LEARN. SEE. RESPECT. REPORT

Making your marine and coastal encounter great for wildlife - putting wildlife first!



Aim: to minimize the effect to marine and coastal wildlife from encounters with people.

Please note this is work in progress and is regularly reviewed in the light of feedback received.

Cornwall's coastal and marine wildlife, so essential to our economy, is under pressure from climate change, habitat loss, less available food, pollution and human activity...it needs our help and respect!

Key messages:

- Learn: find out first. Learn as much as you can about what wildlife you might see where and know the best way to act around it. This will help you improve your chances of great sightings.
- See: be alert whilst out and about.
- > **Respect: act appropriately** and aim to leave wildlife as you found it.
- Report: see the big picture. Understand that our coastal and marine wildlife has numerous encounters with people. Tell us about your sighting and any disturbance you see.

Content of document: (Dark blue boxes contain essential information)

PAGE	
2	Guiding principles - What you can do to help
3	Signs of disturbance and actions that scare, startle and panic wildlife
4	At the coast - Guidelines
5	On the sea - Guidelines
6	In the sea - Guidelines
7	Guidelines for operators and definition of disturbance
8	Birds
11	Seals
13	Dolphins, porpoises and whales
16	Basking sharks
20	Turtles



GUIDING PRINCIPLES: What YOU can do to help: Give SPACE & TIME



Grey seal called Medallion man, photo by Sue Sayer

- Check our website for sensitive wildlife sites www.cornwallmarinelifecode.com
- **Expect the unexpected** be alert and get prepared
- **Observe from a distance** use binoculars if you can
- Look for signs that you've been spotted by wildlife and avoid actions that scare, startle or panic animals
- Large groups and mothers with young are best avoided completely
- If you decide to move closer, **approach side on, around the outside** making sure the animal/s have a clear escape route
- **Be patient and wait downwind**, move predictably, steadily and slowly
- **Be calm** and quiet while you enjoy your encounter
- **Be considerate**, back off and move on to keep your encounter brief
- Leave wildlife and the environment as you found it
- **Report sightings** www.marinedatacornwall.org or species / disturbance incidents to the hotline 0345 201 26 26

Signs of disturbance - how do you know you have been spotted?

Obviously this depends on the animal (more information for different species can be found on the wildlife pages), but the signs may include some or all of the following: looking at you, sudden movements and alarm calls. If you ignore these reactions then more serious responses may follow, for example: a change of behaviour, a change of direction, rapid movements, bunching up, flight, rushing to the sea, aggression, repeated crash dives or tail slaps.



Shag, photo by Andy Hay rspb-images.com

Your actions that can scare, startle or panic wildlife - The real "No nos":

- Large numbers of people / craft surrounding marine life
- Head on, close approaches
- Moving at speed and making a lot of noise
- Chasing wildlife or making wildlife separate, scatter or stampede
- Flushing wildlife off rocks into the sea or air
- Approaching large groups or mothers with young
- Feeding wild animals which has damaging lifelong effects
- Re-engaging animals once they have left
- Damaging the environment or leaving litter.

'At the coast' GUIDELINES

Cornwall's accessible coast is spectacular and a haven for wildlife with opportunities for awe inspiring encounters that can include watching sea birds feed their chicks, seals snoozing on favored beaches or feeding their pups to the miniature world of a rockpool.



General advice to avoid disturbance AT THE COAST:

- Where present, **please pay attention to signs** that help you to minimize your impact on wildlife
- Aim to watch wildlife unseen so be cautious, stealthy and quiet
- Keep a look out for wildlife and **use binoculars** or a telescope to get a better view and avoid the need to get close. Make sure the automatic flash is off on your camera
- Assess the situation and think like the animal to work what they are doing, where they are going and what might frighten them to help decide how you can avoid disturbing them
- Make any approach steady, predictable and non-direct
- Be very **careful where you are putting your feet** to avoid crushing burrows, eggs or animals
- Look for signs wildlife has spotted you and be prepared to get out of sight, back off or take an alternative route
- Remember disturbance is more likely when more people are present, so **stay together in a group.** Ensure the wildlife doesn't get surrounded and has an escape route
- Let animals move away and please don't chase, feed or touch wild animals
- If you move stones in rockpools, be careful and **put them back where you found them**
- Leave animals as carefully as you approached them
- Avoid damaging the environment itself by trampling vegetation that might increase the chance of erosion and take all litter home
- It is very important to **keep pets under control** and remember that they can also cause disturbance
- Where sites have been designated, disturbing their listed features (e.g. wildlife, plants, geology) can result in a fine of up to £20,000.

