

Press release: How to watch marine wildlife responsibly

As large numbers of visitors begin to flock to the Cornish coast, the Cornwall Marine and Coastal Code Group is sending out a timely reminder on how to responsibly enjoy watching marine wildlife such as dolphins and basking sharks.

The species most often affected are seabirds and seals as they come on to land to rest, but dolphins and basking sharks close to shore will quickly attract a lot of attention, making them vulnerable to overcrowding or being chased and can lead to accidents.

The Cornwall Marine and Coastal Code group includes Cornwall Wildlife Trust, the RSPB, Cornwall Seal Group, National Trust, Marine Stranding Network and the British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR), Cornwall Council, Devon and Cornwall Police Marine & Coastal Policing Team, the Marine Management Organisation and Natural England.

Full guidelines can be found on the [Cornwall Wildlife Trust's website](#). These recommendations include:

- keep your distance from resting animals such as seals and seabirds on land
- remain calm and quiet so resting animals are not disturbed and scared off
- move slowly and avoid sudden changes in direction and speed if animals are nearby
- stay side on to the animals while watching them rather than approaching directly
- if there are other boats/kayaks etc nearby then ensure the animals have plenty of space and an obvious escape route should they choose to leave, and to not pursue them when they do

One such incident off Padstow in 2013 resulted in the death of a bottlenose dolphin calf from a local inshore pod, threatening the long-term survival of the group. [The people responsible were successfully prosecuted.](#)

Dan Jarvis from BDMLR said:

The South West has an amazing range of marine species that are a big part of why lots of people love to visit the region, but sometimes people's encounters with our wildlife do not go well for the animals involved.

We are incredibly fortunate that we have these animals here in the first place and it is a privilege that we're able to see them, so we want to help people get the best out of these encounters by following some simple guidelines that will avoid causing distress

and harm.

By encouraging people to use these guidelines, we hope that they in turn will share them with others, so that many more people are aware of how their actions, and those of others, can affect the behaviour of animals that need to use these habitats too. We are all out on the coast to enjoy the amazing environment we have here and we need to make sure the animals that live there are still able to enjoy it too, otherwise they could abandon the area and we all lose out.

Guidance for recreational boaters

The Green Blue, the joint environment campaign run by the Royal Yachting Association and British Marine, has worked with other organisations including the MMO to produce The Green Wildlife Guide for Boaters. This advises boaters on how to get the best experience out of their wildlife encounters by acting responsibly and cautiously to minimize the risk of disturbance while keeping participants and their boats safe.

The guide is [available online](#) or a hard copy can be obtained by emailing info@thegreenblue.org.uk.

Campaign Manager for The Green Blue, Kate Fortnam, said:

It is perfectly safe and lawful to view marine wildlife by adopting a few simple measures – acting responsibly and cautiously to minimise the risk of disturbance is always the safest course of action.

Visit thegreenblue.org.uk for your copy of The Green Wildlife Guide for Boaters, or drop us a line for a hard copy.

Reporting incidents of marine wildlife disturbance

If you see marine species such as dolphins, porpoise or whales being disturbed, please contact your [nearest MMO office](#) or local police force wildlife crime officer on 101.

Incidents of disturbance in Cornwall can be reported to the Cornwall Wildlife Trust's disturbance hotline on 0345 201 2626, which has seen a steady increase in the number of calls over the last few weeks with the warmer weather.

Laws protecting marine wildlife

Details of the laws protecting marine species can be found on [the Government's website](#). They have also been [previously explained by the MMO](#).