

**ABSTRACTS FOR *CONDOR* 103(4) NOVEMBER 2001**

**COMMENTARY**

**ON DRAWING CONCLUSIONS NINE YEARS AFTER THE *EXXON VALDEZ* OIL SPILL**

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*Abstract.* We comment on the paper of Irons et al. (2000), which evaluated the status of several marine bird taxa in Prince William Sound, Alaska, nine years after the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill. We discuss concerns about the effects on the study design of inherent differences between the oiled and unoled areas; about interpretations of results that use inconsistent criteria to define the spatial scales of analysis; and about explanations of underlying causes that are not empirically founded. These comments highlight general difficulties in assessing the effects of large-scale environmental perturbations. It is important to draw conclusions about the effects of such events, but the conclusions must be founded on accuracy in reporting study results, caution in interpreting the results, and adequate consideration of alternative causal explanations for the observed results.

*Key words:* Alaska, Exxon Valdez oil spill, impact, recovery, seabirds.

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