

# TRI-STATE BIRD RESCUE & RESEARCH, INC.

# OILED WILDLIFE LOG

Volume 10 | Page 1

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*“Despite the demand wildlife rehabilitation places on me, I have never found any difficulty in arriving at valid reasons for doing it.”*

*- Lynne Frink, Tri-State Founder*



## EOW 2025 Was a Success!

In this issue:

- Planning and attending The Effects of Oil on Wildlife Conference
- Recent spill responses in Chicago and Baltimore
- Introducing our new wildlife rehabilitation manager!
- Announcing a free training opportunity!

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# 15th International EOW Conference Unites Oiled Wildlife Response Community in Cape Town

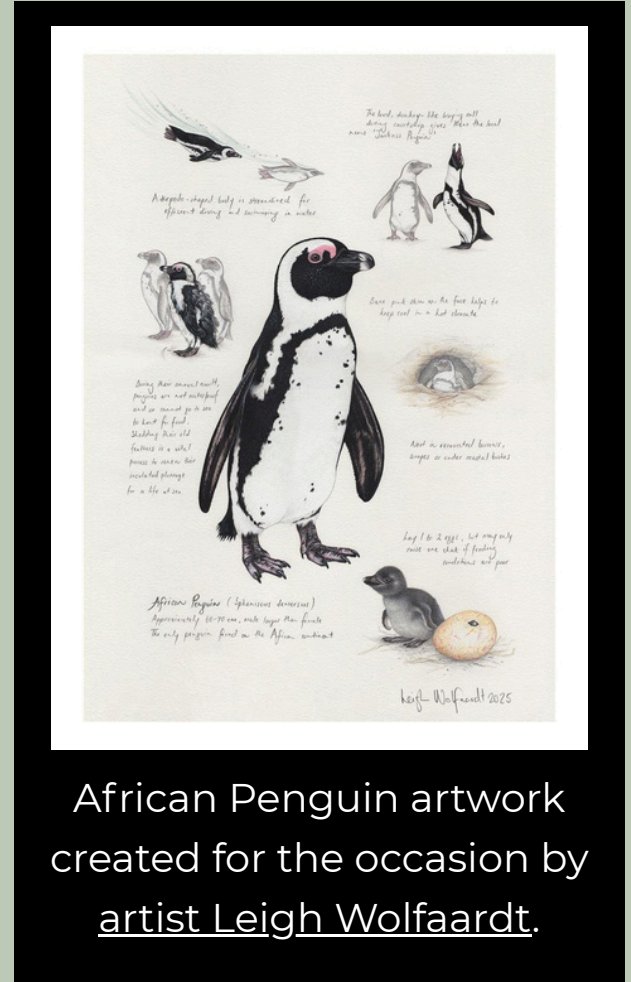
## By Jessica Slutter

The Effects of Oil on Wildlife Conference (EOW) has brought together an international audience to advance oiled wildlife response since 1982. The conference was co-founded by Tri-State Bird Rescue & Research, Inc. and International Bird Rescue; now each organization alternates planning the conference, which is typically held every 3 years. Tri-State had the honor of planning the 15<sup>th</sup> EOW alongside the South African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) as the host organization in Cape Town, South Africa. After over 18 months of planning, the conference took place from 13-17 October, 2025. Roughly 120 delegates attended the conference from 6 continents and 20 countries, representing non-profit organizations, government agencies, and oil industry members.

The conference highlighted two primary themes: the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the MV Treasure oil spill response that affected over 20,000 African penguins and the critical conservation status of the African penguin species. The conference opened with African Penguin Awareness Day, where African penguins rehabilitated by SANCCOB were released back into the wild by conference guests. The keynote address was given by conservationist Anton

Wolfaardt highlighting his work to help save birds like African penguins from extinction. There was also a memorial exhibit created by a local South African artist to visually depict the events of the Treasure response and to honor the responders who contributed to the success of the event.

Delegates attended four days of presentations, panels, roundtables, and workshops focusing on a wide range of topics related to oiled wildlife response, such as international collaboration, case studies, and alternative fuel responses. The conference ended with field trips that allowed guests to explore some of the areas of South Africa that could be affected by oil spills, including a tour of the Cape of Good Hope and a birding trip to a gannet colony. On top of the knowledge shared and relationships formed, the conference also generated funding for SANCCOB's important work towards seabird conservation, largely thanks to sponsors such as Oil Spill Response Limited, the Global Oiled Wildlife Response System, and ExxonMobil.



African Penguin artwork created for the occasion by artist Leigh Wolfaardt.



Follow the [EOW Facebook page](#) for updates regarding the next conference and learn more about SANCCOB's conservation efforts at [sanccob.co.za](http://sanccob.co.za).



## Diving into the Deep End - EOW as a New Oil Programs Employee

**By Kristen Bishop**

Conferences can be overwhelming, even if you are well-established in your field. Imagine your first day at your new job being halfway across the world and surrounded by strangers who have been in this field for many years... That was me!

