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AIR MARSHAL SIR JOHN CURTISS

CPL GREEN

Mystery oil slick takes its toll on bird life at sea



A mystery oil slick has claimed the lives of more than 130 seabirds between Bridlington and Scarborough over Christmas and the New Year.

About 40 birds were collected from the beach at Bridlington, either by coastguards or RSPCA inspector Mr Ken Wilde.

A further 25 birds were picked up at Flamborough, but the majority of those affected by the oil came from Filey.

There has been no visible oil slick, and the Marine Pollution Control Officer in Hull, Capt Thomas Mallory, did not receive any reports until the oil-affected birds hit the beach.

An RAF aircraft covered the beach areas, and there was no report of any offshore oil. "We think it was a very isolated patch of oil," said Capt Mallory.

A sample of the oil has been sent to the Government chemists in London for analysis.

"The winds were blowing from east and north-east and it brought the oil on to the beach," said Capt Mallory. "It is almost impossible to say where the oil source was."

Of the oiled birds rescued, only about 20 have been put back into the sea. "Some of the oil on the birds was old, but then we started getting birds with fresh crude oil on them," said Inspector Wilde.

"It seems to be abating now, but you only need a change in wind direction and we could be back to square one."

Most of the affected birds are guillemots and have had difficulty fishing because of the oil. Some have gone days without food.

A long tail duck was found affected at Filey Brigg and a seal with traces of oil was found at Flamborough. The seal later swam off.

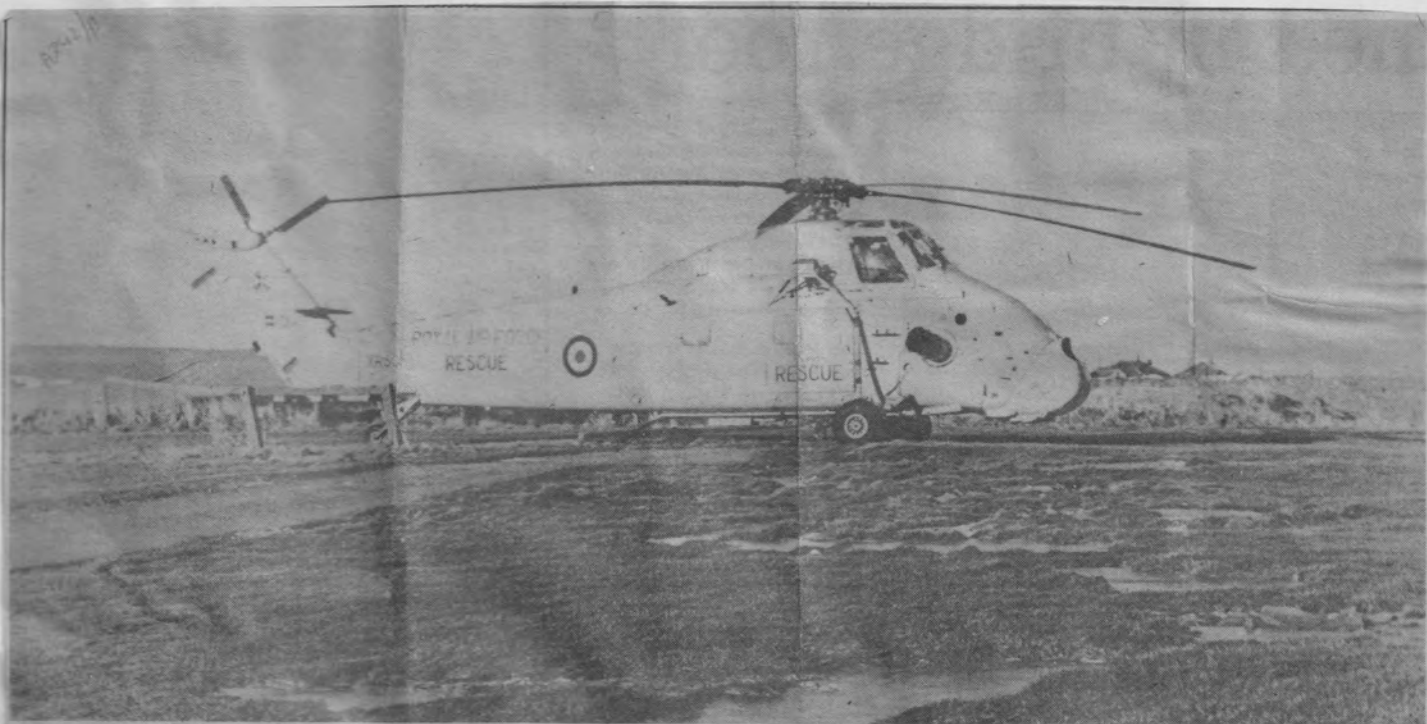
"Everything is alien to the birds," said Inspector Wilde. "They are handled, put in boxes, and very often had to be force-fed and they have not got a strong will to live."

There have been three similar oiled-bird incidents in the Bridlington area in the past, and the latest is mild in comparison. Inspector Wilde recalls dealing with about 150 birds a day over a 10-day period.

● Happy to be alive — one of the lucky birds which survived the oil, seen here with RSPCA Inspector Ken Wilde.

7TH

10TH



Helicopter lands in car park
after gull strikes rotor blade

An RAF Wessex helicopter from Leconfield, on exercise in Thornwick Bay, Flamborough, on Sunday morning, landed in the North Landing car park (see picture) after a seagull struck its rear rotor blade. The landing was made to check the rotor blade for damage. On finding it was intact, the helicopter returned to Leconfield.

28TH

Filey lifeboat in exercise with helicopters

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Filey lifeboat took part in an exercise involving two helicopters yesterday.

The RNLI's new divisional inspector for the area, Mr Tom Nutman, made his first inspection of the lifeboat and went to sea with it.

The exercise took place 10 miles off Filey.

The Filey lifeboat secretary, Lieut-Comdr Tony Cornabe, said that two Wessex helicopters from RAF Leconfield were used because the station wanted to make some new pilots familiar with work involving lifeboats.