LITHUANIA

Country Wildlife Response Profiles
A Summary of oiled wildlife response arrangements and resources worldwide

VERSION 28/01/2025

Location

Introduction

Lithuania, officially the Republic of Lithuania, is a country in the Baltic region of Europe. It lies on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea, , bordered by Latvia to the north, Belarus to the east and south, Poland to the south, and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad Oblast to the southwest. Lithuania shares a maritime border to the west with Sweden.

Lithuania has around 99 kilometres of sandy coastline, of which only about 38 km north of Klaipeda face the open Baltic Sea. The rest of the coast is sheltered by the Curonian sand peninsula, (a thin, curved spit of shifting sand dunes that separates the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea). The terrain has many lakes (around 3000, mostly in the east and southeast of the country). The country's largest river, the Nemunas, gorms the southern border with Kaliningrad.

The climate is transitional, between maritime and continental, with wet, moderate winters and summers. Average temperatures range from -5C to 17C. Sea ice may form in colder winters and rivers and lakes often freeze. The main port of Klaipeda is ice free.

Regional Seas and Biogeography

Baltic Sea
Baltic Sea LME

Habitats

- Sand dunes - the Curonian spit is characterised by sand dunes, some up to 50m high.
- Saltmarshes can be found in the northern part of the Curonian lagoon.

Biodiversity Hotspots

- **National Parks and ecological reserves**

The Nemunas delta, a managed Nature Reserve, Regional Park, Natura 2000 site, RAMSAR and IBA is a river delta of marshes, reedbeds, bogs and flooded meadows. This is the most important bird area in Lithuania. Located on the East Atlantic flyway, it is an important breeding, wintering and passage site for thousands of waterbirds and migratory birds (in autumn and spring and during the moulting season). Species which are found in their thousands include greater white-fronted goose (*Anser albifrons*) and the tufted duck (Aythya fuligula). Large populations of gulls and terns also breed at the site and over 60 thousand migratory birds are ringed annually here.

- **IBAs**

The Lithuanian part of the Curonian spit is home to storks, birds of prey and passerines migrating through the area in large numbers.

Marine waters along the continental part of Lithuania is an offshore area which is important for wintering and migrating waterbirds, especially wintering seaducks. The long-tailed duck (VU),the arctic loon (*Gavia arctica*) and razorbill (*Alca torda*) are regularly seen in numbers over 20,000.

Marine waters along the Curonian spit is another offshore area around 40 km long near the Curonian spit which in winter supports large densities (more than 20k000) waterbirds regularly. Velvet scoter (VU) can be found in densities of up to 1,000 birds/km2 as well as large numbers of other seaducks such as long-tailed ducks (up to 10,000 birds).

The Northern part of the Curonian lagoon, comprising the coastline and immediate offshore section of the bay is an important wintering waterbird site, with more than 20,000 birds particularly ducks and swans such as wintering smew (*Mergus albellus*) and goosander (*Mergus merganser*).

Flooded coastal meadows near Svencele raised-marsh and Tyrai marsh are waterlogged areas in the in the Curonian lagoon which are important for breeding aquatic warbler (*Acrocephalus paludicola*) and dunlin (*Calidris alpina*).

➔ **IMMAs**
The Baltic Proper IMMA is designated due to the presence of the Baltic subpopulation of the Harbour porpoise (CR) and a genetically distinct population of harbour seals (*Phoca vitulina*).

At risk Wildlife

In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (VU), Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR). A more complete list of IUCN listed species is found in Appendix 1.

➔ **At risk birds**
The Baltic Sea is generally an important site for wintering ducks and other seabirds who migrate from their reproductive grounds in the Artic tundra, especially on offshore banks and shallow coastal waters. Lithuanian waters serve as an important wintering area for a wide range of waterbirds and several species can be found in their thousands. The southern region hosts internationally important winter concentrations of red-throated (*Gavia stelltata*) and arctic loon (*G. arctica*), long-tailed duck (VU) and velvet scoter VU) that arrive from the Gulf of Riga. The northern region, especially the area off Palanga, is the second-largest Baltic wintering site for Steller's eider (VU). Many birds are breeding along the Nemunas river delta. Breeding birds of concern include the horned grebe, common pochard and aquatic warbler (all VU).

