

**A Murre Tragedy.**—The accompanying cut portrays a California Murre (*Uria troille californica*) in a very hopeless as well as helpless condition—he has been “oiled”. In the latter part of March, 1920, B. F. Hake and myself tramped from Santa Cruz to Halfmoon Bay, California, practically all the way along the beach. During this trip we saw no less than thirty-five Murres in this predicament. They were in all stages from recently oiled and in fair condition physically to badly emaciated and in many cases dead.

The plumage of the Murre is particularly susceptible to picking up the clots of floating oil that escapes from the oil carrying tankers. This material adheres to the breast feathers as is indicated by the photograph, and, what is much more disastrous, to the feathers under the wings. As a result the feathers mat, allowing the water to get through the feathers and next to the skin with the final result that the bird no longer feeds and soon dies of exposure and starvation, or, before that stage is reached, becomes the prey of the beach-combing coyote.

The oil comes from the tankers that load at various points along the coast. They are ballasted on their incoming trips by filling their tanks with water. When this is pumped out, whatever oil there happens to be left in the tank passes out and floats off to ensnare any swimming birds that happen to come into contact with it.

It is truly a pitiable sight to see these handsome and normally immaculate birds standing or sitting up on the beach or out on a rock vainly trying to preen themselves



Fig. 25. AN “OILED” MURRE.

free of this direful clinging mass; and at last, becoming too weak for further attempt, they sit stoically awaiting the end.

As a matter of interest in passing, the bird in the picture bears in his pose a suggestion of his quadruped ancestry. The use of the wings as props to help maintain an upright position, as well as to assist in propelling while on the ground, speaks in no uncertain terms of an ancestor that used the anterior organs of locomotion for feet rather than wings.

During the month of March, 1919, I spent a week at Pacific Grove and Monterey. During this time I covered many miles along the beach in the vicinity. My first impression of this locality was one of dead birds. An attempt was made to make a count of the carcasses, but after enumerating several hundred the task was given up as impossible to complete. Almost without exception the presence of the soiled and matted plumage, particularly under the wings, was ample evidence of the cause of the mortality. The list was not limited to the Murres but included practically all the birds that frequent Monterey Bay in any numbers.—R. H. PALMER, *University of Washington, Seattle, March 29, 1921.*