For those of you who don't know me, I have been a wildlife rehabilitator for over 6 years and have recently shifted to the Oiled Wildlife Response Team as the Wildlife Rehabilitation Manager. It has been a quick transition process and my first official day was October 13<sup>th</sup>, which just so happened to be the first day of the Effects of Oil on Wildlife Conference! I had already been planning on attending the conference and presenting a poster, but now as an oil staff member there was more pressure to network and introduce myself to everyone.

I was concerned at first that I would feel out of place. After all, other than Tri-State staff I knew nobody else attending the conference! Thankfully the first event of the conference really helped ease some of that worry. Saturday was African Penguin Awareness Day, which was celebrated by the release of rehabilitated, critically endangered African penguins. The event allowed attendees to bond over something that we all work towards – releasing animals back into the wild where they belong. I also received an additional, unexpected honor – tipping a box to release one of the penguins! Watching these incredible creatures group together and start their new life was an emotional experience – I can neither confirm nor deny that a few tears were shed! The added emotion revolved around the critical state of the African Penguin population, as every new member to the wild population can only add to their chances of recovery. It was truly a bonding experience that we could all share together as wildlife responders.

Going into my poster presentation, I was feeling more confident than I was expecting. The icebreaker at SANCCOB was a good introduction to networking and meeting new people, and the poster proved to do the same. I was concerned that my poster (about safe removal, decontamination, and rehabilitation from sticky traps) would not necessarily interest or be applicable to

*Continued on page 6*



### **Introducing our new Rehabilitation Manager Kristen Bishop!**

While not a new face to the organization, Kristen has recently transitioned to a new position as the Oil Programs Rehabilitation Manager. For the past 4.5 years, she has been a supervisor in Tri-State's wild bird clinic where she developed her rehabilitation skills. Prior to joining Tri-State full time, she worked as the infirmary manager at Avian Haven in Maine and received her M.S. in conservation medicine from Tufts University. She is looking forward to immersing herself into the world of oil spill response, creating trainings for oiled wildlife responders, and developing oiled wildlife rehabilitation protocols.

## Case Study 1: Chicago

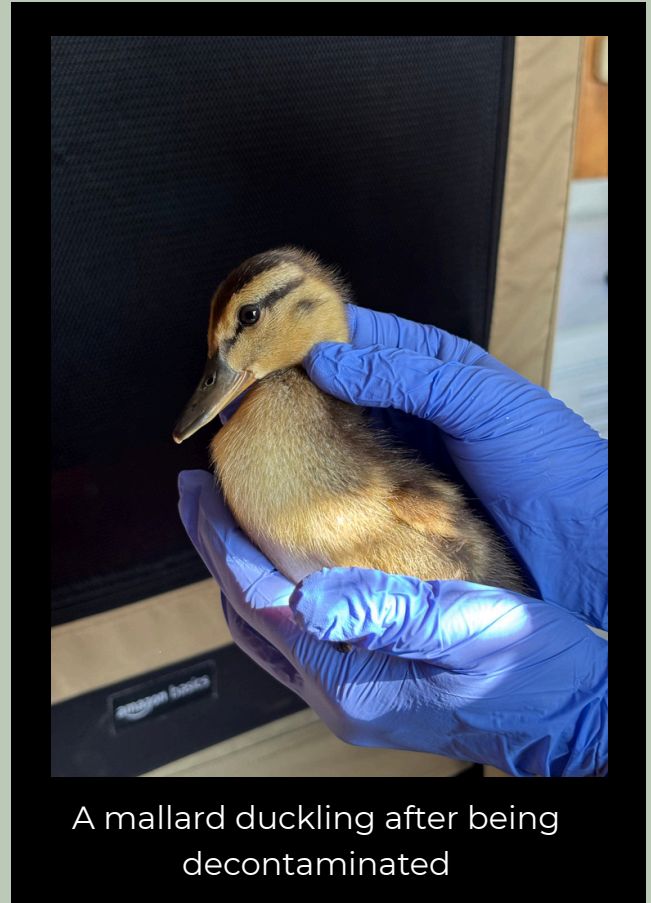
**By Dan Wilson**

We knew the moment we saw the spill location that this was going to be one of the most difficult field responses in recent memory – nearly half a million gallons of asphalt spilled into the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. More often contemporary spills are inland, impacting creeks, retention ponds, and wetlands rather than larger, navigable waters like rivers. This spill was on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, built in part as a sewage treatment scheme; it also accommodates significant barge traffic from the various industrial businesses that line the canal's banks.

The first challenge was simple manpower – there were only two responders at the start with over two dozen miles of canal and shoreline to survey. We immediately set to work contacting our Community Oil Response and paraprofessional network responders as well as, reaching out to industry colleagues for support. All told, we utilized 25 responders from 15 organizations with levels of experience ranging from none to two decades.

