



Procedures for handling and documenting stranded birds encountered on infrastructure offshore Atlantic Canada



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1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Document Purpose

This document is intended to provide personnel working on offshore infrastructure (i.e., oil and gas platforms, supply vessels, etc.) with safe and effective procedures for dealing with and documenting live and dead stranded birds.

Disclaimer - The information presented here constitutes advice only. All persons must adhere to all pertinent laws (for example provincial or territorial laws), regulations and permit requirements including but not restricted to the “Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994” (MBCA) and the “Migratory Birds Regulations” (MBR). It is important to note that some species of birds protected under the MBCA have also been listed in Schedule 1 of the Species at Risk Act (SARA). These species receive protection from both the MBCA and SARA.

This advice does not provide an authorization for harming or killing migratory birds or for the disturbance, destruction or taking of nests or eggs under the MBR. It does not provide a guarantee that the activities will avoid contravening the MBR or other laws and regulations. This is general information not intended to be relied on as official advice concerning the legal consequences of any specific activity. It is not a substitute for the MBCA, the MBR, or any other legislation.

1.2 Supporting documents (as APPENDICES)

Stranded Bird Encounter Datasheet – used for documenting and reporting all live and dead stranded birds (Appendix 1).

Infographic - Procedures for handling and documenting stranded birds – used as a quick reference guide to identify the most appropriate course of action when stranded birds are encountered (Appendix 2).

Common Seabirds of Atlantic Canada – used to help identify the most common seabirds found offshore Atlantic Canada (Appendix 3).

1.3 Bird attraction to coastal and offshore infrastructure

Birds can be attracted to offshore platforms, drilling rigs, and support vessels for a variety of reasons, which can include roosting and/or foraging opportunities, as well as attraction to potentially disorienting light sources. Light sources can include floodlights, operational deck lighting, and flares, which may be particularly attractive at night and in foggy or otherwise inclement weather. Attraction to light sources may result in the collision of birds with lit structures and incineration or partial incineration in flares. In Atlantic

Canada, nocturnal migrants and night-flying seabirds (e.g., storm-petrels) are the birds most at risk of attraction to lights.

1.4 Authorization for capture and handling of migratory birds

The capture and handling of migratory birds requires authorization under the “Migratory Birds Convention Act” and “Migratory Bird Regulations”, which can be obtained by contacting:

Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) – Atlantic Region
Environment and Climate Change Canada
17 Waterfowl Lane
Sackville, NB, E4L 1G6
ec.scfatlpermis-cwsatlpermits.ec@canada.ca

See section 1.6 for contact information when CWS needs be contacted immediately.

1.5 Equipment required for capture and handling of live birds

Most capture and handling of stranded birds can be conducted safely and effectively without specialized equipment. However, all personnel should refer to their companies’ Occupational Health and Safety Procedures to identify and minimize potential hazards.

We recommend the following list of equipment be available on offshore infrastructure to help minimize stress to the bird and mitigate any risk of injury to personnel. Please note, all equipment that is used for the capture and handling of stranded birds should be cleaned thoroughly, disinfected, or discarded, as appropriate after use.

1.5.1 Personal protective equipment (PPE) for personnel

- Protective barrier gloves (e.g., disposable plastic, nitrile, or rubber gloves) appropriate for the type of bird handled. Consider heavier-duty gloves (e.g., thick leather, PVC, or plastic gloves) when handling larger birds. Gloves should be clean and free from grease and oil.
- Eye protection (e.g., clear safety glasses, wrap-around sun glasses, or face-shield) is required when handling large birds such as herons, gulls, and gannets (use extreme caution when handling any large bird, or avoid handling altogether as they can be dangerous).