➔ **At risk reptiles**
Natterjack toad (Epidalia calamita) are found in coastal dunes along the coast and Green Toad (*Bufotes viridis*) in shallow ponds.

➔ **At risk mammals**
Grey seals (Halichoerus grypus) are seen along the Lithuanian coastline, and in the Curonian lagoon. They pup mostly on sea ice, there are no terrestrial haul out sites in Lithuania. Decreasing ice cover forces females to give birth sometimes on land, which has lower breeding success, and weak and sick pups are found along the coast every year.

The Baltic Subpopulation of the Ringed seal (*Pusa hispida botnica*) is also found in Lithuanian waters and Eurasian otters (*Lutra lutra*) are widespread in Lithuania, including in coastal areas.

The harbour porpoise (CR) breeds on offshore banks in the central Baltic sea proper.

Past experience with oil spill and potential risks

In 1983, the Globe Assimi spilled HFO at Klaipeda, resulting in a large shoreline cleanup but with no reported wilidfe impacts.

Traffic lanes from and to the Klaipeda harbour and the Butinge Oil Terminal (north of the city of Palanga) cross Lithuanian coastal waters. avigation to and from Klaipėda port can be challenging in rough weather due to high wave action into the Klaipėda Strait. The Nemunas river and some of its tributaries, carry international shipping.

International and Regional Treaties and Agreements

➔ **Oil spill and HNS Response**

☐ CLC Convention 69
☐ CLC Protocol 76
☒ CLC Protocol 92
☐ FUND Protocol 76
☒ FUND Protocol 92
☒ FUND Protocol 2003
☒ LLMC Convention 76
☒ LLMC Protocol 96

☒ OPRC Convention 90
☒ HNS Convention 96
☐ HNS PROT 2010
☐ OPRC_HNS 2000
☒ BUNKERS CONVENTION 01

➔ **Marine Biodiversity Protection**

- Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS)
- Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission – also known as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM)
- Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)

Oil Spill Response and HNS Spill Response

➔ **National Contingency Plan?**
Lithuania's main document for pollution response is the Contingency Plan for Oil Spill Incidents at Sea, which was updated in 2024.

➔ **Role of Competent National Authorities**
Oil spill response at sea falls under the responsibility of the Maritime Search and Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) of the Lithuanian Navy. The Ministry of Environmental Protection is responsible for the implementation of the National Contingency Plan, and the Ministry of Interior will become involved in any shoreline clean-up operations and in the Curonian lagoon via the fire brigades. The Port Authority is responsible for responding to spills within port jurisdiction.

Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response

➔ **Formal guidelines?**
There is no formally agreed national oiled wildlife response plan in Lithuania, although wildlife response is mentioned in the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan as being under the responsibility of the Lithuanian Sea Museum (see under wildlife responders below). The Ministry of Environment may play a role in decision-making for oiled wildlife response.

➔ **Response objectives and strategy**
No reference.

➔ **Euthanasia or rehabilitation?**
Rehabilitation would be permitted, as undertaken by the Lithuanian Sea Museum under the present system. It is likely that the State Food and Veterinary Service would get involved in decision-making around rehabilitation and euthanasia of oiled animals.

➔ **Impact assessment**
The Environmental Protection Agency would likely get involved in monitoring of animals, particularly seals, following an oil spill. BirdLife Lithuania, Scientists from the University of Klaipeda Marine Research Institute and the Lithuanian Bird Ringing Center of the Zoological Museum in Kaunas. could also assist impact assessment activities.
The Curonian spit National Park Authority carry out monitoring of protected species. It is likely that their rangers may get involved in a wildlife incident if birds or seals were affected within the park.

➔ **Notification and early response**
No reference.

