

## **Establishment of a 'European Beached Bird Survey'**

Beached Bird Surveys are organized in many North Sea countries. Methods are roughly the same, but the planning of these surveys is quite different. One major exception is the 'International Beached Bird Survey' (IBBS), in which many countries participate. In the IBBS, organized annually on the last weekend of February or the first weekend of March, all participating countries do a National Survey of which the data are sent to the coordinating body of the IBBS (formerly the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), England; nowadays Ornis Consuly, Denmark).

National Beached Bird Surveys have been organized in several countries since the 1960s. They give an idea of seabird mortality in a given year at the high point of the stranding season (winter, Nov-Apr). The uniform method in all countries and the regular planning make these surveys very valuable to compare densities in different countries and years. However, on average corpses disappear from the beach in 3-4 weeks time and serious oil-incidents or mass strandings are thus easily missed. In the Netherlands, the season 1990/91 was a perfect example: a mass stranding of severely oiled Guillemots was missed in the National Survey of December as well as in February, giving a 'low' index for the season while in fact 1990/91 was a peak in a series of years. A 'European Beached Bird Survey' (EBBS) scheme, in which the IBBS should be included and continued, could extend the exchange of data to the entire stranding season if participants could produce monthly, or bi-monthly indices of seabird strandings,

either from their entire coastline, or from study plots.

Information derived from the IBBS is: number of stranded birds, species, proportion oiled, and distance surveyed. From these data, densities are calculated and compared. It would be valuable if at least for some target species (e.g. divers, scoters, Kittiwake, auks) more information could be collected in a uniform manner. Interesting could be: age, sex, origin (rings/biometrics), physical condition (dissection), and diet. Many countries have their own dissection schemes and in fact do collect the above data as a routine. An EBBS could be established to exchange these data on a regular basis to provide a more complete picture of what is actually happening in the North Sea area, whether or not comparable trends can be found in different countries and whether or not these trends can be explained.

A sampling programme of oil on corpses and on the beach and standard analysis of these samples in a specialized laboratory should be linked with beached bird surveys. The mere occurrence of oil at sea is one thing, it should be linked with environmental damage in terms of numbers of casualties among seabirds. It would be nice if the programme which was set up in 1990 in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands could be extended to a larger number of countries (e.g. Britain, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, and France). Not only from a research point of view, but also to routinely link oil pollution with seabird strandings all over the North Sea. Questions:

- \* Are we going to continue the International Beached Bird Survey?
- \* Could we exchange data from the rest of the season, for instance by producing monthly indices for study plots and target species?
- \* Could we standardize methods of dissection, oil sampling, ageing, sexing and surveying?
- \* Could we exchange data on age, sex, condition, and origin of target species in a uniform manner?
- \* Could we link these activities with an extended project on oil sampling and analysis like the one now organized in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands?
- \* Could we perhaps organize this exchange on a regular basis, try and raise funds for further study in a project called 'European Beached Bird Survey'?

*Samenvatting Instelling van een 'Europees olieslachtoffer-onderzoek'.*

*In veel Noordzeelanden worden olieslachtofferellingen georganiseerd. Elk jaar, eind februari, wordt bovendien in de meeste landen een nationale telling georganiseerd als bijdrage aan de internationale olieslachtoffertelling ('International Beached Bird Survey'). Omdat massale strandingen van zeevogels en olie-incidenten gemakkelijk kunnen worden 'gemist' door deze vaste telling, wordt voorgesteld om het IBBS programma uit te breiden naar de overige wintermaanden. Concrete vragen zijn: (1) Zal de IBBS worden gecontinueerd? (2) Is het mogelijk om telgegevens uit te wisselen van de overige wintermaanden (bijvoorbeeld door het produceren van*

*maandelijkse opgaven van dichtheden) (3) Is het mogelijk om de methode bij dissecties en oliebonstering te standaardizeren? (4) Is het mogelijk om dergelijke gegevens regelmatig uit te wisselen? (5) Kan het oliebonsterings programma, zoals nu in Nederland, Duitsland en Denemarken uitgevoerd, zorden uitgebreid en gekoppeld aan een Europees olielachtoffer onderzoek? en (6) Is het mogelijk fondsen te verwerven voor een project (met de naam 'European Beached Bird Survey') waarin dit alles is te realiseren.*

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