'On the sea' GUIDELINES

Off the Cornish coast, there is a lot of amazing wildlife to see from large rafts of resting seabirds to curious and engaging seals. Encounters may be distant and fleeting, but this is better for the wellbeing of our marine life, so keep your eyes peeled. If you spot wildlife, tell others with quiet low key signals.

General advice to avoid disturbance ON THE SEA:

- Be alert and keep a look out for wildlife
- Use binoculars to get a better view and to avoid the need to get too close.
- Cameras with zooms are recommended, but automatic flashes should be switched off
- If you see wildlife, slow down
- Avoid highly sensitive areas such as breeding sites or large groups of animals and allow them to stay together as you found them
- Keep watching the wildlife and where appropriate quietly spread the word to others
- Work out what you think the animals are doing, where they are heading and how they may react to you to help decide how you can avoid disturbing them
- Make sure your craft's movements are constant, steady and predictable
- Stay a good distance away and choose indirect, side on approaches and departures
- Let the animals decide how close they want to be to you and move away at the first sign of disturbance (see page 3)
- If an animal in the water has chosen to make a close approach and it is safe to do so, consider putting the boat in neutral
- More crafts, vessels and people will increase the chances of disturbing marine life, so be extra careful. Make sure animals have a wide escape route by not surrounding them or boxing them in on the shoreline
- If you have them, think about engine / propeller noise and echo sounders...consider **sound levels and aim to keep levels constant**



Basking shark, photo by Paul Naylor

- If you are paddling, sailing or rowing you will need to be aware that a silent approach may startle wildlife more if they wake up and suddenly see you
- Never follow, chase or feed marine life
- Avoid damaging the environment by carrying rather than dragging craft to the sea, and take all litter home
- There are several bodies which **regulate the sea**, and a suite of both local and national regulations may be used to limit activities and protect important wildlife in some areas. These regulations can include local bylaws (which incur fines) and national legislation (which can attract fines of up to £5000, or six months in prison.) It's your responsibility to be aware of these.

'In the sea' GUIDELINES

The seas around Cornwall offer spectacular opportunities for seeing marine and coastal wildlife for divers. snorkelers. surfers. swimmers and other recreational users. Experiences can vary widely from seeing communities of vibrantly coloured, encrusting animals to encounters with giant basking sharks. As some activities may start out from a boat, please look at the 'on the sea' section (page 5) as well.



General advice to avoid disturbance IN THE SEA:

- Keep a good look out on the surface and underwater
- Let any wildlife encounter be on their terms
- Never feed wild marine animals
- Make sure **your movements are steady and predictable** and be prepared to move out of the animal's way in good time
- Check if you have been spotted and move gently away at the first signs of disturbance (see page 3)
- If an animal in the water has chosen to make a close approach, **be calm, move slowly and predictably, keeping hands to yourself**. An example of interactive behaviour may be seals sniffing or 'mouthing' you or your gear.
- Generally there is greater potential for disturbance when more people are in the water so always leave wildlife a clear escape route
- If you handle animals, be careful and put them back where you found them
- Take care with your feet or fins as some species are very sensitive to physical damage
- When snorkeling or diving in sensitive areas, keep **good control of your buoyancy** to avoid touching the seabed or smothering it in clouds of sand or mud
- If you use flash for photos, **limit the number of photos** you take of the same animals. In the dark use the **edge of a light beam** rather than shining it directly at the animal
- Take all litter home
- Snorkeling, diving or swimming with large marine mammals and basking sharks is not recommended. If you decide to, or encounter them by chance, follow the guidance above where relevant and make sure you are prepared by following the guidance for species specific codes on pages 8 to 21. Choose to snorkel with basking sharks via accredited boat tour operators who closely follow the Basking Shark Code of Conduct.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OPERATORS: Give animals SPACE and TIME!

