# U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Bird Collection Data

## Deep Water Horizon Oil Spill

## Questions and Answers

## September 15, 2010

### *Why is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service updating its bird collection data?*

In the early days of the spill response, immediate reporting of oiled and dead bird numbers was needed to direct daily field crews to collect animals for rehabilitation or as evidence. Due to the urgency, the reporting of the information was not complete. While response efforts continue, scientists and professional data managers have been working to enter all data into a secure database and verify the daily reports for accuracy. The updated numbers represent verified data that can be used in the government's Natural Resource Damage Assessment.

### *Why is verified data necessary?*

Accurate data collection and management are essential to preparing legally defensible cases to hold the parties responsible for the spill accountable for restoring wildlife and habitats injured by the spill and compensating for lost services provided by the natural resources.

### *How is the Service verifying the data?*

The Service is using a well-documented Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) procedure for data processing and analyses. This procedure follows established protocols for ensuring that data resulting from the collection and analysis of environmental samples and measurements are of the appropriate type and quality and are scientifically and legally sound and defensible.

To do this, data managers review written daily reports submitted by field crews to determine whether:

- Required information is provided correctly
- The information makes sense (for example, the GPS coordinates are within the defined spill area);
- The information matches the information entered into the electronic database (for example, the number assigned to a carcass matches the number entered into the database).

If the data reviewer has questions, he or she contacts the person who completed the report to resolve any uncertainties.

At this point, more effort is being expended on assuring the quality of the data than on urgency, as it was in the beginning of the spill. Data that are not able to meet the quality requirements are not entered into the assessment database.

### *Who developed this database?*

The database was developed by Department of the Interior employees and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Research Development Center (ERDC). It meets military-level standards for security.

*Who is doing this work?*

A Data Management Team located in DOI's Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) office in Fairhope, Alabama, is entering and evaluating the data. In addition to developing the database for captured or collected birds, the team has developed and is maintaining a database for the information expected to be generated by 13 study teams and three sub-teams researching potential spill impacts on species and habitats.

*How are the data collected?*

The data are collected in several ways: from authorized teams out looking for alive and dead birds; from authorized study groups who come upon dead or alive but struggling birds while conducting other spill-related research; and from members of the public who find birds and bring them to one of four intake centers in Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Alabama.

*What is the process for reporting the data?*

Each day, crews fill out data sheets to report each live bird and each dead bird collected. These data sheets include information such as: the species of the bird; the location where the bird was found; whether or not the bird is oiled and if so, whether the oil is light, moderate or heavy; and other defining characteristics such as whether a carcass has been scavenged. When dead or alive birds are brought to an intake center, data sheets are filled out there.

The data sheets accompany the birds throughout their stay in the intake/rehabilitation center or at the morgue if they are dead or die after their arrival at the intake center. Copies of all data sheets are sent to the NRDAR Data Management Team under strict chain-of-custody protocols for verification and entry into the data system. The data sheets are a key component of the chain-of-custody for dead birds and will be part of any legal case that is pursued.

*How does the verified data compare to the consolidated wildlife tables generated each day?*

The consolidated wildlife table is a daily tally of just the numbers of dead and alive birds brought to each intake center that day, with no other identifying information. Therefore, that table is current but not very detailed. The report details, which are entered and reviewed by the NRDAR Data Management Team, are included in the updated, verified DOI/ERDC report.

*Why are the verified data different from the daily reports?*

Because the verification process takes some time, there will always be a gap between the daily consolidated wildlife report and these verified numbers. Because it takes time to get the reports, review and verify them, and add them to the database, there is a lag time of up to two weeks to provide verified results. Therefore, the updated numbers are not as current as the daily reports, which are preliminary, but they are more accurate.

*How long does it take to review and verify daily reports?*

The process takes up to two weeks to review and verify reports and enter them into the database.

*Why are you releasing this information when you haven't finished the verification process?*

Our goal is to keep the public updated as the verification work progresses. We will continue to provide updated information every week.

*When will the QA/QC verification process be completed?*

That depends on how many birds continue to come in. Due to the amount of detailed work involved and the small staff that's been doing it, it takes one to two weeks after the birds are collected to review the data sheets, enter the data into the database and verify its accuracy. When no more birds come in, the process will be completed within one to two weeks.

*How will the verified data be used?*

The data will be used to quantify injury to avian resources that are important to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Gulf States and the public. Ultimately, these data will be used to understand the extent of the impacts from the oil spill and how much restoration should be done.

The verified data will be used to help compile DOI's Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) case against the parties determined to be responsible for the impacts of the spill on wildlife and other natural and cultural resources.

*What is Natural Resource Damages Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR)?*

NRDAR is a program that assesses the damages and injuries to natural resources entrusted to the Department and negotiates legal settlements or takes other legal actions against the responsible parties for the spill or release. Funds from these settlements are then used to restore the injured resources at no expense to the taxpayer. The program is authorized under CERCLA, the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, and the Clean Water Act, among other laws. When oil and other hazardous substances enter the environment, fish, wildlife and other natural resources can be injured. The Department of Interior and the Department of Commerce, along with other federal partners, states and tribes, act as trustees for these resources. The trustees have four basic goals: identify natural resources injured, determine the extent of the injuries, recover damages from those responsible, and restore the injured resources. These can all be accomplished under the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration program.

Accomplishing these goals is a legal process that can result in a settlement or in a civil lawsuit.