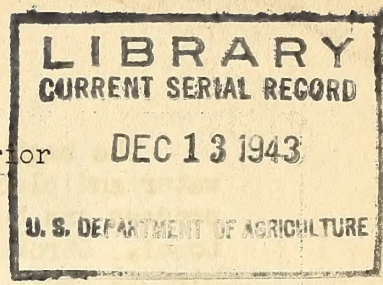


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TREATMENT OF OIL-SOAKED BIRDS

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The hazard to wildlife caused by oil pollution in coastal and interior waters has been a serious matter for many years, but the areas affected have been greatly increased by the sinking of oil-burning and oil-cargo vessels by enemy action. Ducks, gulls, cormorants, loons, pelicans, and other seabirds are the most frequent victims. The action of seawater seems to be such as to change the oil into a tarlike substance, which sticking the feathers together, makes the bird helpless and unable to fly. A thoroughly oil-soaked bird is a pitiful sight. Unless it is given human aid, it is doomed to death by starvation or exposure.

THE LAW

Pumping bilges or bunkers in ballast from oil-burning and oil-cargo vessels within the territorial waters of the United States is prohibited by the Oil Pollution Act of 1924. This law is administered by the Corps of Engineers of the War Department, and violations should be reported to the District Engineer.

Most of the oiled birds that are found along beaches are protected under the terms of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which is administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service. Rescue of such birds has the full approval of the Service, but any person desiring to retain possession of birds so salvaged for any length of time should apply to the Fish and Wildlife Service for the permit required, at which time full details regarding the case should be given.

TREATMENT

Heavily oiled birds are frequently beyond human aid. When any are found in this condition, the best course is usually to destroy them as humanely as possible. Many birds, however, can be restored with care and patience. Do not use alcohol, turpentine, kerosene, or gasolene. Such solvents will burn the bird's skin. A mild white soap (preferable in flake or granulated form), warm water, and persistent application will usually remove the oil.

The best procedure is to whip up a good suds in a tub of lukewarm water and place the bird in it. The oil must be dissolved, but this process can be expedited by stroking with a sponge or a piece of turkish towel. Stroke with the feathers to avoid breaking the shafts. If the bird is badly oiled, repeated washings with fresh suds may be necessary. When all possible oil has been removed, rinse the bird thoroughly with clear tepid water and place it in a coop or cage to dry. This should be out of drafts, as a water-soaked bird can soon be fatally chilled.

The washing, if successful, will not only remove the mineral oil but also the natural oily dressing that gives the bird's plumage its waterproof character. This animal oil must be restored before allowing the bird again to enter the water. This step is most important. Accordingly, the treated bird must be kept caged for several days (usually about a week) until it has time to dress its plumage thoroughly with the oil secreted by the gland at the base of the tail. Food and drinking water, of course, must be supplied. A test of the stage of feather dressing that the bird has been able to achieve may be made by sprinkling a few drops of water on its back or by placing it in a shallow pan of water. If the plumage shows a tendency to absorb water, the dressing process is incomplete and additional time should be allowed. When the bird has attained normal conditions, it may be released on a suitable uncontaminated water area.