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45th Anniversary of SF Bay Oil Spill

On the foggy morning of January 19, 1971, more than 800,000 gallons of oil spilled into ocean and thousands of birds affected; Spill led to creation of International Bird Rescue.

This week marks the 45th anniversary of the San Francisco Bay oil spill that led directly to the creation of International Bird Rescue. On the early morning of January 19, 1971, two [Standard Oil](#) tankers, the *Arizona Standard* and the *Oregon Standard*, collided in foggy conditions near the Golden Gate Bridge. The ruptured tankers spilled more than 800,000 gallons of crude.

Among other terrible outcomes, the spill affected 7,000 birds. Volunteers collected nearly 4,300 of them, mainly Western Grebes and Surf Scoters, and brought them to makeshift rehabilitation centers.

Alice Berkner, the founder of Bird Rescue, remembers: "Here were about 16 different treatment centers scattered around the Bay Area. A

friend of mine, who happened to be a veterinarian, asked me if I wanted to go to the hastily established Richmond Bird Center and help out."



"As long as I live I will never forget the odor that assaulted me as I walked through the doors of the Center," said Berkner. "It was a horrendous mix of rotting fish, bird droppings, oil, and, strangely enough, Vitamin B."

Only about 300 birds were successfully rehabilitated and released—in part given the lack of established oiled bird rehabilitation practices at the time.

Jay Holcomb, Bird Rescue's long-time director—who passed away in 2014—told the San Francisco Chronicle in 2012, "There were dying birds everywhere and no one knew what to do. It was as horrible as you can imagine," said Holcomb. "It was then that we realized there needs to be an organized attempt for their care."

International Bird Rescue Research Center (now "International Bird Rescue" was hatched in April of 1971 in the "little red house" at Berkeley's Aquatic Park. Since then, it has led oiled bird rescue efforts in over 220 oil spills in more than a dozen countries. In the 1990s, Bird Rescue became a founding partner in California's [Oiled Wildlife Care Network](#) (OWCN).

Today, Bird Rescue runs two full-time bird rehabilitation centers in partnership with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Office of Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) and OWCN, located in the San Francisco Bay and Los Angeles areas, as well as an as-needed oiled wildlife response facility in Anchorage, Alaska.

"From an environmental tragedy 45 years ago, Bird Rescue was born to deliver on the promise of mitigating the human impact on seabirds and other aquatic species through response, rehabilitation, and research," said current Executive Director **JD Bergeron**. "And our 45th year promises to bring continued excellence in response and rehabilitation, as well as renewed focus on research, education, and outreach, especially to children, the next generation of wildlife and nature stewards."

Note: Photo of oiled Surf Scoter (a sea duck) from spill found January 1971 near Land's End in San Francisco. Please credit: International Bird Rescue (high resolution available)

About International Bird Rescue: International Bird Rescue (IBR) has been helping seabirds and other aquatic birds around the world since 1971. Our team of specialists operates two year-round aquatic bird rehabilitation centers in California, which care for more than 5,000 birds every year. IBR is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Learn more at birdrescue.org