The Bow Jubail oiled wildlife incident: success factors of an international tiered response on the basis of standards of good practice

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ABSTRACT
In June 2018, about 218 metric tons of heavy fuel oil gushed into the harbor of Rotterdam (NL) following the rupturing of the hull of the Bow Jubail at a jetty. Due to tidal activity, the oil from the unloaded chemical tanker quickly spread out over a 30 km waterway where many hundreds of Mute swans were molting at the time. A citizen’s initiative quickly led to the capture of over 200 swans from the water and shores, and their transport to some bird rehab centers in the immediate neighborhood. For the authorities this massive impact that overwhelmed the available resources of the permanent center was the trigger to activate the national oiled wildlife response plan. The activation of the national plan goes hand in hand with the decision to build a large temporary facility that needs to be fully operational within 48 hours to receive the impacted live animals for treatment. The building of the such a facility, but also the staffing that is needed to care for 600 impacted swans is a challenging task and needs fast decision taking by experts who can oversee the particular needs of swans, and are able to inform logistics about equipment and materials needed.

In parallel, a large number of experts must be mobilized who can lead and process the impacted animals once the temporary facility is ready for operations. For some part these resources were available in the Netherlands, but many more experts needed to be mobilized from abroad. The mobilization procedures of both EUROWA network and the GOWRS network were activated, leading to a large number of experts who indicated their availability. This paper describes the decision making in the early days, and the way that arriving experts were deployed in the facility. The use of international guidelines for this process and the ease by which international experts could work together thanks to many years of investments into local and international preparedness will be highlighted. The rehabilitation of 522 mute swans took a full month (30 days), after which 97.5% of the animals had been successfully released. A 3-minute movie will be shown as well.