Volume 16 October 2026

Wildlife Responsibility Bulletin

INTERNATIONAL BIRD RESCUE

Fall Team Update: Building Readiness From Kansas to the Arctic

Every oiled bird's chance at recovery begins before a spill, with trained responders and tested plans. This summer, the Response Services team completed an Oiled Wildlife Contingency Plan for the Environmental Protection Agency covering Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and Cheyenne Bottoms Preserve under the Central Kansas Wetlands Subarea Contingency Plan.

In August, Barbara Callahan, Senior Director of Response Services, and Danene Birtell, Preparedness Manager, joined Hilcorp's mutual-aid tabletop exercise in Anchorage.

Barbara Callahan, Senior Director of Response Services, and Danene Birtell, Preparedness Manager, join Hilcorp's mutual-aid tabletop exercise in Anchorage, AK.

On Alaska's Arctic Slope, they led a hands-on lab training at the Alpine oilfield for Alaska Clean Seas, supported the Mutual Aid Drill in Prudhoe Bay as crews deployed boats, boom, skimmers, and duck decoys, and presented the Oiled Wildlife First Responder Training.

Barbara Callahan and Danene Birtell add a Bird Rescue sticker to a decorated wall in Deadhorse, AK.

Following September's Global Oiled Wildlife Response System meeting and SpillAsia in Singapore, October brought a facility exercise and responder training for Alyeska Pipeline Service Company and virtual support for a North Dakota tabletop exercise. Callahan and Michelle Bellizzi, Response and Training Manager, taught HAZWOPER and responder courses in Port Angeles, WA, sponsored by the Clallam County Marine Resources Committee.

Each exercise strengthens the network that gives oiled wildlife a second chance at life in the wild and helps partners respond with speed, skill, and care.

Takeaways From SpillAsia 2026

The inaugural SpillAsia 2026, held in Singapore in late September, drew participants from countries less represented at other international spill conferences. International Bird Rescue joined global partners there for productive discussions. JD Bergeron, CEO; Barbara Callahan, Senior Director of Response Services; and Danene Birtell, Preparedness Manager, also took part in a meeting of the Global Oiled Wildlife Response System (GOWRS) prior to the conference to discuss oiled wildlife challenges and emerging risks.

Innovation drives the oil spill response industry forward. However, at conferences, vendors sometimes promote "miracle" cleaning products developed without veterinary input, treating the wash as a chemistry problem, not a medical one. At SpillAsia, one vendor's videos showed people handling oil without gloves and animals that appeared to have been oiled for the purpose of testing. "Demonstrations like this set our field back decades and contradict our mission to rescue waterbirds in crisis," Callahan said.

As Bird Rescue founder Alice Berkner taught, "Oiled wildlife is not a laundry problem." The skill lies in medically stabilizing each animal beforehand and restoring waterproofing afterward.

"Any product we consider must be safe, effective, affordable, and available anywhere," Bergeron said. "We can only support innovation that puts human and animal welfare first."

Left to right: Barbara Callahan, Senior Director of Response Services; JD Bergeron, CEO; and Danene Birtell, Preparedness Manager, attend SpillAsia 2026 in Singapore.

Read the full blog post from Bergeron.

Expect the Unexpected at CLEAN Americas Week

International Bird Rescue is heading to Irving, TX, for CLEAN Americas Week, November 9–11, 2026. The event brings more than 30 years of the CLEAN Gulf, CLEAN Waterways, and CLEAN Pacific communities together for real-world case studies and hands-on learning. Visit Bird Rescue at Booth 627.

On Wednesday, November 11, Danene Birtell, Bird Rescue Preparedness Manager, joins the panel "Unconventional Wildlife Response: Let's Talk About It!" from 2:00 to 2:45 p.m. When oil threatens wildlife, no two responses look alike. Birtell and fellow experts will share creative strategies and field stories that go well beyond the textbook.

IBR in the News: Influx of Common Murres

CBS News recently visited International Bird Rescue's San Francisco Bay-Delta Wildlife Center to report on a surge of starving Common Murres, and KSBW Action News 8 has covered the increase along the Central Coast.

Between August 15 and late September, 125 murres were admitted, nearly double the 68 received by September 10. By October, the total number of murres admitted grew to 293. Many arrived severely emaciated, with worn, broken, and weathered feathers. Bird Rescue typically receives mostly orphaned chicks this time of year, but this year, adults outnumber them.

Changing ocean conditions can shift where fish gather, making it harder for seabirds to find enough food. Food scarcity also disrupts molt, the annual feather replacement that seabirds need for buoyancy, warmth, and flight. Similar starvation events affected Brown Pelicans in 2022,

—Continued on Page 4

Common Murre patients recover from symptoms of starvation at Bird Rescue.

Alaska Response Leader Dave Owings Joins Bird Rescue's Board

International Bird Rescue is honored to welcome Dave Owings to our Board of Directors. He has served as General Manager of the Southeast Alaska Petroleum Response Organization (SEAPRO) since 1998, leading one of Alaska's primary marine response cooperatives.

Before SEAPRO, Owings spent five years as a Master Marine Spill Responder with the Marine Spill Response Corporation and 18 years in the fire service, where a mentor taught him that a firefighter's real job is prevention. He carried that lesson into oil spill response, where the goal is to put yourself out of work.

That commitment to preparedness connected him with Bird Rescue. He met Barbara Callahan, Senior Director of Response Services, at an oil spill conference, and SEAPRO later signed a response agreement with Bird Rescue. "Anytime I've called, Barbara and the team have responded immediately," Owings said. "Their passion for wildlife is contagious."

Owings visited our San Pedro wildlife center and came away impressed by the facility and people. He sees the team's drive to carry out the mission as the organization's greatest strength. "The world is changing, and that impacts birds and wildlife," Owings said. On the board, Owings' goal is to help the organization to continue to grow and respond.

Read the full blog post.

As fall migration brings a seasonal rise in highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) among wild birds, a few simple habits at home and in the field can help slow its spread.

IBR in the News: Influx of Common Murres

—Continued from Page 3

2024, 2025, and 2026 and Common Murres in 2015 and 2018. The 2015 event was the largest known die-off of a single bird species, killing roughly 4 million murres, about half of Alaska's population. Dr. Rebecca Duerr, Senior Director of Research and Veterinary Science, describes murres as "a window into what's going on in the ocean."

Dr. Duerr said, "Not having the energy to grow new feathers is kind of like not having enough money to buy a new wetsuit and having to use a ratty old one with lots of holes in a cold ocean."

Sierra Koop, Wildlife Rehabilitation Technician, examines an emaciated Common Murre with weathered feathers.

The Wildlife Responsibility Bulletin is published by International Bird Rescue for its customers. **Editors:** Emily Dixon, Ariana Gastelum, JD Bergeron, and Daniel Flynn. **Contributors:** Michelle Bellizzi, Barbara Callahan, and Danene Birtell. **Photos:** Danene Birtell, Cheryl Reynolds, and Ariana Gastelum. **Design:** Ariana Gastelum