1.5.2 Equipment for the safe and effective capture and handling of live birds

- Box or animal carrier - Cardboard boxes are best for holding migratory birds because the boxes provide a calm, dark environment, and will not damage feathers to the extent that hard-sided animal carriers may. Ventilation holes must be cut or punched into cardboard boxes prior to the placement of birds. The bottom of the box should be lined (see below) to allow the bird to stand without slipping. The box should be large enough to allow the bird to stand. Do not house or transport birds in transparent carriers (e.g., wire cages or aquariums).
- Blankets, sheets, towels or pillow cases (based on size of bird) - for corralling and capturing birds. Pillow cases also work well for short-term transportation and holding of birds until they can be placed into a cardboard box. Towels or a piece of clean carpet can be used to line or pad the box to prevent slipping.
- Nets - Smaller and more agile birds may be better captured with hand-held nets (e.g., butterfly nets with long handles). These are especially useful when birds are in hard-to reach corners or under equipment.
- Field guides and/or cameras (including cell phone cameras) are useful for species identification. Identifying the species can help inform decisions regarding the housing, maintenance, transport, and release of the bird. The images on the “Common Seabirds of Atlantic Canada” (Appendix 3) can help in identifying the most common seabirds found in Atlantic Canada, and the following are useful field guides for birds in general:
 - “The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America” (Sibley)
 - “A Field Guide to North Atlantic Wildlife” (Proctor & Lynch)
 - “Beached Birds – A COASST Field Guide to the North Atlantic” (Hass & Parrish) for identification of dead birds.

1.6 Reporting live and dead stranded birds

All birds found stranded on platforms and vessels should be documented (section 4). Documentation should include photographs whenever possible. The documentation should be sent to CWS annually, or as specified under the conditions of the authorization.

Some circumstances require immediate (within 48 hours) reporting to CWS:

- one or more Species at Risk found alive or dead on platform or vessel;
- 10 or more birds stranded or found dead during a single event or day;
- Any birds found injured or oiled that may require transport to mainland facilities for release or rehabilitation; or

- Any birds for which the identification, status or proper handling protocols are uncertain.

Nova Scotia

Carina Gjerdrum: (902) 426-9641, (902) 233-2506 (cell);
carina.gjerdrum@canada.ca

Newfoundland and Labrador

Sabina Wilhelm: (709) 772-5568, (709) 764-1957 (cell);
sabina.wilhelm@canada.ca

Alternate contact

Becky Whittam: (506) 364-5189, (506) 224- 0152 (cell);
becky.whittam@canada.ca

Though the majority of birds fall under federal jurisdiction, some species (such as owls, raptors, and crows) are the responsibility of provincial governments. If you are unsure, CWS staff listed above can direct you to the appropriate provincial agency, if required.

2 LIVE STRANDED BIRDS: GENERAL PROCEDURES

When live birds are stranded on offshore vessels or platforms, their rapid capture, stabilization, and release can significantly increase their chances of survival. Documentation of the stranding will help to inform mitigation strategies that can minimize impacts on bird populations.

Refer to the “Infographic - Procedures for handling and documenting stranded birds” (Appendix 2) as a quick reference guide to identify the most appropriate course of action when stranded birds are encountered.

2.1 Identify type of bird (i.e., species) that has stranded

Field guides are a useful tool to aid in species identification (section 1.5.2), but when the identification of a species is in doubt, contact CWS (section 1.6). Take a photograph of the bird whenever possible to help confirm species identification.

The “Pelagic Seabirds of Atlantic Canada” is a reference card associated with this document (Appendix 3) that shows images of the most common seabirds found offshore Atlantic Canada.

2.1.1 Birds that may become stranded

Leach's Storm-Petrels (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) are abundant, small seabirds that frequently become stranded on vessels and platforms at night. A similar species that may also be found stranded is the **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** (*Oceanites oceanicus*). Storm-Petrels account for 97% of stranded birds reported on offshore platforms and vessels operating on the Grand Banks, Newfoundland and Labrador. The period of greatest risk of attraction to lights on vessels appears to be at the end of the breeding season (September and October) when adults and newly fledged chicks are dispersing from the colonies and migrating to their offshore wintering grounds.

Murre (*Uria* spp.), **Atlantic Puffin** (*Fratercula arctica*), **Razorbill** (*Alca torda*) and **Dovekie** (*Alle alle*) are diving birds that spend a large proportion of their time floating on the surface of the ocean, which makes them highly susceptible to oiling at sea. These migratory birds occasionally strand on platforms and supply vessels.

