

Introduction

The State of Israel is located in the Middle East, bordered on the north by Lebanon, on the northeast by Syria, on the east by Jordan and the Palestinian territory of the West Bank, on the southwest by Egypt, on the south by the Red Sea, and on the west by the Mediterranean Sea and the Palestinian territory of Gaza.

Israel had 273 km coastline, of which 196 km are on the Mediterranean and 14 km on the Red Sea's Gulf of Aqaba. Near the northern border are sea caves, steep cliffs, and sandy beaches with isolated coves. The En Afeq Nature Reserve, a RAMSAR site, is an important wetland with reedbeds and wet meadows that support a variety of waterbirds. The Dor HaBonim Beach Nature Reserve supports marine birds and mammals, and sea turtles.

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 (V), Endangered (E) or Critically Endangered (CR).

Avian species – Israel is host to a variety of gulls, terns, pelicans, grebes, petrels, ducks, swans, geese, cranes and rails, storks, herons, bitterns and shorebirds such as lapwings and plovers, which inhabit much of the coastline. Species of special concern include northern bald ibis (CR), sociable lapwing (CR), white-headed duck (E), Basra reed warbler (E), marbled teal (V), common pochard (V), Leach's storm petrel (V), and Yelkouan shearwater (V)

Marine mammals – On the Mediterranean coast, bottlenose dolphin may be found along the coast, as well as offshore where striped, common, Risso's and rough-toothed dolphins, false killer whale, Cuvier's beaked whale, and minke whale have also been sighted. Mediterranean monk seals (E) have been seen but are rare. In the Gulf of Eilat-Aqaba Indo-Pacific bottlenose, pantropical spotted and spinner dolphins are regular visitors which are often found nearshore.

Marine reptiles – Green (E) and loggerhead (V) sea turtles are found on much of Israel's Mediterranean coast. Six of the country's coastal nature reserves are nesting sites for both species and may also be used for egg relocation sites to protect current populations and bolster numbers in new areas. Both species forage throughout the offshore Mediterranean waters of the country.

Regional Seas

Mediterranean Sea
Red Sea (Gulf of Aqaba)

Past experience

In 1988 the Bilkur spilled 100 tonnes of fuel oil at Ashdod, in 1989 the EYAL sank, spilling 100 tonnes of fuel, in 1991 a ruptured hose spilled 300 tonnes into Haifa Bay which contaminated 8 km of coastline, in 1992 a barge sank in Haifa Port spilling 300 tonnes of heavy fuel oil, and in 2014 the Trans-Israel Pipeline (which runs from Eilat to Ashkelon) rupture spilled between 3,000 and 5,000 tonnes of fuel in the area around the Evrona Nature Reserve where there is a population of Dorcas gazelle (V). No verified reports of wildlife impact were found for any of these spills.

Response: the role of the authorities

The Marine and Coastal Environment Division (MCED) of the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MoEP) is the Competent National Authority, with the Ministry of Transport, Shipping and Ports Authority sharing command during a major event at sea under the National Contingency Plan for Preparedness and Response to Incidents of Oil Pollution at Sea (TALMAT).

When a sea-going vessel is involved, the Head of Shipping and Ports Authority may take command, with the Director of the MCED acting as Deputy and advisor.

Oiled wildlife response

Formal guidelines?

The TALMAT does not include any formal guidelines for oiled wildlife response. It does, however, give second level priority to declared nature reserves and sea turtles, and sixth level priority to declared national parks.

Response objectives and strategy

N/A

Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

It is likely that rehabilitation would be allowed but there is limited capacity within the country to respond to oiled birds. Euthanasia may be allowed as welfare concerns dictate.

Impact assessment

An ecologist representing the MCED oversees impact assessment, in coordination with the Director General of the Nature Reserves Authority and the Environmental Quality Information Center. The Israel Marine Mammal Research and Assistance Center (IMMRAC) conducts marine mammal surveys, has experience in marine mammal necropsies and environmental contamination, and may be called on to assist should there be marine mammals impacted.

Notification and early response

There is no system in place for notification of potential wildlife responders, nor is there any early response plan in place.

Wildlife responders

The National Sea Turtle Rescue Center, established by the Israel Nature and Natural Parks Protection Authority rescues and rehabilitates sick and injured sea turtles and maintains a breeding population of green turtles whose offspring are released to bolster the population of this endangered species.

The Birdlife International partner, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI) does not do any avian rehabilitation but their International Ornithological Center (IOC) personnel may be able to assist with other aspects of response to impacted birds.

IMMRAC responds to sick and injured marine mammals .

Cooperation between stakeholders

SPNI is involved in regional collaboration with the Palestinian Authority and Jordan. IMMRAC is a partner to ACCOBAMS (Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area), working on joint projects.

Israel is a signatory to the Barcelona Convention, a REMPEC member state, and holds a trilateral agreement with Egypt and Cyprus for joint response, shares a sub-regional contingency plan with Egypt and Jordan for the Upper Gulf of Aqaba, and another with Cyprus and Egypt for the South Eastern Mediterranean.

Permanent facilities

The National Sea Turtle Rescue Center includes a dedicated sea turtle hospital and IMMRAC maintains a small rehabilitation facility for marine mammals. There are no facilities for avian species, however the above facilities might be able to accommodate a small number of birds.

Current processes

In 2018 The Ministry of Environmental Protection led a two-day national marine pollution exercise with staff from other ministries and entities. Israel holds regular national drills and exercises, and participates in joint exercises with REMPEC and sub-regional contingency plan cooperating countries.

Documentation and references

General references

I TOPF Country Profile (2011)

REMPEC Country Profile

Birdlife International Country Profile

ISRAEL:NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TO INCIDENTS OF OIL POLLUTION OF THE SEA 2008

Levy, et al. 2017. Spatiotemporal hotspots of habitat use by loggerhead(*Caretta caretta*) and green (*Chelonia mydas*) sea turtles in the Levant basin as tools for conservation. *Marine Ecology Progress Series*. 575:165-179. <https://doi.org/10.3354/meps12146>

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