Best practices for stranded birds encountered offshore Atlantic Canada



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Environment Canada Environnement Canada

Canada

Contents

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Document Purpose

This document is intended to provide offshore personnel with safe and effective procedures for dealing with and documenting live and dead stranded birds (this can include: capture, handling, transport and release).

Supporting documents:

- *Stranded birds encounter datasheet* – for documenting and reporting live and dead stranded birds
- *Response procedures for live and dead stranded birds in offshore Atlantic Canada: A reference card* – outlines procedure and provides contact information
- *Pelagic Seabirds of Atlantic Canada* – a reference card showing images of the most common seabirds found offshore Atlantic Canada
- *Daily search record logbook (to come)*

1.2 Bird attraction to offshore vessels and platforms

The day to day operations of offshore petroleum activities can impact wildlife. Birds can be attracted to offshore platforms, drilling rigs, and support vessels for roosting, foraging opportunities, and due to disorientation by and attraction to light sources. In Atlantic Canada, nocturnal migrants and night-flying seabirds (e.g., storm-petrels) are the birds most at risk of attraction to lights. Attraction to lights may result in collision with lit structures and incineration or partial incineration in flares. Best management practices can include turning off or shielding lights, especially on foggy nights (without compromising safety), avoiding flaring at night when possible or incorporating enclosed waste gas incineration systems instead of flares during platform retrofits or new platform development.

Despite implementing measures to minimize the attraction to offshore platforms and vessels to migratory birds, birds may still be found stranded. In Atlantic Canada, bird interactions with offshore petroleum activities have been studied but incidental reports of stranded birds also provide important information. Documenting these interactions helps to inform mitigation strategies to further minimize impacts on bird populations. Furthermore, safe and effective capture, handling, and release of stranded birds can further reduce impacts, especially for rare and threatened species. For birds that are oiled or injured, rapid capture and stabilization is often the key to their survival.

1.3 Bird species likely to become stranded

Leach's Storm-Petrels (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) are small seabirds that frequently become stranded on vessels and platforms at night as they are attracted to lights. Storm-petrels account for 97% of stranded birds recorded from offshore platforms and vessels on the Grand

Banks, Newfoundland and Labrador (Appendix I). Murres (*Uria* spp.), Atlantic Puffins (*Fratercula arctica*), Razorbills (*Alca torda*) and Dovekies (*Alle alle*) are diving birds that spend a large proportion of their time floating on the surface of the ocean. Thus, they are highly susceptible to oiling at sea and occasionally strand on platforms and supply vessels. Other seabirds may occasionally become stranded on vessels, but these are less likely to be oiled and more likely to be injured or resting.

Landbirds are the group of species that typically do not occur at sea outside of brief migration periods but often inhabit coastal areas. These include songbirds, flycatchers, raptors (birds of prey), sandpipers, plovers, and herons, among others (Table 1). Landbirds account for only about 1% of strandings recorded from offshore platforms and vessels on the Grand Banks, Newfoundland and Labrador, but are more frequently found stranded in the Sable Island Banks production area. They typically interact with offshore vessels or platforms during migration when blown offshore by storms, or when disoriented by fog.

1.4 Permits for capture and handling birds

A permit issued by Environment Canada under the authority of the *Migratory Birds Convention Act* may be required to handle migratory birds.

For more information on permitting requirements, contact:

Canadian Wildlife Service – Atlantic Region
Environment Canada
17 Waterfowl Lane
Sackville, NB, E4L 1G6
Permi.Atl@ec.gc.ca

1.5 Equipment required for capture and handling of live (injured or exhausted) birds

Most capture and handling of wild birds offshore can be conducted safely and effectively without specialized equipment. The following equipment should be available to minimize capture and handling time, which will minimize stress to the animal:

- **Box** or **animal carrier**: Cardboard boxes are best for holding birds as they provide a calm, dark environment and do not damage feathers as much as hard sided animal carriers do. Ventilation holes may be cut or punched into cardboard boxes prior to placement of birds.
- **Blankets, sheets, towels** or **pillow cases** 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 can be used as padding in the box.