Other seabirds that occasionally become stranded on vessels or platforms include **shearwaters, gannets, and gulls**, although these are less likely to be oiled and more likely to be injured or resting.

A number of globally rare seabird species, such as the **Bermuda Petrel** (*Pterodroma cahow*) and **Black-capped Petrel** (*P. hasitata*), are particularly vulnerable to fatal light attraction due to their low population size. Take a photograph if species identification is not certain and contact CWS (section 1.6) for instructions on proper handling, care, and release or collection.

Landbirds include **songbirds** (e.g., sparrows, warblers finches), **waders** (e.g., plovers, sandpipers, herons), and **birds of prey** (e.g., owls, hawks, falcons) that typically do not occur at sea outside of brief migratory periods, but often inhabit coastal areas. Landbirds account for approximately 1% of strandings recorded on offshore platforms and vessels operating on the Grand Banks, Newfoundland and Labrador, but are more frequently found stranded on platforms and vessels in the Sable Island Banks production area. Landbirds typically interact with offshore vessels or platforms during spring or fall migration, particularly during periods of high wind or fog.

2.1.2 Species at Risk

For the purposes of this document, Species at Risk are considered species (or sub-species) listed in Schedules 1, 2 or 3 of the Species at Risk Act and/or assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) as endangered, threatened or special concern. If any of these species are found stranded alive or dead on offshore platforms or vessels, contact CWS (section 1.6) for instructions on proper handling, care,

and release or collection. The latest list can be found on the Species at Risk Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca).

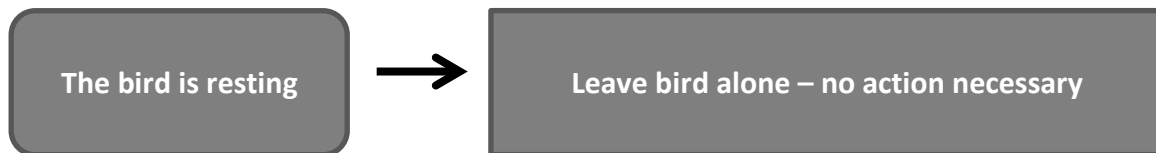
2.2 Identify issue and follow course of action

When a migratory bird is observed on a platform or vessel, it may be resting or it may be truly stranded. A stranded bird may require assistance to leave the structure if it is trapped, exhausted, or wet.

At other times, a stranded bird may be injured and unable to leave the structure under its own power. Identifying the exact nature, cause, and severity of an injury can be very difficult and will often require consultation with an expert. Injured and oiled birds may require expert care whereas other birds may simply need some assistance to be released at sea.

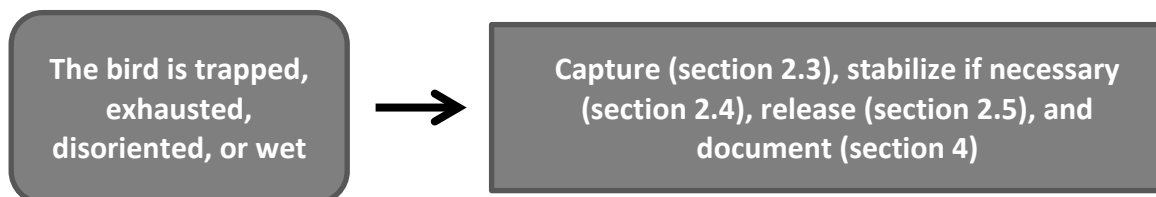
Furthermore, in many cases, birds may recover best if left alone. The following points describe what should be done when stranded birds are observed.

2.2.1 Bird is resting



- A bird that is resting on deck or a railing and is still able to fly and/or walk freely, or is able to leave the platform unassisted.
- Some resting birds may stay with a vessel for several days until they are ready to depart.

