



Oil-soaked Feathers

explore how oil spills affect birds

Oil spills not only have a negative impact on marine life, they also threaten the lives of birds that spend most of their time at sea or near the water. When oil spills occur, birds that come into contact with the oil often get contaminated and sick and may even die as a result. Because birds are vulnerable to oil, people have to prevent oil spills from happening.



Oil spills destroy our habitats and endanger our lives!





What you need:



oil



a feather



water



2 large bowls

*Never pick up
feathers outdoors.*



What to do:

- 1 Add cold tap water to the two bowls.
- 2 Add some oil to the water in one of the bowls. This represents an oil spill.
- 3 Dip the feather into the oil spill.
- 4 Dip the feather in the bowl of clean water and move it back and forth to wash off the oil on the feather. Do not touch or rub the feather with your hands. Just let the water do the cleaning.
- 5 Let the feather dry. How does the feather look now?



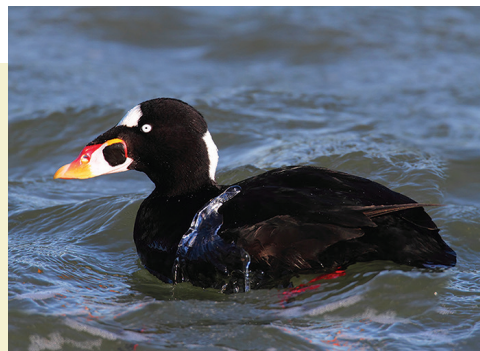
You should have noticed that the oil-soaked feather clumped together and was sticky, greasy, and slimy even after being washed in water. This is because water could not wash off the oil on the feather.

When birds' feathers are covered by oil, they become soggy; they clump together and become heavier. Not only are oily feathers no longer waterproof, they cannot insulate birds from heat or cold because the clumping of the feathers creates bald spots on their skin. The gained weight also hinders birds from flying. To make the situation worse, birds ingest the oil as they try to clean it off their feathers. This can poison the birds and can even cause fatal results.



Cleaning Birds

As you have learned, birds are vulnerable to oil spills. In fact, without our help, most oil-contaminated birds die. Fortunately, there are professional organizations that carry out cleaning operations targeted at oil-coated birds. In these facilities, rescuers first calm the stressed birds. Then they wash them in warm soapy water, feed them, and assess the birds' health before returning them to their habitats.



a bird not covered in oil