- **Nets:** Smaller and more agile birds may be better captured with hand-held nets (i.e. butterfly nets). These may also be used to corral birds from corners and from under equipment.
- **Gloves:** Gloves are recommended to protect handlers from bites and disease. The risk of disease transmission from birds to humans is very low, but any wild animal may carry diseases or parasites. Gloves should be clean and free from grease and oil.
- **Eye protection:** is recommended when handling large birds such as herons, gulls, gannets, and birds of prey.
- **Field guides** are useful for species identification which facilitates maintenance, transport, and release decisions. The following are useful guides for Atlantic Canadian birds:
  - *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)

1.6 Reporting

All birds found on platforms and support vessels should be documented - including photographs whenever possible. Circumstances that require **immediate reporting to Environment Canada**:

- 1 or more *Species at Risk* found alive or dead on platform or vessel (see Appendix II for complete list of species at risk).
- *10 or more birds stranded or killed* during a single event or day.
- Any birds found *injured or oiled* that may require transport to on-land facilities for release or rehabilitation.
- Any birds for which the status and proper handling protocols are uncertain.

Please contact the local Environment Canada office.

Nova Scotia:

Carina Gjerdrum: (902) 426-9641; Carina.Gjerdrum@ec.gc.ca
Andrew Boyne: (902) 426-1900; (902) 225-7563; Andrew.Boyne@ec.gc.ca

Newfoundland and Labrador:

Sabina Wilhelm: (709) 772-5568; Sabina.Wilhelm@ec.gc.ca

Though the majority of birds fall under federal jurisdiction, some species (owls, raptors, crows etc.) are a responsibility of provincial governments. Environment Canada staff listed above will assist persons reporting to determine jurisdiction and direct them to the appropriate provincial agency if required.

2. DAILY SEARCH METHODOLOGY

ACTION: Conduct and document a daily search for live and dead birds

- Every vessel or platform must designate 1 crewmember to undertake a daily walk-through of all easily-accessible open areas to search for live and dead birds. The search does not need to be done all at once but can be broken down into a few searches that can be separated in time. However, it is crucial that the entire search be undertaken every day.
- Live birds encountered must be handled as per instructions in following section.
- If dead birds are encountered, they must be collected using either method A or B (below)
- A log book indicating that a daily search was completed must be kept. Searches that did not result in any birds being found must be logged as well since knowing that no birds were killed overnight is as important as knowing that there were mortalities. (A logbook template will be provided).

3. LIVE STRANDED BIRDS: GENERAL PROCEDURES

3.1. Identify issue and follow course of action

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 in order to be released at sea, furthermore, in many cases, bird may be best off if left alone.

RESTING BIRDS:

ACTION: Leave bird alone – no capture necessary

- **Resting birds** - resting on decks or railing *but still able to fly and/or walk freely, or are able to leave platform unassisted.*
- Some birds may stay with a vessel for several days until they are ready to depart.

TRAPPED, EXHAUSTED OR WET:

ACTION: Capture, document and release

- **Birds that are trapped** on deck or in cabins may be captured and released immediately if they are not injured, oiled, or exhausted. **Exhausted birds** (those that remain seated or laying on deck for long periods and when approached, cannot fly away or hide in a corner) should be captured, placed in cardboard box, and examined every few hours to determine level of activity and recovery. When recovered, release as appropriate. Storm-petrels should be released at night and other birds during the day. Landbirds (i.e., songbirds) can be held for up to 48 hours if there is an opportunity to release closer to land. If no such opportunity exists, the bird may be released at sea, but may remain with the vessel or platform.
- **Wet birds** - Feathers are naturally waterproof but any disruption to their feathers may cause them to become wet. 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). Wet birds should be captured, placed in cardboard box, and examined every few hours to determine level of activity and recovery. When recovered, release as appropriate (see exhausted birds above).
- **Storm-petrels** should be captured, placed in cardboard box (overnight if required ie. daytime capture), and released *at night* (if they are not injured, oiled, or wet). *If released during the day, storm-petrels may be eaten by gulls.*
- **All stranded birds should be documented** in a data collection form.

INJURED, DISORIENTED OR OILED :

ACTION: Capture, document and contact Environment Canada

- **Bird is injured –** birds may sometimes become injured from collision with platform or vessel infrastructure

  Broken wing - 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.
- Should be kept in box until further instruction from Environment Canada.