2.2.2 Bird is trapped, exhausted, disoriented, or wet

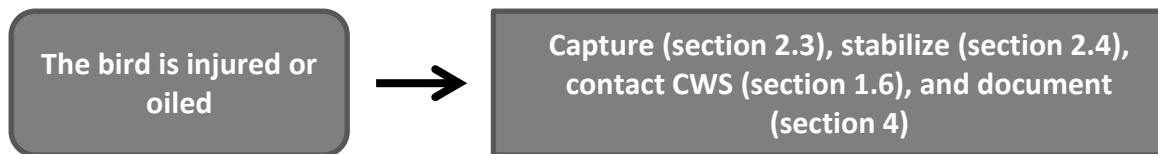


- **Do not attempt to capture birds of prey or large birds (e.g., herons, cormorants, gannets and gulls) as they are able to inflict significant injuries. Contact CWS for further instruction (section 1.6).**

- Most birds that are trapped on deck or in cabins may be captured (section 2.3) and released immediately (section 2.5) if they are not exhausted, disoriented, wet, injured, or oiled.
- Exhausted birds (e.g., those that remain seated or laying on deck for long periods and when approached, cannot fly away or hide in a corner) and wet birds should be captured (section 2.3), placed in a cardboard box in a dry, quiet location (section 2.4), examined every few hours to determine level of activity, and when appear recovered, released as appropriate (section 2.5).
- After a collision, some birds may be disoriented but otherwise uninjured. If the disoriented bird is easily captured, keep it in a box for a few hours to rest and recover (section 2.4), then release at sea (section 2.5).

It is important to determine if a bird is simply wet or if its feathers are coated with oil (some dark birds may appear to be oiled when the feathers are only wet). See section 2.2.3 for information concerning identifying and handling oiled birds.

2.2.3 Bird is injured or oiled



- Birds may sometimes become injured from a collision with a platform or vessel infrastructure.

Broken wing – the wing is held at awkward angle or dangling when standing, walking, or flying. A bird with a broken wing will not survive on its own and should be kept in a darkened box (section 2.4) until further instruction from CWS.

Broken leg or foot – the bird walks or stands with a limp. Some birds may survive with broken legs and may be difficult to capture. Consult with CWS (section 1.6) as some birds with this type of injury may fare best if left alone or released at sea (section 2.5).

- Birds can be oiled at sea or may become oiled when moving around on vessel or platform decks or beneath machinery. Even small amounts of oil or grease can harm a bird's ability to maintain waterproofing, which is the key to feathers' insulation value. Loss of insulation can quickly lead to hypothermia and death.

Confirm presence of oil by

- **looking for oil smudges on glove, towel or paper towel;**
- **feeling for a sticky or filmy substance on feathers;**
- **smelling the feathers for petroleum-like scents.**

Do NOT try to clean an oiled bird. Cleaning an oiled bird requires authorization under the Migratory Bird Regulations, specialized training, and proper facilities.

2.3 Safe capture and handling of live stranded birds

Ensure that personnel always use the appropriate PPE (section 1.5.1) when capturing and handling wildlife, and follow these general rules:

- 1. Never attempt to capture a bird if your safety is at risk.** If you are uncomfortable or unable to capture a stranded bird on your own, seek assistance. Do not attempt to capture a bird of prey or large, long-necked birds such as herons, cormorants, gannets, and gulls. The talons and bill can cause serious injury.
- 2. Safety first** - for both personnel and the birds. Have appropriate and clean equipment ready (section 1.5). Proper precautions must be taken and safety equipment must be worn during capture and handling (e.g., gloves and eye protection).
- 3. Minimize stress to the animal.** House and transport birds in a closed, darkened box or carrier. This is safer and less stressful to the bird.

2.3.1 General techniques

- Briefly examine birds to identify the species and look for signs of injury, oiling, and wetness. What you find will determine the course of action (section 2.2).
- Use towels, blankets, jackets, or sheets to corral the bird into a corner. Gently throw the towel/blanket over the entire bird. Darkness will help calm birds while transferring them to a box. Smaller and more agile birds may be better captured with hand-held nets (e.g., butterfly nets).

Storm-Petrels can be collected by hand as they are easy to pick up, poor walkers, and will not fly up off the deck if the area is well-lit.

Use gloves and eye protection for larger birds, such as murre, puffins, and shearwaters. If possible, secure the bill by firmly but gently, holding it and the head from outside of the blanket or towel.

