



Audubon's President speaks out on Gulf Oil Spill

Title

Frank Gill, Audubon President, comments on the Gulf oil spill: "The Gulf oil spill is a disaster unfolding in slow motion, threatening birds, wildlife and Gulf coast communities. While immediate impacts on birds have not yet been as dramatic as many had at first feared, Audubon is gravely concerned about the ultimate toll this unprecedented environmental crisis will have on the already strained Gulf coast ecosystem.

We are concerned that the oil is already disrupting with the underwater marine ecosystem. It is virtually certain that fish, shrimp, and many other vital cogs in the web of life are dying underwater, unseen. The loss of these critical sources of food has potentially devastating consequences for both birds and the coastal economy. Comprehensive assessment and documentation of the spill's impacts on marine life is essential to support both the emergency response and ongoing recovery of the Gulf coast ecosystem – and it needs to be an immediate priority.

The birds that dive into open water for food – Brown Pelicans, terns (Least, Forster's, Sandwich, Royal, Caspian), Magnificent Frigatebird, Northern Gannet, and other pelagic species are among the first reported victims of oiling. This group will also be the first to encounter food losses. However, because many spend much of their lives on the open water, their deaths will likely go unmarked and unrecorded.

Onshore and in coastal wetlands, the legacy of habitat loss has left smaller and smaller areas for birds and wildlife. Disruption of the remaining habitat--even as a result of well-intentioned efforts to protect the gulf coast and its barrier islands from oil damage through cleaning and movement of sand and other materials--may disrupt nesting birds and other wildlife, with long term consequences.

As the June 1 start of the hurricane season approaches, so does the risk of a storm-driven surge of oil that would render useless the booms now in place to protect the gulf's coastal islands, leaving millions of nesting birds vulnerable to oil washing onto breeding islands, beaches, sand flats and mudflats, and seeping into wetlands, and coastal terrestrial habitats.

Audubon has recruited and registered more than 12,000 volunteers to assist lead agencies, as needed, with on-the-ground response efforts. They will also provide bird and wildlife monitoring and other assistance to advance the massive long-term restoration that will be needed.

Congress must match the commitment of ordinary citizens with a commitment of funds to help the restoration proceed. We call on Congress to complete the emergency supplemental appropriations bill before the Memorial Day recess, and to include in this emergency measure funding for restoration projects in coastal Louisiana that would immediately help mitigate the inevitable damage from this slow-moving, but avoidable disaster.”