



Helping you to take action to avoid disturbing seals

www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk : Please report all seal disturbance incidents to sue@cornwallsealgroup.co.uk



Signs of disturbance
1 Looking round



2 Moving towards sea



3 Entering the water

How disturbance affects seals

Seals need to haul out to rest and digest their food. Repeated disturbance may compromise their energy reserves. Seals haul out more during their annual moult (Spring) and their breeding season (Autumn). Seals that are rushing towards the sea may stampede, scaring seals around them in a domino effect. Rushing seals are less careful and may gash their bellies or rip out claws.

Recognising disturbance

Disturbance is a complicated issue and can be different from one seal to another and for the same seal at different times, conditions or locations. To avoid disturbing seals, you have to observe their behaviour carefully. There are 3 progressive signs of disturbance. Firstly a seal will look at you, then it will move towards the sea and if the disturbance continues, the seal will enter the water.

Causes of disturbance

Seals are disturbed most by what they can see and hear even across large distances! Non-marine sounds (e.g. raised or loud human voices, especially high pitched children's voices or dog barks) and changing sounds (e.g. slowing boat engines) alert a seal to potential danger. The worst disturbance often results from close proximity to people, especially if their approach was sudden and silent (e.g. in an Ocean Kayak) or if people or their pets make a sudden loud sound or quick movements.

How to avoid disturbance

When a seal senses potential danger, it will look round to assess the danger. At this point, if it is easy for you to do so without moving quickly, get out of their line of sight (e.g. stepping back from a cliff top.) If not, maintain a still silence and avoid eye contact (seals associate 2 eyes with predators!) If the seal looks away, then relooks at you repeatedly, appears anxious or moves towards the sea you are already close enough. Watch the seal's reactions & act respectfully.

Impacts of disturbance on seals and other people

Disturbance is an interaction between you and the seal and it is your responsibility to manage that interaction on behalf of the seal. Disturbance doesn't just impact on the seals' health and your opportunity to look at them in the wild, but it is likely to impact on the enjoyment of other people who may have been watching the seals now or later in the day.



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