- Wrap the bird in the towel/blanket, holding securely but gently while handling. When lifting a bird, hold its wings flush to its body in order to prevent flapping, which could lead to injury to the bird.
- If necessary, transfer the bird to a box with adequate ventilation (section 2.4) as soon as possible and gently unwrap the towel or blanket.
- Immediately after handling any birds, dispose of gloves and thoroughly wash hands with soap. Wash clothes if necessary.

2.4 Stabilization of live stranded birds

After capture, stabilization of the bird is important for its rest and recovery. The following are some key points for maintaining birds in preparation for release at sea, or for transportation to the mainland, if required. Remember to always use appropriate PPE when handling the birds (section 1.5.1).

- Keep bird(s) in a cardboard box with adequate ventilation. If possible, keep only one bird per box. However, if multiple stranded birds need stabilization, they can be kept in the same box provided they are not overcrowded. If it is necessary to keep more than one bird in a box, they should all be of the same species. Larger birds (e.g., waders) should be kept in their own box. Long-legged birds (e.g., yellowlegs, whimbrel, and willet) should be kept in a box that is tall enough to allow the birds to remain standing.
- If the bird is suspected of being oiled, it should be kept in a box until further instruction is received from CWS (section 2.2.3). Oiled birds should be kept individually in separate boxes in order to avoid cross-contamination.

- The bottom of the box should be padded with towels to absorb water/oil and provide padding for legs and feet. Avoid other bedding types (i.e., long strips of paper) that may lead to entanglement, especially for smaller species.
- Change towels when wet or oiled.
- A small dish of water can be provided to songbirds, but not to other species and only if they are able to stand. No food should be given to any of the birds in captivity.
- Keep the box in a quiet, cool (but indoors), and dark location.
- Birds should be monitored regularly (every 1-2 hours) for panting as birds can overheat as they recover. If a bird is found to be panting, move the box to a cooler location or increase ventilation.
- If transportation to the mainland is necessary, it should be done within 24 to 48 hours, if possible.

2.5 Releasing birds at sea

Depending on the severity of the birds' injuries and overall condition, some birds may be released at sea. If unsure of the best course of action, contact CWS (section 1.6). Remember to always use appropriate PPE when handling the birds (section 1.5.1).

Storm-Petrels should be released at night to avoid predation from gulls. In circumstances where there are no gulls in the vicinity, the storm-petrels can be released during the day. The stranded storm-petrel should be brought to the forward quarter of the vessel or a poorly lit corner of the platform where the bird will not be attracted to lights or flares and strand itself again. Release by gently letting go of the bird over the side, pointing it away from the vessel/platform.

Other seabirds can be released at sea by gently tossing the bird over the leeward side of the vessel/platform so that wind or waves do not blow the birds back onto the deck.

Landbirds (e.g., songbirds and waders) can be released at sea by placing them on a high perch, somewhere out of the wind where the bird has the opportunity to fly away when it is ready to do so. Depending on the birds' condition, it may remain with the vessel or platform.

Table 1. Considerations for capture and handling of birds that may get stranded.

Bird type	Tips for quick identification	Considerations for capture
Seabirds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webbed feet • Bill deep but narrow, pointed or hooked at the tip • Typically black, white, and/or grey • Often poor/awkward walking on deck • Shearwaters, storm-petrels, gannets, murre, puffins, gulls, cormorants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storm-petrels can be caught by hand • Other species of seabird are best captured by throwing towel/blanket over body • All will likely try to bite, and larger species may cause injuries – use gloves and eye protection and secure bill under towel/blanket (shearwaters, murre, puffins) • <u>Do not attempt to capture gannets, gulls or cormorants</u>
Songbirds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short thin legs, feet not webbed • Bill short, but thin (warblers) or stubby (sparrows and finches) • Small, typically brown or any mix of colours (black, yellow, red, white.) • Agile, quick flight, often hopping and perching • Sparrows, warblers, finches, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corral into corner of a room • Most easily captured with hand-held net • May or may not bite
Waders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long thin legs, feet not webbed • Bill generally long and thin however plovers have short beaks. • Small to large, typically brown or grey • Agile, good at walking or running • Plovers, sandpipers, herons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plovers and sandpipers: corral into corner of a room, using a net or light towel/sheet for capture • <u>Do not attempt to capture herons</u> - may bite or strike with beak
Birds of prey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very strong legs, feet, with long talons • Bill hooked • Medium to large, typically brown or grey • Strong, agile flyers that will most often be found perched on vessel/platform looking to hunt smaller birds • Owls, hawks, falcons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Do not attempt to capture</u> • Talons and bill can cause serious injury • Contact CWS who will direct the call to the appropriate provincial agency

