

# Public urged to 'GIVE SEALS SPACE'

The Seal Alliance has launched a new government-backed campaign to ['Give Seals Space'](#) and reduce the shocking impact that human disturbance can have on these vulnerable marine mammals.

As the public go out for walks over the Easter weekend, the Seal Alliance warns that getting too close to seals can lead to their injury and death, even up to several months later.

The UK is home to 38% of the entire world's population of grey seals and 30% of the European subspecies of common seals, yet these precious mammals face an extensive list of threats including climate change, toxic pollution, entanglement, collisions with vessels, plastics and other marine debris. Of these threats, disturbance from human interaction is a significant and growing problem.

Seals are vulnerable to any kind of human interactions, either deliberate or unintentional. The 'Give Seals Space' signs and leaflets will raise awareness of the simple steps the public can take to protect these precious creatures. It features four easy-to-remember steps:

- Keep well away from seals (use a camera zoom or binoculars) so that they can't smell, hear or see you
- Keep dogs on a lead when in an area where seals might be present
- Never feed seals
- Take all litter home

Young seals are most affected by disturbance and only 25% are likely to survive to the age of 18 months in a bad year. If people are being noisy or startle the vulnerable animals by getting too close, this wastes their energy, meaning young pups struggle to haul out of the water to rest and digest their food.

Female seals are heavily pregnant or pupping during the summer and getting too close or disturbing them can lead to seals stampeding on rocks, which prove fatal to both mother and pup. The impact on seals can also be invisible but results in mothers not being able to build sufficient fat reserves so they cannot feed new-born pups adequately.

The campaign is a timely reminder as the public go out for walks, take part in water activities or fly drones over the Easter weekend, and as lockdown measures gradually ease across the UK. The Seal Alliance is urging the public to exhibit special caution as seals have ventured further inshore on beaches and coastlines that have become quieter during lockdown.

**Environment Secretary George Eustice said:**

Seals are one of our most iconic marine mammals. They can be found along our coastline around the UK, and we must do all that we can

to protect them.

Disturbance by members of the public can be detrimental to seals, but this is entirely preventable. I would urge everyone to follow the guidance, give seals the space that they need and respect this vulnerable marine species.

This campaign will raise vital awareness ahead of the bank holiday weekend and help protect some of our most treasured marine wildlife.

**Andy Ottaway, of the Seal Protection Action Group, said:**

Our precious coastal wildlife is coming under increasing human pressure. We need to be aware of the harm we can cause by getting too close to our seals and the often tragic consequences when we do.

**Sue Sayer, of the Seal Research Trust, said:**

I have witnessed bleeding, grazed flippers, ripped-out claws and gashed bellies that leave blood trails across the rocks after a stampede. Seals need our help so please keep yourself downwind and your dog on a lead.

If a seal is looking at you, it has been disturbed, so please move further away. Use your camera and binoculars, stay quiet and out of sight. If we follow these simple rules we can enjoy watching seals for longer and without harm – a win-win for both people and seals.

The Seal Alliance has used funding to produce leaflets and signage, for the public and wildlife tour operators, with guidance on how to [‘Watch Seals Well’](#) so not to disturb them. The funding has also allowed the Alliance to employ a ‘digital ranger’ to help promote messages across social media platforms.

Key messages and resources can be found at <https://www.sealalliance.org/downloads>