

Location



Introduction

The Republic of Finland is in the North of Europe on the Baltic Sea, surrounded by Russia to the east, Sweden to the northwest and Norway to the north, with the northern part of Finland being in the Arctic Circle. Finland has 1,250 km of coastline which includes archipelagos, such as Åland and Turku, inlets and bays, as well as islands. Finland can have a varied climate between the coastal zones, the inland areas and the Arctic Circle zone. In general, the climate can be temperate in the summer and cold in the winter.

Regional Seas and Biogeography

Baltic Sea
Baltic Sea LME

Habitats

The coastline of Finland is dominated by rocky shorelines, but also has some sandy beaches and wetlands.

- Salt marshes are dotted along the east and southeast coast of Finland with the highest concentrations along the coast near Turku and the coast near Pori.
- Baltic sea lagoons, flads and gloes are specific types of lagoons in the Baltic sea that can be found along the coast of Finland.
- Reed beds are a type of wetland commonly found around the southern and southwestern areas of Finland, as well as in the Gulf of Finland.
- Coastal wetlands include fresh and saltwater and can be found in the northeastern Gulf of Bothnia.

Biodiversity Hotspots

→ Ramsar sites

The Quark Archipelago (which is also a Natura 2000 site, SPA, SCI site, and a HELCOM Baltic Sea Protected Area) is in western Finland and is an important breeding area for many bird species. There are more than 1,700 pairs of Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) and 3,800 pairs of Black Guillemot (*Cephus grille*) breeding there, as well as grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*). Oil pollution is one of the main threats to the area.

Bird Wetlands of Hanko and Tammisaari (also a National Park, Natura 2000 site, SPA, SCI site, covers an IBA and a HELCOM Baltic Sea Protected Area) is a complex archipelago with lagoons in the southern part of Finland. Tens of thousands of ducks and waders use the area during migration and a nationally significant population of the Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) can be found there. Oil pollution is a main threat due to the shipping routes and a nearby harbour.

Söderskär and Långören Archipelago (also a Natura 2000 site, SPA, and HELCOM Baltic Sea Protected Area) is in the south of Finland and is an important area for the grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*). The islands and inlets are an important area for migratory birds. Oil pollution is a main threat due to increase shipping to the harbour of Vuosaari.

Vanhankaupunginlahti, Laajalahti (also a Natura 2000 site and an IBA) are wetlands in two bay areas in the metropolitan areas of Helsinki and Espoo. Bird species such as bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), great snipe (*Gallinago media*), horned grebe (VU).

Aspskär Islands (Also Natura 2000 site, SPA and SCI, Nature Reserve and HELCOM Baltic Sea Protected Area) in the south are an important archipelago for Alcids in Finland, including the largest Finnish colony of Razorbills (*Alca torda*) as well as high numbers of Black Guillemots (*Cephus grille*). Oil pollution is a major threat to the islands.

Pernajanlahti Bay (also a Natura 2000 site, SPA and SCI, and HELCOM Baltic Sea Protected Area) is a 10km sea bay with many islands in southern Finland. The bay supports corncrake (*Crex crex*), crane (*Grus grus*) and spotted crane (*Porzana porzana*).

Vassorfjärden Bay (also a Natura 2000 site) is one of the largest estuaries in the west of Finland which includes important reed zones. The area is an important breeding and staging area for waterfowl and waders, and is a visiting point for the lesser white-fronted goose (VU) and common pochard (VU).

Bird Wetlands of Hailuoto Island (also a Natura 2000 site, SPA and SCI, and HELCOM Baltic Sea Protected Area), in the west, consists of a number of wetlands across the islands and Bothnian Bay. The area serves as an important area for breeding and migratory birds, with goosanders (*Mergus merganser*) reaching 8,000 and goldeneyes (*Bucephala clangula*) reaching 2,000 during summer.

Liminganlahti Bay Area (also a Natura 2000 site, SPA and SCI, and HELCOM Baltic Sea Protected Area) consists of lagoons, muddy shores, coastal meadows and natural forests. There are high numbers of breeding and migrating wetland bird species.

