Alaska Spill Response Wildlife ID Aid
TAKE A “WILDLIFE MINUTE” AND RECORD WHAT YOU SEE
During an active spill, report wildlife observations or other wildlife related concerns to your supervisor or Incident Command. At any time, you can also report to:

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Spill Response Team
907.242.6893
fwsakspillresponse@fws.gov
HOW TO USE THIS FIELD AID  

We want to know what you see!

This guide contains basic characteristics of
6 Bird groups and 7 Marine Mammal groups
• No wildlife ID experience needed
• No binoculars needed
You can use a permanent marker to record
your wildlife counts right on the Field Aid.
(Marks can later be erased with rubbing alco
hol and the Field Aid can be reused.)

STEPS

Each time you see an animal or group of similar animals:

☐ Notice the shape & appearance of the animal
  (body shape, wing size, leg length, etc.).

☐ Notice the behavior of the animal (swimming,
  flying, wading, etc.) and the habitat that surrounds
  it (ocean, tundra, wetland, etc.).

☐ If more than one animal, estimate the number of
  animals of that type you see.

☐ Flip through your Field Aid to find the page of the
  group that best matches your animal in its shape,
  appearance, habitat, and behavior.

☐ Record the number of animals you see in the “Count”
  box, on that group’s page. Use your permanent marker!

☐ As you see more animals, continue recording their
  numbers on the correct pages.

☐ On the last page of the Field Aid, tally and record the
  total number of individuals you have seen in each group.

☐ Record notes of important observations on the last page.

☐ Report your counts and notes to a supervisor or to
  the USFWS Spill Response Team.

☐ Size charts in the bottom right corner of bird ID
  pages show the general size of birds in that group
  as compared to a sparrow, robin, raven and a goose.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology/Merlin Bird ID App

Thank you for helping us take care of Alaska’s wildlife.
SHOREBIRDS  Sandpipers, Plovers, Oystercatchers, Phalaropes

SHAPE & APPEARANCE

Bird illustrations courtesy of David Sibley

Wings: slender

Bill: thin, vary in length

Body: slender

Legs: relatively long, often visible in flight

Often form tight flocks
**HABITAT**

- Inhabit aquatic areas: coastlines, bays, river deltas, interior wetlands.
- Nest on the tundra or in boreal forest close to water.

**BEHAVIOR**

- Excellent waders, rarely swim.
- Scurry in or near shallow waters.
LONG-WINGED SEABIRDS
Gulls, Terns, Petrels, Albatross, Shearwaters, Cormorants

SHAPE & APPEARANCE

Wings: long, narrow

Bill: slender, short to medium length

Body: streamlined

May flock to feed

Bird illustrations courtesy of David Sibley
LONG-WINGED SEABIRDS

HABITAT

• Inhabit deep ocean environments.
• Gulls frequently come to land.
• Most nest on islands, often in colonies.

BEHAVIOR

• Soar over water.
• May congregate to feed on schools of fish.
• Some dive into water.

Gulls, Terns, Petrels, Albatross, Shearwaters, Cormorants
FOOTBALL-SHAPED SEABIRDS

Puffins, Auklets, Murrelets, Murres, Guillemots

SHAPE & APPEARANCE

Body: heavy, football shaped

Head: large

Neck: thick

Bill: blunt or pointed

Feather shading: dark colored back, light colored chest

Bird illustrations courtesy of David Sibley
HABITAT

- Inhabit ocean environments.
- Many nest on island cliffs, often in colonies.

BEHAVIOR

- Spend more time swimming than long-winged seabirds.
- “Run” across water to take flight.
- Flight is fast, straight, and low over the water.
- Swims underwater.

FOOTBALL-SHAPED SEABIRDS

Puffins, Auklets, Murrelets, Murres, Guillemots

Christopher Harwood
WATERFOWL  Ducks, Geese, Swans, Loons

SHAPE & APPEARANCE

*Bird illustrations courtesy of David Sibley*

Often fly in V-formation

**Wings:** wide

**Neck:** long in flight

**Body:** rounded

**Head/bill:** distinctive shape
- Fly with fast wing beats, don’t soar.
- Often vocal in flight.
- Feet are often visible during water take-off and landing.
- “Run” across water to take flight.
- Sea ducks dive underwater.
**BIRDS OF PREY**  Eagles, Falcons, Hawks, Owls

**SHAPE & APPEARANCE**

*Bird illustrations courtesy of David Sibley*

- **Wings**: long
- **Head**: owl – rounded, others – triangular
- **Neck**: short in flight
- **Tail**: fanned or squared in flight
- **Bill**: short, hooked
HABITAT

- Inhabit coastlines, tundra and inland environments.

BEHAVIOR

- Often soar over land or sit on exposed perches.
- Hunt in open country or over water.
- Usually solitary.
LAND BIRDS  All other land birds you see, record here!

SHAPE & APPEARANCE

Bird illustrations courtesy of David Sibley

Highly variable in size and shape
**HABITAT**

**BEHAVIOR**

- Many leave Alaska during winter months.

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**LAND BIRDS**  All other land birds you see, record here!
**SEA OTTER OR RIVER OTTER?**

**SEA OTTER**
- **Swim:** belly up, floating
- **Inhabit:** salt water
- **On land:** rarely, awkward movement

**RIVER OTTER**
- **Swim:** belly down, body low
- **Inhabit:** fresh and salt water
- **On land:** often, agile movement
SEALS
- **Head:** No external ear flaps
- **On land:** Scoot on belly
- **Group size:** Solitary or a few
- **Vocalizations:** Soft, quiet grunts
- **Body:** Spots, rings, or patches

SEA LIONS
- **Head:** External ear flaps
- **On land:** Walk on front and hind flippers
- **Group size:** Large groups
- **Vocalizations:** Bark or roar
- **Body:** No patterns

WALRUS
- **Head:** No visible ears, large tusks
- **On land:** Walk on front and hind flippers
- **Group size:** Small to large groups
- **Vocalizations:** Variety of sounds
WHALES AND DOLPHINS

LARGE WHALES
- **Size:** large
- **Dorsal fin:** small, if any
- **Surfacing movement:** slow, tail visible

SMALL WHALES AND DOLPHINS
Porpoise, Dolphin, Killer Whale, Beluga
- **Size:** smaller
- **Dorsal fin:** generally visible, more pronounced
- **Surfacing movement:** more rapid, smaller arch

COUNT
- Often seen when surfacing
- Dorsal fin and blowhole
Merlin Bird Identification App
http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/download/

Inputs to this app are basic – your location, bird size, and bird color. These are used to quickly narrow down who you’re looking at.

Seek App
https://www.inaturalist.org/pages/seek_app

This app uses image recognition technology. Simply take a picture of the plant or animal you are trying to identify, and let Seek figure out what it is!

Even if you don’t have these apps, taking pictures of wildlife that you see while responding to a spill is an excellent way to report wildlife observations.

This aid was created by:
Claire Montgomerie / USFWS (editor), Eric Cline / Terragraphica (design)
All bird illustrations courtesy of David Sibley unless otherwise noted.

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Produced by:
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game
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<td>Small Whales and Dolphins</td>
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Notes: (For example: Are animals oiled? Are young present? Are there dead animals?)