Broken leg or foot - Walks or stands with a limp.

- Some birds may survive with broken legs and may be difficult to capture.
- Consult with Environment Canada as some may fare best if left alone or released at sea.

Disoriented - After a collision, some birds may be disoriented but otherwise uninjured.

- If a bird is easily captured, keep it in a box for a few hours to rest and recover.
- Consult with Environment Canada as it is likely that the bird can be released at sea.

- **Bird is oiled –** 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. Birds can be oiled at sea or may become oiled when moving around on decks or under machinery.
    - **If a seemingly oiled bird can be caught**, it should be kept in a box until further instruction is received from Environment Canada. Oiled birds should be kept in separate boxes to minimize cross-contamination.
    - **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 feathers for petroleum-like scents.
    - **Do NOT try to clean an oiled bird**. This requires a permit, specialized training, and facilities.
    - For all instances of oiled birds, **contact Environment Canada** for further instructions.

- **All stranded birds should be documented** using the data collection form.

3.2. Safe capture and handling

Ensure that you follow the three "golden rules" for capturing and handling wildlife (adapted from the Hope for Wildlife Society; www.hopeforwildlife.net):

1. **Safety first** - for you and the animal. To minimize stress to birds, have appropriate and clean equipment ready. Capturing some animals, like birds of prey and large seabirds may be dangerous. Proper precautions and safety equipment should be worn during capture and handling (e.g., gloves and eye protection).
2. **Never attempt to capture an animal if your safety is at risk**. If you are unable to capture a stranded animal on your own, seek assistance.
3. **Always** transport animals in a box or carrier. This is safer and less stressful to the animal.

General techniques for safe capture and handling of birds:

- **Use towels, blankets, or sheets** to corral bird(s) into a corner. Gently throw the towel/blanket over the entire bird. Darkness will help calm birds while transferring them to a box.
- **Wrap** the bird in the towel/blanket, holding **securely but gently** while handling. When lifting a bird, hold its wings to prevent flapping which could lead to further injury to the bird.
- Briefly **examine birds** to identify the species and **look for signs of injury, oiling, and wetness.**
- **Transfer birds to a box** as soon as possible and gently unwrap the towel or blanket.
- After handling any birds, **dispose of gloves and thoroughly wash hands** with soap.

Note: large birds like herons, gannets, gulls and other seabirds may bite or strike and cause injury. Use gloves and eye protection, and if possible, secure the bill by firmly but gently holding it and the head from outside of the blanket or towel.

Table 1. Considerations for capture and handling of different types of birds that may be encountered on offshore platforms.

Bird type	Tips for quick identification	Considerations for capture
Seabirds	• 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, murres, puffins, gulls and cormorants.	• Easily captured by throwing towel/blanket over body • All will likely bite and larger species may cause injuries – use gloves and eye protection and secure bill under towel
Songbirds	• Short thin legs, feet not webbed • Bill short and stubby • Small, typically brown or any mix of colours (black, yellow, red, etc.) • Agile, quick flight, often hopping and perching • Sparrows, warblers, finches, etc.	• Corral into corner of a room • More easily captured with hand-held net • Will not bite
Waders	• 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	• Plovers and sandpipers: corral into corner of a room, using a net or light towel/sheet for capture • Herons: may bite or strike with beak – use gloves, eye protections, and large blanket
Birds of prey	• 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	• **<u>Do not attempt to capture</u>** • Talons and bill can cause serious injury • Contact Environment Canada.

3.3. Stabilization of birds

After capture, stabilization of the bird is important for its rest and recovery. Here are some key points for maintaining birds for release or transportation to the mainland, if required.

- Keep birds in a cardboard box with adequate ventilation.
- 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 that may lead to entanglement, especially for smaller species (i.e. long strips of paper).
- Change towels when wet or oiled.
- Consult Environment Canada staff for appropriate feeding and watering options.
- Keep the box in a warm, quiet, and dark location.
- Birds should be monitored regularly (every 1-2 hours) for panting as birds can overheat as they recover.
- If transportation to mainland is necessary, it should be done within 24 to 48 hours, if possible.