→ National Parks and ecological reserves

Åland Sea, Åland Islands and the Archipelago National Park is a large geomorphically diverse area in the south-west of Finland. There are overlapping designations, such as RAMSAR sites, a National Park, Natura 2000 sites IBAs and HELCOM MPAs. It consists of thousands of islands, lagoons, shallow bays, boreal inlets, and estuaries among other habitats. The area supports important populations of the ringed seal (*Pusa hispida botnica*) and grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*). The harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) also visit the area. The area is important for bird populations, such as the common eider (*Somateria mollissima*), Black Guillemots (*Cephus grille*), razorbills (*Alca torda*), purple sandpipers (*Calidris maritima*).

→ IBAs

Merenkurkku Archipelago is in the west of Finland at the boundary of the Bothnian Sea and the Bay of Bothnia. It consists of hundreds of islands, as well as lagoons and different types of forests depending on the size of the island.

Pori Archipelago and wetlands sea bays, river mouths, lagoons, marshlands and lakes at the delta of the Kokemäki river. An important wetland for breeding and staging waterbirds with high numbers of Eurasian coot (*Fulica atra*), mute swan (*Cygnus olor*), Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) and common ringed plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*), amongst others.

Tammisaari and Inkoo western archipelago in southern Finland is a large archipelago with hundreds of islands. It has the largest population of Caspian terns (*Sterna caspia*) and great black-backed gull (*Larus marinus*) in all of Finland. The long-tailed duck can also be found there.

→ IMMA

Baltic Ringed Sea (*Pusa hispida botnica*) Area covers large areas along the coast of Finland that are the main ice field breeding habitats and moulting areas for the ringed seal. Although not threatened yet, numbers are in decline and threatened by climate change.

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

Finland has many species of waders, seabirds, waterbirds, gulls, ducks and geese, amongst others. It has important sites for staging sea ducks, especially the Long-tailed Duck. It also hosts important populations of Steller's Eider, as well as breeding sites for the Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*), Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*) and Black Guillemots (*Cephus grille*).

→ **At risk reptiles**

→ **At risk mammals**

coastline. Ringed seals are primarily found in the Bay of Bothnia in Northern Finland, whereas grey seals can be found throughout the coastline and islands of Finland.

The Saimaa ringed seal is an endangered subspecies of the ringed seal which is only found in Lake Saimaa and the surrounding banks in Finland.

The Eurasian Otter (*Lutra lutra*) is spread throughout Finnish rivers and coastal areas.

Past experience with oil spill and potential risks

The largest oil spill in Finland was the grounding of M/T Antonio Gramsci in 1987 which spill around 7,000 tonnes of crude oil. The oil drifted hundreds of kilometers with impacts on Finnish archipelagos and birds becoming oiled. Due to difficult ice conditions, much of the oil was controlled by natural processes.

Finnish waters are some of the busiest areas globally for maritime traffic, therefore creating persistent risks of oil spills either by accident or on purpose from shipping activities.

International and Regional Treaties and Agreements

→ **Oil spill and HNS Response**

- d CLC Convention 69
- CLC Protocol 76
- CLC Protocol 92
- FUND Protocol 76
- FUND Protocol 92
- FUND Protocol 2003
- d 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 Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (MOSPA)
- 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)
- Gulf of Finland Agreement between the Russian Federation and Finland
- Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)
- Copenhagen Agreement

Oil Spill Response and HNS Spill Response

→ **National Contingency Plan?**

The Finnish Border Guard, operating under the Ministry of the Interior, has drawn up regional contingency plans for the two regional seas areas. Each Rescue Service Department on the municipal level should have a contingency plan for their coastal areas.

→ **Role of Competent National Authorities**

The Ministry of the Interior has overall responsibility for oil and chemical response, while the Finnish Border Guard has responsibility for marine pollution response in the open sea. Meanwhile, the Rescue Service Departments of the municipalities are responsible for coastal and on the shore response. The Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) is responsible for oiled wildlife response, and provides expert support and technical input wildlife protection.

The Finnish Border Guard can be requested to give assistance internationally.

Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response

→ **Formal guidelines?**

In 2014, an Oiled Wildlife Response Plan was drawn up and implemented led by SYKE. WWF Finland, Helsinki City Rescue Department and Eastern-Uusimaa Emergency Services Department collaborated on the plan. SYKE oversees the oiled wildlife response and WWF Finland is responsible for bringing in trained volunteers to care for oiled birds. In line with the plan, there is a mobile Bird Cleaning Unit (more below).

