

Wildlife Response Action – Bird Nesting Colonies Mississippi Canyon 252 Oil Spill

Summary: Human impacts to bird nesting colonies (colonial nesting birds, waterbirds, shorebirds, wading birds, etc.) needs to be considered in every aspect of oil spill response. Responders must ensure that impacts from approaching or entering a colony do not exceed the initial impact from oil exposure. Below documentation to support decisions made for response activities:

- Nisbet (2000) proposed that human disturbance for colonial waterbirds be defined as “any human activity that changes the contemporaneous behavior or physiology of one or more individuals within a colony”.
- Previous research has revealed that humans approaching or entering a nesting colony will provoke flushing and panic flights which is the most severe response to disturbance.
- Colony abandonment has been documented from excessive disturbance at critical nesting phases.
- When flushed by a disturbance, nest predation has been documented. Some species of birds, such as laughing gulls, will destroy eggs in adjacent nests.
- Bird eggs and hatchlings in the nest are particularly vulnerable to human disturbance because their survival depends on parental care. Parental care includes shading of hatchlings and eggs from the sun exposure and high temperatures.

The following protocol should be followed regarding oiled birds in bird nesting colonies:

- Do not enter the colony. Record as much information as possible from a distance of at least 100’ to include # of birds oiled, % of oiling of birds, pictures, and coordinates. This information should be reported to the Houma ICC as soon as reasonably possible.
- Each report of oiled adult birds, eggs, or chicks will be investigated by a LDWF and USFWS biologist team to determine severity of impacts.
 - Approach colonies slowly by boat – no rapid movement
 - Wear inconspicuous clothing
 - Attempt to be concealed as possible – birds are less sensitive to observers if somewhat concealed/shielded
 - Use binoculars or spotting scope to observe from a distance
 - Document conditions - photographs, field notes (number of birds/nests, % oiled, etc.) and GPS coordinates
- If the percentage of the colony oiled exceeds 50%, a team of at least three highly qualified biologists (ornithologists, species specific managers, etc.) from LDWF and USFWS will collaborate and develop a unified decision and protocol to remove the birds. Field personnel should relay the report to Houma IC immediately. Primary contacts for LDWF are Michael Seymour, Mike Carlross, and Tom Hess. The USFWS contacts are the Deputy Branch Director and the Operations Manager.

- Bird colonies will not be entered to retrieve oiled birds unless deemed appropriate by the team of LDWF and USFWS biologists. A unified decision by the Wildlife Branch will be made before collecting oiled birds from colonies.
- If only a few birds are oiled, collection of birds will not occur. However, this guideline is flexible in the event capture is feasible with minimal impact (for example – isolated nests adjacent to a colony).
- Eggs will not be collected in any circumstance.
- If oiled birds (chicks and/or adults) need to be removed from the colony due to oil impacts, the animals will be cared for as follows:
 - Capture operations will occur during the early morning hours to avoid heat stress.
 - Kits containing the following information and supplies will be given to response vessels:
 - **Laminated Fact Sheet** - One-page protocol that describes the procedures for collecting a bird.
 - **Collection Kit**
 - Eye Protection
 - Cardboard pet carriers - for smaller birds
 - Larger crates - for larger birds/pelican
 - Sorbent Pads
 - Pole net
 - Tyvex
 - Goggles
 - Nitrile gloves
 - Tape
 - Labels
 - Live capture forms
 - Capture technique will depend on the site situation. Access via small boats (pirogues, flats, etc.) and foot traffic will only be allowed for capture. Birds can be captured by hand, hand nets, or herding/corralling technique. Capturing via patrols along the banks in small boats is preferred to minimize impacts.
 - Birds will be placed in boxes or kennels that are well ventilated. Boxed birds should be stored away from noise and in a shaded area. Boxes or kennels should be lined with sorbent pads.
 - Birds must be transported to a rehabilitation facility in the most efficient means possible. Transport vessels will be used to shuttle birds to limit the amount of time birds are contained in boxes. Completed live capture forms must remain with each bird.
 - Chicks must be reared by qualified and permitted organization organized by the unified command. Additional facilities may be required to house young birds until release.

Signature

Date