

SCIENCE &amp; ENVIRONMENT

## Freezing Spray Ices Birds

By Stephanie Joyce



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It turns out freezing spray isn't just dangerous for cars and crabbers, it's a hazard for birds as well.

A storm sweeping through Unalaska Tuesday coated everything in thick ice - including many birds.

"The eagles, when they do take off, and they've got this frozen layer on their wings, you can hear the ice cracking as they're attempting to fly, but the weight is quite a bit."

That was Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory professor Reid Brewer. He's rescued several disoriented seabirds wandering around town. He says it's unclear whether they were on the ground and got coated by ice or were beaten out of the sky by the freezing rain, but either way, they were stuck, unable to get back to the water.

"The big thing with a lot of these sea birds is that they're not used to maintaining all of their weight on their feet. They're used to being on the water or flying, so it's difficult for them to get up and going once they're on the ground."

Brewer says he consulted with the Anchorage branch of the International Bird Rescue and Research Center to figure out what to do with the ice-

logged birds. They recommended putting them back in the ocean, so long as they weren't injured.

But the Center's Director Emeritus Jay Holcomb says this is a highly unusual event. He says while it's common to have birds grounded by storms, he's never heard of birds getting coated in ice.

If you find an icy sea bird, Brewer recommends being careful – they peck - and finding a sheltered cove to release it.

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