein reeds schuldig bevonden en veroordeeld. Een goede registratie van de levende olielachtoffers is thans nog problematisch. Bij calamiteiten zijn vindplaatsen meestal onbekend. Slachtoffers van chronische vervuiling worden door asielen en Vogelbescherming slechts op jaarbasis geregistreerd, hetgeen onvoldoende is voor gebruik in het gegevensbestand van de Nederlandse Zeevogelgroep. ■