



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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OIL-SOAKED BIRDS DIE WHEN WASTE IS DUMPED IN LONG ISLAND WATERS

Between 400 and 1,000 surf scoters, a species of wild duck, died on Long Island Sound recently when the birds became "logged" by oil suspected to have been dumped into the water by a passing vessel. Fish and Wildlife Service investigators reported to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes today.

Dumping oil from a boat into waters close to shore is a violation of the Oil Pollution Act of 1924. The offense carries a penalty of not less than \$500 or more than \$2,500 in fines, or not less than 30 days or more than 1 year in jail, or both, and Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, has appealed to all citizens to report to the U. S. War Department, which enforces the act, the name of any vessel seen pumping waste oil into territorial waters.

Clearance on foreign vessels found guilty of oil dumping is withheld until the penalty is paid.

At least 400 surf scoters were found dead or dying between Mattituck Sound and Orient Point. "The exact toll is not known," the investigator

reported, "but if all the sick ducks died or were later killed by foxes, the loss can be placed at nearer a thousand."

Many of the birds were picked up alive but died a few hours later. When approached, most of the scoters rolled, waddled, or flopped into the water. About ten percent were unable to move.

Oil-soaked birds, Service officials explained, usually can't fly. The birds most frequently die from overexposure to cold. Oil holds the feathers together, exposing the skin. To avoid getting cold in water, oil-soaked birds usually go ashore.

"Feathers act as insulators," a Service ornithologist said, "and prevent heat losses. When the feathers are held apart by oil, the birds lose an excessive amount of body heat and may develop pneumonia."

The birds also suffer from irritation and cracking of the skin because most oils are caustic.

Other hazards from oil dumping include damage to shore properties, which become more liable to fire, and to commercial fisheries. In the past, pollution from oil seriously damaged commercial fisheries along the eastern coastal waters and portions of the Gulf Coast of Texas.

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