- Check the website for sensitive wildlife sites www.cornwallmarinelifecode.com
- Manage the expectations of your clients by briefing them about potential sightings and how to respond when wildlife is seen, particularly about low key communication.
 Explain that you will talk about the wildlife at a time when it will not cause disturbance
- **Expect the unexpected** be alert for signs of wildlife
- Observe from a distance use binoculars if you can
- Move slowly and quietly whenever wildlife is seen
- All encounters should be on the animals terms
- Look for signs you've been spotted by wildlife (page 3) and avoid actions that scare, startle or panic them (page 3)
- Large groups and mothers with young are best avoided completely
- If you decide to move closer, **approach side on, around the outside** making sure the animal/s have a clear escape route
- Be patient and wait downwind, move predictably, steadily and slowly
- Be calm and quiet while you enjoy your encounter
- Be **considerate**, back off and move on to keep your encounter brief, particularly if you are with a large group or if others are nearby
- Leave wildlife and the environment as you found it
- Ideally you will provide your clients with information about impacts, pressures, threats and conservation issues linked to the wildlife you have seen
- **Reflect on every wildlife encounter** considering how well it went and what can be learned for next time
- Please **report sightings** www.marinedatacornwall.org , disturbance incidents to the hotline 0345 201 26 26 and consider participating in marine life related research.

What is disturbance?

In this code "disturbance" is when interaction with people changes the behaviour of an animal or its environment, affecting its well-being or survival prospects. This might include raised stress levels, loss of energy from repeated avoidance or flight; vulnerability to predators; masked communication; disrupted or altered behaviour patterns (breathing, resting, feeding, breeding, nursing, migration); loss of body condition; compromised immune systems and physical injury.

BIRDS



Peregrine, photo by Chris Gommersall rspb-images.com

Cornwall's coast is a very special place for birds and the sea provides food and a safe place to rest for many. Some birds spend their whole life at the coast while others use it mainly in the breeding season (February to July, depending on the species) or over winter.

To thrive, birds need safe places to rest and feed throughout the year as well as suitable places to breed. Depending on the species, birds nest in crevices, on cliff tops and cliff faces at different levels, in burrows and on boulder, shingle or sandy beaches above the high tide line.

Cliffs are important for seabirds such as guillemots, fulmars, shags and kittiwakes, several large gull species, plus ravens, jackdaws and the rarer choughs, as well as raptors such as. peregrines and kestrels. **Shorebirds** including turnstones and oystercatchers use rocky and sandy beaches while wading birds and wildfowl, including dunlin, lapwings, curlews, shelduck, wigeon and teal use the more sheltered estuaries and saltmarshes. In winter, some **inshore areas** are particularly important for divers and grebes while estuaries attract large numbers of waders and wildfowl.



How disturbance affects them:

- Birds scared away from nests **leave their eggs or young** at risk of chilling and attack from predators. Eggs and chicks may also be knocked into the sea by panicked parents
- Birds that are repeatedly scared from an area may **stop using it altogether**. This also reduces the areas available for birds to live and breed
- Birds scared off whilst roosting, resting and feeding will **use up vital energy**, making them more vulnerable to predators and disease.

Actions that scare, startle or panic birds:

- Getting too close
- Sudden movements
- Loud noises, shouts & screams

How to tell you've been spotted:

- Heads up
- Bunching together or turning
- Alarm calls
- Birds will look visibly agitated



Razorbill, photo by Andy Hay rspb-images.com

It's too late and definitely time to move away if you see:

- Birds taking flight
- Birds circling above or around you
- Birds mobbing or dive bombing you





(Left) Redshank, photo by Andy Hay rspb-images.com

(Right) Dunlin, photo by Andy Hay

Tips to avoid disturbing birds

Follow the general guidelines (see page 2) and in particular:

- Seabirds use steep cliffs and rocky islands as nesting sites. **Keep a safe distance away** (at least 50m and up to 300m for some sensitive species) and **don't linger** at seabird colonies during the breeding season (February to July)
- Some species are more easily scared than others so be prepared to give them more space
- Bays, estuaries and marshes are important feeding and roosting sites for birds, especially during autumn and winter (August to April). **Avoid getting too close to birds** on the shoreline, particularly around high tide and definitely if there are large numbers of birds
- Keep your dogs under control. Do not allow your dog to run at any birds.