3 DEAD STRANDED BIRDS: GENERAL PROCEDURES

Dead birds are occasionally found on offshore vessels or platforms. Documentation and/or collection (with appropriate PPE, section 1.5.1) of dead birds will help wildlife managers determine the cause of death.

3.1 Less than 10 birds found dead (in the same event), no Species at Risk, and no oiled bird(s)



- If species identification is uncertain, take a photograph of the dead bird(s). Send the photograph to CWS to confirm species and that the dead bird is not a Species at Risk.
- Document the date, location, species, number of birds that were found, bird condition (i.e., oiled or unoled), and bird fate using the “Stranded Bird Encounter Datasheet” (Appendix 1).
- After documentation, carcass(es) may be disposed of at sea.

3.2 More than 10 birds found dead (in the same event), Species at Risk, or oiled bird(s)



- When more than 10 individual migratory birds are found stranded in a 24 hour period (and they are not oiled), contact CWS as well as the Canadian Coast Guard Environmental Emergencies Line (1-800-565-1633).
- If you suspect you have a Species at Risk, take a photograph and contact CWS to confirm.

- While wearing disposable gloves, place dead birds in a plastic bag (any type) and tie it shut.
 - Document (section 4) the event using the “Stranded Bird Encounter Datasheet” (Appendix 1).
 - Contact CWS and arrange to ship to the appropriate CWS contact person as soon as possible (section 1.6).
- If the bird(s) is oiled, contact CWS as well as the Canadian Coast Guard Environmental Emergencies Line (1-800-565-1633).
 - To avoid cross-contamination, individually wrap each bird in aluminum foil and place in its own bag. It is vital that clean gloves are used prior to handling each oiled bird, and that oiled birds are wrapped in foil as soon as they are found.
 - Write date, location and name of collector directly on the bag with permanent marker and attach the data collection form to the bag (or put inside the bag).
 - Document (section 4) the event using the “Stranded Bird Encounter Datasheet” (Appendix 1).
 - Contact CWS and arrange to ship to the appropriate CWS contact person as soon as possible (section 1.6).
- Store any collection bag(s) in a cool place (e.g., outdoors during winter or in portable cooler with ice packs) that is sheltered from scavenging birds.
 - After removing and disposing of gloves, thoroughly wash hands with hot water and soap.

4 DOCUMENTATION OF STRANDED BIRDS

Documentation of stranded birds will help to inform mitigation strategies to minimize impacts on bird populations. **All stranded birds (live and dead) should be documented** using the “Stranded Bird Encounter Datasheet” (Appendix 1). The documentation should be sent to CWS annually, or as specified under the conditions of the authorization (section 1.4).

The following fields are used for recording information on stranded bird encounters:

- **Name of facility, vessel or platform** – record the name of the facility, vessel or platform on which the stranded bird was found.

- **General activity** - describe the activity of the facility, vessel or platform (i.e., seismic exploration, drilling, refinery, etc.).
- **Description of search effort** - describe how and where stranded birds are searched for (e.g., opportunistically, systematic searches, etc.)
- **Date** – record the date that the bird(s) was encountered.
- **Location** – record the latitude/longitude of the facility, vessel or platform where bird(s) was encountered, or location name.
- **Bird species** – identify the species encountered. If the identity of the species is in question, take a photograph, if possible.
- **Total number of stranded birds** – indicate the number of birds encountered.
- **Condition of bird(s) when found** – indicate the number of stranded bird(s) found dead, alive, and/or the number found oiled.
- **Action taken** – document the number of stranded birds that were disposed of at sea, released alive, sent ashore, and/or died in care.
- **Weather** – indicate whether there was fog and/or rain at the time of the stranding.