➔ **Wildlife responders**
The Lithuanian Sea Museum is a named in the National Oil Spill Contingency plan as the main wildlife response support organisation in Lithuania. In 2022 a new Baltic Sea Animal Rehabilitation Centre was built, which is an integral part of the Museum (see below under facilities). The Lithuanian Society for the Protection of Animals and the Lithuanian Fund for Nature may also get involved in supporting a response.

➔ **Cooperation between stakeholders**

No reference.

➔ **Permanent facilities**

The Baltic Sea animal Rehabilitation Centre (part of the Lithuania Sea Museum) is a private facility which can provide rehabilitation for oiled marine mammals (mainly grey seals), as well as some capabilities for birds. The centre has indoor and outdoor pools for birds and seals as well as facilities and equipment for animal examination, washing and treatment.

➔ **Current processes**

In August 2024, the HELCOM BALEX Delta exercise was held in Lithuania, with one of its objectives to test the national oil spill contingency plan and involvement of municipalities and volunteers. WWF Latvia and the Lithuania Sea Museum participated, with the museum's facilities being used to simulate a number of oiled animals captured by authority teams being taken into rehabilitation care.

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Terms and Conditions

Appendix 1

➔ **At risk birds**

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Long-tailed Duck / Clangula hyemalis / VU / Migratory (summer) /
Steller's Eider / Polysticta stelleri / VU (Lithuania Red List) / Resident/migratory /
Velvet Scoter / Melanitta fusca / VU / Resident/Migratory (between summer and wintering season) /
Horned Grebe / Podiceps auritus / VU (Lithuania Red List) / Resident/migratory / Breeding
Black-legged Kittiwake / Rissa tridactyla / VU / Resident/migratory /
Lesser White-fronted Goose / Anser erythropus / VU (Lithuania Red List) / Migratory (between summer and wintering season) /
Common Pochard / Aythya ferina / VU (present in their thousands) / Resident/migratory / Breeding
Broad-billed Sandpiper / Calidris falcinellus / VU / Migratory /
Aquatic Warbler / Acrocephalus paludicola / VU (Lithuania Red List) / Resident/migratory / Breeding
Greater White-fronted Goose / Anser albifrons / LC (present in their thousands on passage) / Migratory (spring and autumn) /
Tufted Duck / Aythya fuligula / LC (present in their thousands on passage) / Migratory (spring and autumn) /
Common Goldeneye / Bucephala clangula / LC (present in their thousands) / Migratory (spring and autumn) / Breeding
Eurasian Coot / Fulica atra / LC (present in their thousands on passage) / Migratory (spring and autumn) / Breeding
Eurasian Wigeon / Mareca penelope / LC (present in their thousands on passage) / Migratory (spring and autumn) /
Northern pintail / Anas acuta / LC (Lithuania Red List, present in their thousands on passage) / Migratory (spring and autumn) / Breeding
Great-crested grebe / Podiceps cristatus / LC (present in their thousands on passage) / Migratory (spring and autumn) /
Black Tern / Chlidonias niger / LC (Lithuania Red List, present in their thousands on passage) / Migratory (spring and

autumn) / Breeding
Arctic loon / Gavia arctica / LC (Lithuania Red List, CR HELCOM Red List, present in their thousands) / Migratory (winter) / Breeding
Razorbill / Alca torda / LC (present in their thousands) / Migratory (winter) /
Smew / Mergellus albellus / LC (present in their thousands) / Migratory (winter) /
Goosander / Mergus merganser / LC (present in their thousands) / Migratory (winter) / Breeding
Red-throated Loon / Gavia stellata / LC (CR HELCOM Red List) / Migratory (winter) /

➔ **At risk reptiles**

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

➔ **At risk mammals**

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)
Grey seal / Halichoerus grypus / LC (Lithuanian Red List) / Resident/migratory / pupping (Feb to March)
Ringed seal / Pusa hispida botnica / Baltic subpopulation VU (HELCOM RedList) / Resident/Migratory /
Harbour porpoise / Phocoena phocoena / Baltic subpopulation CR (HELCOM RedList), Lithuania Red List / Resident/migratory /
Harbour seal / Phoca vitulina / LC / Resident/migratory /