Puffin, photo by Andy Hay rspb-image.com



Atlantic grey seal, photo by Sue Sayer Cornwall Seal Group

Most seals seen around **Cornwall's coast are grey** seals, but common seals occasionally visit. Seals often spend time out of the water, hauling out at favoured spots to rest, digest their food, breed and look after their pups. They are very agile in the water and will escape to the sea if they feel threatened. Seals are inquisitive and after initially observing from a distance, will often approach and follow people or watercraft out of curiosity.

Actions that scare, startle or panic:

- Sudden noise, shouts, screams or barks
- Your sudden appearance and movement
- Sudden changes in engine sound
- Getting too close
- Making eye contact like a predator would

How to tell you've been spotted:

- Heads up
- Seals looking round and at you



Getting too close, photo by Dan Jarvis

It's too late and definitely time to move away if a seal or seals:

- Start to move towards or rush (stampede) into the sea
- Crash or splash dive
- Hiss or snarl at you

How disturbance affects them:

- Seals flushed into the sea will **use up vital energy** and have **raised stress levels.** They lose out on important resting time making them more vulnerable to illness and disease
- Seals stampeding to the sea may **injure themselves** on sharp rocks and marine litter and may rip out claws that get caught between rocks
- Mothers disturbed when feeding their pups may escape to the water leaving the pup vulnerable to attack. The mother may delay returning to feed and under nourished pups are not likely to survive their first winter. If repeatedly disturbed a mother may be forced to abandon her pup altogether
- Seals that are regularly disturbed at a haul out may **stop using that site**, reducing the areas available to rest and breed.

Tips to avoid disturbing seals

Follow the general guidelines (see page 2) and in particular:

- Keep clear of large groups and mothers with pups (most likely from September to November)
- If seals approach you in the water, **remain calm and quiet**, avoid actions that might scare or panic them (pages 3 and 11).

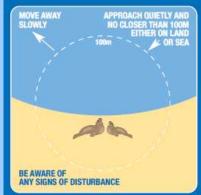


Diagram taken from the RYA Green Marine Wildlife Guide, produced in conjunction with Cornwall Wildlife Trust



(Above) Seals stampeding into the sea after disturbance, photo by Caitlin Kight.

(Right) Seal with bleeding flipper after disturbance, photo Sue Sayer



DOLPHINS, PORPOISES AND WHALES

Porpoises, whales and dolphins can be seen from the coast or at sea around Cornwall. Dolphins (particularly bottlenose dolphins) and porpoises can often be seen feeding and socialising close to shore all year round. Minke and fin whales occasionally come in closer to shore, particularly in deeper water areas and long-finned pilot whales can often be seen with dolphins or minke whales.



Bottlenose dolphins seen from cliffs in St Ives, photo by Dan Murphy

Actions that scare, startle or panic:

- Getting too close
- Approaching animals head on
- Sudden changes in speed, direction, or engine noise
- Surrounding or boxing them into an area
- Camera flashes
- Using an echo sounder or fish finder near to porpoises or dolphins

How to tell you've been spotted:

- Sudden and erratic movements (although these could be associated with feeding or play)
- Bunching together
- Changes in diving behaviour and less frequent surfacing
- Changes in breathing patterns
- Increased vocalisation (you'll only be able to hear this if you're using a hydrophone)

It's too late and definitely time to move away if:

- They increase their swimming or travelling speed
- Females maneuver to shield their calves
- They slap their tail or head on the water surface
- They become aggressive towards watchers or each other

Tips to avoid disturbing porpoises, dolphins and whales

Follow the **general guidelines** (see page 2) and in particular:

- Keep clear of large groups and mothers with young
- Ensure all encounters are on their terms by, ideally, only being close to them if they choose to be close to you – e.g. dolphins bow-riding
- If you find yourself unexpectedly close, slow down or stop and allow them to pass. Put the engine into neutral so there is no chance of injuring them with the propeller and check carefully before re-engaging the engine
- If dolphins choose **to bow-ride, maintain a steady speed** and course and stay vigilant
- **Don't approach again** once you or the animal have moved away
- Make sure your engine and propellers are well maintained

Manx Wildlife Trust

Harbour porpoise, photo by Niki Clear for

Risso dolphin, photo by Niki Clear for Manx Wildlife Trust



If you do decide to approach:

- From a minimum of 1km away, **approach side on, at a steady slow speed** (less than 6 knots) making sure they have a good clear escape route
- Keep to the outside of a group of animals to avoid scattering or separating them and leave them plenty of space
- Maintain a steady direction and 'no wake' speed
- Limit the time you spend with them, **leave after 15 minutes**
- Limit the number of boats in proximity to the animals by leaving the area is necessary

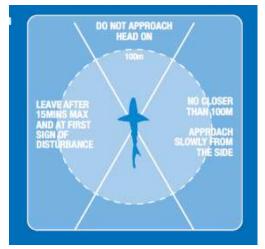


Diagram taken from the RYA Green Marine Wildlife Guide, produced in conjunction with Cornwall Wildlife Trust

How disturbance affects them;

- Interacting with or avoiding humans can disr**upt their communication and use up vital energy**, making animals more prone to disease and attack from predators
- Whales, porpoises and dolphins use echo-location to interpret their environment and find out where other animals and objects are. Engine and propeller noise can confuse or drown out these sound signals which can disorientate the animals and disrupt their communication and feeding
- Whales, dolphins and porpoises can be **injured or killed** in collisions with boats and propellers.



Common dolphins approaching and swmming alongside boat, photo by Sue Sayer

BASKING SHARKS

Basking sharks can grow up to I I m long. They are the UK's biggest fish (and the world's second largest). They feed on plankton - tiny plants and animals that drift around in the sea. They're usually seen around Cornwall's coast in the spring and summer when they're feeding close to the surface. Their oddly shaped tail, which often appears above the surface, along with their lack of surfacing and diving, helps to tell them apart from cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises).



Basking shark, photo by Tony Sutton

Actions that scare, startle or panic:

- Getting too close
- Sudden movements
- Surrounding or crowding them

How to tell you've been spotted:

- A basking shark feeding at the surface suddenly dives
- Sudden tail movements and a rapid change of direction away from a boat or person. Basking sharks are have quite poor vision and are often focused on feeding on dense plankton. This means people may accidentally get too close and the shark will panic suddenly.

It's too late and definitely time to move away if:

- It's a while before the basking shark resurfaces and starts feeding
- They increase their swimming or travelling speed
- A basking shark lashes its tail it may be about to breach or dive.

Follow the general guidelines (see page 2) and in particular:

- Keep clear of large groups they are likely to be gathering to breed
- Avoid sharks swimming close together nose to tail, as you may disrupt courtship behaviour
- Keep clear of areas where they've been seen breaching
- Ensure all encounters are on their terms by, ideally, only being close to them if they choose to be close to you
- If you find yourself unexpectedly close, slow down or stop and allow them to pass. If safe, put the **engine into neutral** so there is no chance of injuring them with the propeller, as there may be others under the surface. Check carefully before re-engaging the engine.

How disturbance affects them:

- Basking sharks are slow moving and appear to be relatively unaware of other water users, making the possibility of a collision or injury from a propeller more likely. They can weigh up to 7 tonnes so a collision can cause serious injury to them and you!
- Basking sharks don't breed until they are about 20 years old, so their long term survival could be put at risk if they are regularly disturbed at breeding time. They need to be in good health to breed successfully and regular disturbance during peak feeding times is likely to affect their health.

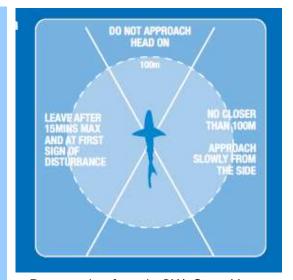


Diagram taken from the RYA Green Marine Wildlife Guide, produced in conjunction with Cornwall Wildlife Trust



Basking shark feeding, photo by Paul Naylor

Basking Shark Code of Conduct

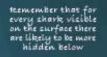
BOAT-USERS, KAYAKERS, SWIMMERS, DIVERS AND SURFERS

The following guidelines have been designed to help water-users reduce the risk of injuring or harassing Basking Sharks, ensuring they return to British waters each year.