3.4. Releasing birds at sea

Depending on the severity of injuries and overall condition, some birds may be released at sea from platforms and vessels.

Storm-petrels should be released only at night to avoid predation from gulls. 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 dropping the bird over the side, pointed away from the vessel/platform. Storm-petrels are known to be attracted to lights on offshore platforms and vessels, and when visibility is reduced during foggy conditions, hundreds may collide with the lit structures and become stranded on deck. More detailed procedures for storm-petrel mitigation for these scenarios are provided in Appendix I.

Other seabirds, sandpipers and plovers can be released at sea by gently tossing over the leeward side of the vessel/platform so that wind or waves don't blow the birds back.

Landbirds (i.e., songbirds) can be held up to 48 hours if there is an opportunity to release closer to land. If no such opportunity exists, the bird may be released at sea by placing on a high perch, somewhere out of the wind where the bird has the opportunity to fly away. Depending on the birds' condition, it may remain with the vessel or platform.

4. DEAD BIRDS: GENERAL COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Dead birds are occasionally found on vessels or platforms offshore. Documentation and/or collection of dead birds will help wildlife managers determine the cause of death.

Two methods are recommended, it is essential follow only one method.

3.1 Method A (preferred):

LESS THAN 10 FOUND DEAD, NO SPECIES-AT-RISK, AND NOT OILED

ACTION: Document and dispose at sea

- Take a **photograph**.
- Document the **date, species, number of birds found, and bird condition** using the *Stranded bird encounter datasheet.*
- Carcasses may then be disposed of at sea or as per permit conditions.

TEN OR MORE FOUND DEAD, OR SPECIES-AT-RISK, OR OILED

ACTION: Collect, document, and send to Environment Canada

- When **10 or more birds are found dead** from the same event, they must to be photographed and documented using the *Stranded bird encounter datasheet.*
- Collect (using procedure below) and send ashore to Environment Canada - Canadian Wildlife Service contact persons.

Procedure for collection of dead birds

1. While wearing disposable gloves, place dead bird(s) in a plastic bag and tie it shut. **If the bird is oiled, individually wrap the bird in aluminum foil and place in its own bag**. To avoid cross-contamination, 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.

2. **Write date, location and name of collector directly on the bag** with permanent marker (date, location, name of collector) and attach the data collection form to the bag.

3. Store the bag(s) in a cool place (e.g., outdoors during winter or in cooler with ice packs) that is sheltered from scavenging birds. Freeze birds if they are to be retained for more than a few days.

4. After removing and disposing of gloves, thoroughly wash hands with soap.

3.2 Method B (simplest):

LESS THAN 10 BIRDS FOUND DEAD:

- Establish a centrally-located "bird bucket" in a visible area.

- The plastic pail should be of a different colour than those normally used onboard (ie. not white, black or yellow) and should be labelled with "birds only – no trash". Another pail or container should sit beside the bird bucket and should contain a supply of plastic bags of adequate sizes to fit birds as well as pound or two of salt (kitchen, pickling or road salt).

- **ALL STAFF ONBOARD** should be instructed to collect dead birds in plastic bags (any type) as they encounter them during the course of their duties and bring them to the "bird bucket". Staff should then open up the bag and put enough salt in it to fully cover the bird(s). The bag should be resealed and placed in the bucket. No labelling or identification is required.

- A staff member must be designated to:
    - ensure that bag and salt supplies are always available,
    - line the bucket with a sturdy plastic bag labelled with the collection period (7 day period: ie. April 3-9),
    - collect the liner bag (even if empty) every week and install a new one,
    - log each bag change and whether the bag was empty or contained birds,
    - send bags with birds to shore for analysis as soon as practicable.

    Note: bags with birds would benefit from being refrigerated or frozen – but this is not required.

IF MORE THAN 10 DEAD BIRDS ARE FOUND DEAD:

Collect all birds as described above – putting all samples into one bag labelled with the date. Contact CWS immediately and arrange to ship to CWS as soon as possible.

Appendix I – Storm-Petrel Mitigation (*adapted from Williams and Chardine*)

The Bird: One of the most common species to strand on offshore platforms and vessels is the Leach's Storm-Petrel. Millions of these birds breed in colonies on offshore islands around the Maritimes and Newfoundland and Labrador, in burrows dug into the topsoil. They feed far from the colony, at the surface of the sea on fish and invertebrates.

