

Name: Peter Morgan.

Date: 29th October 1978.

Location: Broad Haven, Pembrokeshire.

Title: Christos Bitas Oil Disaster, 1978

Memory:

“Valuable data can be collected from dead seabirds and one memorable ‘late night’ conversation in Liverpool with the late Peter Hope-Jones led only too soon to a large-scale operation to collect thousands of oiled seabirds in order to study the effect of a major oil spill on Welsh and Irish Sea seabirds.

He previously had had the extremely difficult job of identifying thousands of dead oiled seabirds from the Amoco Cadiz. Wheelbarrow loads of bodies and oil were deposited on the floor for him to extract and identify which species had been killed. His retort was “Well, Morgan you’re a museum man. Do something, and make certain next time I can see what they are!” We then discussed methods and options should it happen again.

Unfortunately, a couple of years later and 6 weeks after my tenure as Keeper of Zoology at the NMW commenced, on the 29th October 1978 the Christos Bitas oil tanker hit the Hats and Barrels releasing thousands of gallons of oil. Many of the elements discussed that night in Liverpool proved important and within rapid time, thanks due to the then Director of the NMW, Doug Bassett, the YHA and Pembrokeshire National Parks, a 60 foot refrigerated trailer was installed at Broadhaven Interpretative Centre and the collection of the species affected began and continued for 6 weeks.

During this time techniques were developed for cleaning the dead birds of oil with white spirit and then dusting them with Magnesium Carbonate, enabling Peter to examine hundreds of the 5,000 birds collected. These now reside in the collections of the National Museum of Wales for continuous study.

An abiding memory however is the way in which so many people combined to ensure the beach collection ranging from New Quay to the Gower, with living birds being taken for rehabilitation. Less said about the dustbins full of oil and dead birds brought by Swansea University students late into the operation, the better, everybody then knew what Peter Hope-Jones had gone through before.

The operation and techniques developed were published in a Chief Scientists Report no. 34 NCC and unfortunately were used again this time during the Auks and other birds breeding season when the Bridgeness sank in June 1985.

Peter Morgan”