Do not approach within 100m of the sharks – but if you do find yourself close to Basking Sharks here are some general tips:

- Although mostly placid, Basking Sharks can startle if disturbed, often thrashing their tail with enormous power
- Be extremely cautious in areas where Basking Sharks have been seen breaching
- Avoid pairs or large numbers of sharks following each other closely. This
 may be courting behaviour and they should not be disturbed. Maintain a
 distance of at least 500m
- Remember that for every shark visible on the surface there are likely to be more hidden below
- Take time to observe the direction(s) of movement of the sharks and then quietly position yourself alongside their anticipated course for a safe and enjoyable view. Wait for them to come to you
 - Don't forget to take pictures of the fins for the Photo-ID Project and record your sighting



Mainkain a distance 4 metres away from each shark

teestrict the number of people in the water at any one time

WIMMERS, DIVERS AND SURFERS

- Maintain a distance of at least 4m from each shark and be wary of the tail
- Do not try to touch the sharks
- Do not swim towards them if they are near you
- Ideally, swimmers should remain on the surface stay in a group, rather than stringing out around the sharks
- No more than four people in the water within 100m of a shark at any one time

www.baskingsharks.org

The Surv Truck Indomney

A REMEMBER

Basking Sharks are legally protected in the UK. It is illegal to intentionally kill, injure, recklessly disturb or harass Basking Sharks in British waters. Any person committing such an offence could face up to 6 months in prison and a large fine. 200 m switch the engine to neutral

> teestriet your speed to below & knots

when closer than

 Never chase a shark or direct a vessel towards them — this could make them dive or act unpredictably
 When sharks are sighted, restrict speed to below 6

- knots and/or operate under sail When closer than 100m, switch the engine to neutral
- to avoid injuring sharks Avoid sudden changes in speed
- · Do not allow several vessels to surround the shark(s)
- Jet-skie should not approach Basking Sharks

Stay in a group, rather than stringing out around the sharks

which will disturb the sharks

them dive or act unpredictably

\$ 10

 Try not cross the path of the shark so the sharks can maintain their course without changing direction or speed

Remain calm and quiet - avoid sudden movements

several kayaks to surround them – this could make

Never paddle directly towards the sharks or allow

Never use your paddle or kayak to touch a shark

Basking shark code of conduct for swimmers, thanks to The Shark Trust

TURTLES

Five of the world's seven turtle species have been seen in the sea around the UK and Ireland. They nest on tropical beaches and feed mainly on jellyfish which are usually found in tropical and temperate waters. Being reptiles (like snakes and lizards) they're not able to control their own body temperature so most of them find the waters around Cornwall too cold. They are usually seen in late summer and autumn when the sea's at its warmest. Adult leatherback turtles are the ones most likely to be seen because they are the largest and more able to control their temperature. They are black with white spots and have obvious ridges running down their back.



Leatherback, photo by Matt Witt

Actions that scare, startle or panic:

• Getting too close

How to tell you've been spotted:

 It's not that easy to see turtles until you're fairly close to them and as soon as you get too close they will dive

It's too late and definitely time to move away if:

• Turtle dives

Tips to avoid disturbing turtles;

Follow the general guidelines (see page 2) and in particular:

• In late summer and autumn, if you see large numbers of jellyfish, keep an extra lookout for turtles.

How disturbance affects them:

- Turtle numbers are already in decline so they need extra care. We are most likely to see them when they've followed an influx of jellyfish so any disturbance is likely **to use up vital energy and stop them from feeding or resting**
- They are also at **risk from marine litter**, especially plastic bags and fishing gear that they can get caught in. They mistakenly eat plastic bags, probably because they look like jellyfish, and once swallowed, plastic bags block their digestive system.



Leatherback turtle caught in ropes, photo by Dave Jarvis

USEFUL CONTACTS

- To report any wildlife disturbance or harassment please call the Cornwall Marine and Coastal Code Group 24 hour disturbance hotline 0345 2012626. A verbal report should be supported with video footage and/or photographic evidence if possible
- If you find dead marine animals please call Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Stranding Network on 0345 2012626
- If you find a live, stranded animal in difficulty please call British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) immediately on 01825 765546
- Send in your marine sightings and records to www.marinedatacornwall.org

www.cornwallmarinelifecode.org.uk



Cornwall Marine and Coastal Code Group -

Supported by Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Cornwall Seal Group, RSPB, British Divers Marine Life Rescue, National Trust, Natural England, Marine Management Organisation, Cornwall Council, and the Devon and Cornwall Police Wildlife Crime Unit.