The Leach's Storm-Petrel is a small bird, about the size of a robin, with long wings and a notched tail. It is dark brown but with a conspicuous white patch at the base of its tail. When you have the bird in hand, you will see that it has a small tube on top of its bill (used for salt excretion) as well as a peculiar smell.

A similar species that may also be found stranded is the **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** – The two species are very similar and should be handled in the same way.

The Problem: Leach's Storm-Petrels feed far from their colony, often at the continental shelf break and beyond, and are known to be attracted to lights from offshore platforms and vessels, particularly on foggy nights. Although they will often crash into lighted areas on decks, they don't always die as a result. More often, they will seek refuge in a dark corner where they may come into contact with oil or other contaminants on deck. 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. There are records of hundreds or even thousands of Leach's Storm-Petrels stranding with vessels on foggy nights during migration.

The Mitigation: On **nights** when storm-petrels are colliding with the vessel, the following steps should be taken to ensure that as many birds as possible are safely returned to their natural habitat:

1. Reduce the amount of light emitted by the vessel as much as possible by turning off all non-essential lights, orienting or shielding any required lights so that they shine down instead of out to sea and draw blinds over cabin windows if the lights cannot be turned off.
2. All decks of the vessel should be patrolled as often as is needed to ensure that birds are picked up and boxed (see below) as soon as possible after they have collided with the vessel. After collision, birds will often "freeze" below lights on deck or seek dark areas underneath machinery and the like.
3. Birds should be collected by hand and gently placed in small cardboard boxes. Care should be taken not to overcrowd the birds and a maximum of 10-15 birds should be

placed in each box, depending upon its size. The birds are very easy to pick up as they are poor walkers and will not fly up off the deck so long as the area is well-lit. They will make a squealing sound as they are picked up- this is of no concern and is a natural reaction to be handled.

4. When the birds are placed in the box the cover should be put in place and the birds left to recover in a dark, cool, quiet place for about 5-10 minutes. The birds initially will be quite active in the box but will soon settle down.
5. Following the recovery period (and before dawn), the box containing the birds should be brought to the bow of the boat or to some other area of the vessel that has minimal (if any) lighting. Thecover should be opened and each bird individually removed by hand. The release is usually accomplished by letting the bird drop over the side of the vessel. There is no need to throw the bird up in the air at release time. If the birds are released at a well-lit part of the vessel they usually fly back towards the vessel and collide again.
6. If any of the birds are wet when they are captured (i.e., they drop into water on the deck) then they should be placed in a cardboard box and let dry. Once the bird is dry it can be released as per the previous instruction. Also, temporarily injured birds should be left for longer to recover in the cardboard box before release.
7. Any birds contaminated with oil should be kept in a separate box and not mixed with clean birds. Contact Environment Canada for instructions on how to deal with contaminated birds.
8. In the event that some birds are captured near dawn and are not fully recovered before daylight, they should be kept until the next night for release. Storm-Petrels should not be released in daylight as at this time they are very vulnerable to predation by gulls. Birds should be kept in the cardboard box in a cool, quiet place for the day, and do not need to be fed.
9. Someone should be given the responsibility of maintaining a tally of birds that have been captured and released, and those that were found dead on deck. These notes should be kept with other information about the conditions on the night of the incident (*Stranded Bird Encounter Datasheet).* THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT AS IT IS THE ONLY WAY WE CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT THESE EVENTS AND DEVISE WAYS TO PREDICT AND AVOID THEM.

Appendix II – Species at Risk

In Atlantic Canada there are currently 17 species (or sub-species) listed on schedule 1 of the Species at Risk Act as *endangered*, *threatened* or *special concern* (Table 1). ***If any of these species are found stranded alive or dead on offshore platforms or vessels, Environment Canada should be contacted for instructions on proper handling, care, and release or collection.*** For platforms operating in the Sable Island area, there are 2 species which are more likely to be encountered than other species at risk. These are described in this section to aid in proper identification from other similar species. The status of species is regularly reassessed and the list of species at risk is updated. The latest list can be found on the Species at Risk Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca).