Between 2023 and 2024 there was an update to the Oiled Wildlife Response Plan which has been presented to authorities, pending agreement. The updates considered principles set out by the EUROWA network and WWF Finland, with the EUROWA manuals being used as their standards for animal rehabilitation.

→ **Response objectives and strategy**

The updated response objectives and strategy are pending approval from authorities. The previous plan's main objective is to capture, rehabilitate and release as many individual birds as possible. Where large numbers of birds are affected, endangered species and mature females are given priority.

→ **Euthanasia or rehabilitation?**

Euthanasia has been considered as a response option, but certified resources are not in place to carry out mass euthanasia. Animal rehabilitation is a response option for oiled wildlife, within the limits of capacity.

→ **Impact assessment**

Syke has the overall responsibility for the impact assessment. It is likely that WWF Finland would be invited by the authorities to carry out an impact assessment for oiled wildlife, although it is not formally decided.

→ **Notification and early response**

Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre is the first notification point for an oil spill who would then notify relevant stakeholders. In the event of an oiled wildlife incident, Syke would be notified as well as other relevant stakeholders.

→ **Wildlife responders**

WWF Finland has a long-standing cooperation with SYKE and regional authorities to be responsible for organising training events for oiled wildlife responders under their voluntary programme. In line with this, WWF Finland have organised a number of EUROWA course at different levels from BASIC to SPECIALIST. In the event of an incident, WWF Finland can coordinate the mobilisation and integration of trained volunteers into a response for shoreline cleanup and oiled wildlife response.

→ **Cooperation between stakeholders**

Finland is a signatory to the Helsinki Convention and has a Cooperation Agreement concerning Pollution Control of the Sea after Contamination by Oil or other Harmful Substances with Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Finland is also signed an Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Spill Preparedness and Response in the Arctic with Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States of America. They also have bilateral agreements with Russia and Estonia for oil spill response.

In response to the risks of oil spills along the coast of Finland, in 2003 the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

founded the Voluntary Oil Spill Response Troops. The Troops consist of over 9000, volunteers, 3000 of which have completed response training and can be integrated into an authority driven response. Oiled wildlife responders have been trained under this umbrella and WWF Finland regularly organises EUROWA oiled wildlife response courses for volunteers of varying skill levels.

Syke and WWF Finland have a cooperation agreement in place, as do Syke and the Eastern Uusimaa Emergency Services. Since 2022, Syke provides funding to WWF Finland for training and exercises for oiled wildlife response.

→ Permanent facilities

For oiled wildlife response, there are two rehabilitation centres, Korkeasaari Zoo and Heinola bird sanctuary, that have limited capacity for dealing with oiled wildlife. There is also a mobile Bird Cleaning Unit (BCU). The BCU rehabilitation centre is managed in cooperation with regional emergency services, the regional centre for economic development, transport and the environment, a designated veterinarian in charge and a WWF Finland representative.

The Finnish Border Guard has the overall responsibility for purchasing of oil spill response equipment.

→ Current processes

A newly updated Oiled Wildlife Response plan was introduced to authorities in 2024 for approval which is pending.

The Bird Cleaning Unit was to be updated by the end of 2024.

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Appendix 1

→ At risk birds

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

Horned grebe / *Podiceps auratus* / VU / Resident / mid-May to early October

Lesser White-fronted Goose / *Anser erthropus* / VU / Passage in most of Finland, resident in Arctic circle area / May - early September

Common Pochard / *Aythya ferina* / VU / Native breeding / Mid-April - June

Broad-billed Sandpiper / *Calidris falcinellus* / VU / Native /

Velvet Scoter / *Melanitta fusca* / VU / Breeding / September - May

Long-tailed duck / *Clangula hyemalis* / VU / Native breeding / Wintering

Steller's eider / *Polysticta stelleri* / VU / Native non-breeding / Wintering

Grey plover / *Pluvialis squatarola* / VU / Passage /

Curlew sandpiper / *Calidris ferruginea* / VU / Passage /

→ 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)

Saimaa Ringed Seal / *Pusa hispida saimensis* / EN / Resident/endemic / Pupping in summer, only found in Lake Saimaa

Harbour porpoise / *Phocoena phocoena* / Baltic subpopulation CR (HELCOM RedList) / Resident /