

Engineer reports illegal pollution by container vessel

Birds I View

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Who would have known? Passing between Newfoundland and Nova Scotia en route to Montreal, the container vessel *MSC Trinidad* illegally discharged a reported 25 tonnes of oily sludge. The intentional discharge was made via a pipe that bypassed the ship's bilge and spewed the pollution directly into the ocean.

Domingo Silva, the Third Engineer of the *MSC Trinidad*, video-taped and reported the deliberate pollution to the RCMP and Transport Canada when the vessel arrived in port in Montreal on May 2. Transport Canada, the Canadian Coast, DFO and Environment Canada are being faulted for not having even been aware of the pollution event until it was reported 5 days after it occurred. Given the frequent assurances that the air surveillance flights out of Moncton are protecting the eastern Canadian ocean, the perception of such fault is not unexpected.

Uncertainty is the reality about what goes on out there off the Newfoundland coast. Lack of knowledge is why when oiled seabirds show up on beaches, it is almost always a sign of an unknown pollution event.

It is highly likely that many seabirds were killed by this oil pollution. Yet given the location of the discharge well off the south coast of Newfoundland, oiled seabirds may not show up on beaches. When the small offshore Terra Nova spill occurred in 2004, it was estimated that 10,000 to 100,000 seabirds were killed.

What about the whistle blower?

What will happen to Domingo Silva? The captain of the *MSC Trinidad* has apparently approached Filipino crew member to sign resignation papers. Silva wants to stay in Canada. Here's hoping that he gets the opportunity.

What about the captain and Mediterranean Shipping Company?

It is the captain who is responsible for the vessel and its activities. Under Canadian law, he can be sent to jail. It seems that he certainly should be.

And what about the Mediterranean Shipping Company based in Geneva Switzerland that owns the *MSC Trinidad*? They are ones who profit from this pollution. Many of the company's shipping routes run just south of Newfoundland.

The Mediterranean Shipping Company's website claims that it has the second largest fleet of container vessels in the world and that they provide a cost effective global transportation solution (http://www.msctrinidad.com/msc_worldwide.php). If a vessel pollutes at sea and gets away with it rather retaining, reusing or recycling its waste oil, this likely enhances the cost effectiveness of transportation. Only enforcement of Canadian law, conviction and the imposition of significant fines can change that kind of cost effectiveness. It seems apparent from Mediterranean Shipping Company's website that their profits are increasing exponentially.

Will they be made accountable? One way to potentially impact the company would be to ban its vessels from Canadian waters. This would likely be difficult, besides the Mediterranean Shipping Company was voted Best Ocean Carrier of the year by the Canadian International Freight Forwarders Association members in Toronto and Montreal in April and in May 2007. A special ceremony was held in Montreal last May in recognition of this.

This information can be found on the Mediterranean Shipping Company's website. To date, nothing is posted about their vessel's intentional discharge of pollution in Canadian waters.

Given the awards that the Mediterranean Shipping Company has garnered and its exemplary service, one can only imagine what the rogue vessels flying flags of convenience are doing. An effective system of deterrence is still wanting in Canadian oceans.

Birding in the Codroy Valley

The Nature Conservancy of Canada sponsored a bird identification workshop in Codroy Valley on 10 – 11 May. Bruce Mactavish provided the instruction. Birds identified included 3 American woodcock, a pied-billed grebe, a pair of blue-winged teal, a lesser yellowlegs, a Eurasian common teal, 10+ great blue herons, lots of bitterns, 2 red-necked phalaropes off Cape Anguille, and a black-backed three-toed woodpecker.

The Codroy Valley is truly the most magnificent place to capture species diversity in Newfoundland and Labrador. On May 10, Darroch Whitaker and Trina Leonard recorded 69 species there. Some of their highlights were an American kestrel, 6 barn swallows, 114 black guillemots, a brown-headed cowbird, 63 northern gannets (likely from Great Bird Rock in the Magdalens) and a northern harrier.

Sandhill cranes

A pair of sandhill cranes have been seen and heard calling in Goose Bay (Tony Chubbs). Sandhill cranes were also in Goose Bay last spring, though they are more often seen in the fall. Could sandhill cranes be nesting in Labrador?

Black-headed Gulls

In early May, Bruce Mactavish noted 25+ black-headed gulls in the ring-billed gull colony at Stephenville Crossing. European black-headed gulls (likely of Icelandic origin) have been nesting in relatively low numbers Newfoundland since the 1970s. They often nest in association with ring-billed gulls.

Newfoundland is the only place in North America where black-headed gulls have established a nesting expansion, though an odd nesting has occurred in Labrador and in New England. The colony in Stephenville Crossing is likely the largest one in North America.

Northern wheatears

A low pressure system moving from Iceland and Greenland to Newfoundland in the second week in May generated some grim weather. But the northeast winds ahead of system facilitated the occurrences of many northern wheatears from the east coast to the Northern Peninsula (Bruce Mactavish, Jon Joy, Wanda Crocker, John and Ivy Gibbons).

Northern wheatears are fascinating ground-nesting thrushes that breed along the rocky coastal barrens of northern Labrador. During the autumn, they migrate via Greenland across the Atlantic to northern Europe and then on Africa. During spring, they reverse this impressive journey to return to Labrador.

Other birds in the region and around the province

Two piping plovers, 500 greater scaup, 8 Caspian terns and 10 common terns were in Stephenville Crossing on 11 May (Bruce Mactavish). A Eurasian greater golden plover is at Bonavista (Joy Jon). An early common tern was inspecting the environs at Neary's Pond on 5 May.

An osprey was searching Kents Pond on 23 April. The Windsor Lake osprey had to hold back a few days until the ice melted. Merlins are mating in Eastport, where bald eagles are feeding on dead seals washing up on the beaches (Bruce Bradbury).

A pair of shoveller ducks has been in Trepassey since early May (Dave Sheppard). A snowy owl was at Cape Race (Mike Ward) and another along the road into the Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve (Tony Power and Chris Mooney).

A flock of 20 red crossbills showed up in South River (Dennis Minty), and in Gander 2 pair were seen feeding on the ground below an empty niger seed bag (Kevin Butler).

Keep looking. Contacts = mont@mun.ca, 895-2901 or 737-7673.