Table 1 – List of species at risk which occur in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. Information compiled from Schedules 1, 2 and 3 of the federal Species at Risk Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca) which should be consulted for periodic updates.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Family group	Status (SARA & COSEWIC)
Ivory Gull	*Pagophila eburnea*	Seabird	Endangered
Roseate Tern	*Sterna dougallii*	Seabird	Endangered
Red Knot	*Calidris canutus*	sandpiper/plover	Endangered
Piping Plover	*Charadrius melodus*	sandpiper/plover	Endangered
Least Bittern	*Ixobrychus exilis*	Heron	Threatened
Olive-sided Flycatcher	*Contopus cooperi*	songbird/flycatcher	Threatened
Common Nighthawk	*Chordeiles minor*	songbird/flycatcher	Threatened
Chimney Swift	*Chaetura pelagica*	songbird/flycatcher	Threatened
Bicknell's Thrush	*Catharus bicknelli*	songbird/flycatcher	Threatened
Canada Warbler	*Cardellina canadensis*	songbird/flycatcher	Threatened
Eastern Whip-poor-will	*Antrostomus vociferus*	songbird/flycatcher	Threatened
Rusty Blackbird	*Euphagus carolinus*	songbird/flycatcher	Special Concern
Harlequin Duck	*Histrionicus histrionicus*	Duck	Special Concern
Barrow's Goldeneye	*Bucephala islandica*	Duck	Special Concern
Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*	falcon/owl	Special Concern
Short-eared Owl	*Asio flammeus*	falcon/owl	Special Concern
Ipswich Sparrow	*Passerculus sandwichensis princeps*	songbird/flycatcher	Special Concern

Bird species at risk most likely to be observed in the Nova Scotia offshore

Roseate Tern (endangered)

Type of bird: Seabird. Feeds on small fish by diving from the air. Typically does not sit on water surface but often perches on floating debris and sometimes on vessels.

Distinguishing characteristics: Length 12", Wing-span 29". Small tern with pale plumage. During the breeding season (May-Aug) most easily distinguished by **dark bill** which is different from similar Common Terns and Arctic Terns (which have red/orange bills). During late summer, some adult Roseate Terns may get red in the base of their bills like Common Terns. Juvenile Roseate Terns have dark foreheads, bills, and legs which distinguish them from juveniles of other tern species. See field guides for further details and images.

Status and encounters: Extremely rare, less than 70 breeding pairs in Atlantic Canada and only 3 to 5 pairs on Sable Island in recent years. Unlikely to be encountered at offshore platforms and vessels, although terns sometimes rest on vessels.

Ipswich Sparrow (special concern)

Type of bird: Landbird; songbird. This sub-species of the Savannah Sparrow nests only on Sable Island; migrates between Sable Island and the mainland each spring and fall.

Distinguishing characteristics: Length 5.5", Wing-span 6.5". Small sparrow that is very pale/sandy coloured. Light brown streaks on breast and adults have yellowish lores (colouring above the eye), especially during the breeding season.

Status and encounters: Approximately 5000-6000 birds nest on Sable Island. They are most likely to be encountered on platforms and vessels during spring (mid-April to mid-May) and fall (September to November) migration periods. They have previously been reported as stranded birds on platforms and vessels in the Sable Island area.

Bird species at risk most likely to be observed in the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore

Ivory Gull (endangered)

Type of bird: Seabird. At sea, feeds at the surface, primarily on small fish, but also scavenges the carcasses of fish and marine mammals killed by large predators such as the polar bear.

Distinguishing characteristics: Length 17", Wing-span 37". Stocky, medium-sized gull with all white plumage; it is the only gull species with plumage that is entirely white. They have short black legs and heavy grey-blue bill. Juvenile birds have a dark face and dark spots on wings and tail. See field guides for further details and images.

Status and encounters: In North America, the Ivory Gull breeds in the central and eastern Canadian Arctic, but recent surveys indicate an apparent population decrease of approximately 80% since the 1980s. In winter, Ivory Gulls live near the edges of pack ice and are sometimes observed offshore Newfoundland and Labrador. Although unlikely to be encountered at offshore platforms and vessels, interactions are most probable during the winter months (December through March).