Our second challenge was fluctuating resource availability – the number of boats and operators would change from day to day as response strategies changed. We were able to convince the responsible party to allow us a generous dollar amount limit for our equipment spending for much of the response, which removed a major roadblock to scaling up our efforts, but there wasn't much we could do to address a shortage of boats and operators; we had to do what is expected from us during every response: remain flexible and adaptable. Getting new and needed equipment was also a challenge as the staging area where our facilities were located did not have an official address, leading to delivery drivers giving up on finding us.

The canal itself presented the final, and possibly most difficult, challenge – the landscape itself and its residents worked against us. Though several species found the location acceptable for breeding, Mallard ducklings were over-represented among the young present on the canal. They presented a special challenge because, despite being more likely than other species/ages to become contaminated, they were some of the most difficult to determine as oiled because the oiled parts of the body are underwater when the ducklings are swimming. In addition to being difficult to determine as oiled like the mallards, many of the target animals learned they could avoid us by retreating to the shallows under dense vegetation where boats and people couldn't go. Other challenging species were Double-crested Cormorants that could still dive and evade capture, and cryptically colored Northern Water Snakes.



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## Case Study 2: Baltimore

By Katie Muse

In June 2025, two backup generator tanks in Baltimore, MD were overfilled, resulting in the release of approximately 5,000 gallons of red-dyed diesel fuel into the Patapsco River. The diesel traveled more than a mile through storm drains before reaching the Baltimore Harbor. Although response efforts began quickly and cleanup actions were promptly initiated, wildlife was unfortunately impacted.

At the time of the incident, Tri-State's Oiled Wildlife Response Team was already fully engaged in the widely known "Chicago spill" when we were notified of several oiled animals in the Baltimore Harbor area. With two Tri-State staff deployed in Chicago, another providing remote support, and the remaining staff member on maternity leave, the response relied heavily on Tri-State's dedicated response network and clinic staff to manage this additional oil spill event.

Environmental specialists from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) supported the wildlife response by capturing and transporting affected animals to Tri-State's Campbell Facility for decontamination and rehabilitation. Within two days, Tri-State received a total of 26 animals, including Canada geese, mallards, a mallard/domestic duck hybrid, red-eared sliders, and a common snapping turtle. Many of the birds experienced skin and eye irritation caused by exposure to the diesel fuel. Diesel is a caustic substance that can cause chemical burns to the skin and, if left untreated, may be fatal.

The Tri-State team along with 24 additional responders—including teams from Tri-State's clinic, the Maryland Zoo, Central Park Zoo, Philadelphia Zoo, ZooQuatic Laboratory, and CORE volunteers—worked for 37 days to decontaminate and rehabilitate the affected wildlife. Care included treatment for skin irritation, feather damage, and other non-spill-related injuries. In several cases, birds were held in care to allow molted feathers to regrow so staff could assess whether new feather growth had also been compromised by fuel exposure.

As part of the rehabilitation process, 11 Canada geese were fitted with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service leg bands; 9 of those geese also received GPS neck collars to support post-release monitoring. Ultimately, 11 Canada geese and 1 common snapping turtle were successfully rehabilitated and released back into the wild.

The success of this response was made possible through the collaboration and dedication of our friends at MD DNR, CORE and paraprofessional response network members, and Tri-State staff, whose collective expertise and commitment ensured the highest standard of care for impacted wildlife.



A common snapping turtle after being decontaminated

### **EOW As A New Employee continued**

many of the attendees, but I was very busy all night! It was a great experience sharing ideas and protocols and hopefully offering solutions for other rehabilitators who have less experience with these patients. It was an exhausting 2 hours of talking but overall it was a rewarding experience that gave me confidence in my ability to network and share knowledge with others.

Overall, the conference was an excellent introduction to not just the oil spill community, but to international wildlife response. It was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity that I will always remember fondly as my first foray into oil spill response.



Members of the EOW steering committee in front of the Treasure spill memorial display.

### **Chicago case study continued**

When we arrived on May 19, one of the first things we noticed were two Northern Water Snake carcasses partially encased in the spilled product on the very boat ramp responders were using to launch their boats. Adjacent to the boat ramp was a series of concrete steps that many more snakes were using to bask. It seemed an ominous sign of what was to come: a total of 89 reptiles recovered from 5 different species, 78 of which were Northern Water snakes. We also recovered 83 birds from 20 different species, 33 of which were Mallards, and 34 mammals from 7 different species, most of which were Black Rat carcasses recovered after a heavy rain. Thirty-nine of our patients required continued care after decontamination and were transferred to DuPage Wildlife Conservation Center. Overall, 113 animals were successfully decontaminated, rehabilitated, and released back into the wild despite all the physical and logistical hurdles we faced during this response.

## **Coming up...**

We will be hosting a free workshop for wildlife rehabilitators about the basics of oiled wildlife response at our facility in Newark, DE on Saturday November 7<sup>th</sup>!

[Check out this flyer](#) or contact [oilprograms@tristatebird.org](mailto:oilprograms@tristatebird.org) if you'd like more information.

