

Public urged to stay safe during busy seal pupping season

Thousands of grey seals descend on the beaches of Donna Nook and the nearby coastline during November and December to give birth. This spectacle attracts wildlife enthusiasts from across the UK who scramble across the dunes to witness this natural wonder.

However, areas of Donna Nook and land in close proximity is owned by the MOD. As well as being home to historical military activity, the site, including inland and beach locations is still used for live firing and tactical training activities.

These activities pose a safety risk to the general public. Safety remains the MOD's top priority and one risk that the MOD is specifically keen to highlight is the very real danger of disturbing military debris, including unexploded ordnance. Items that are fired, dropped, discarded or buried can be inadvertently disturbed by walkers, ramblers and dogs, sometimes with unintended consequences.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal specialists from the Royal Engineers check a detonated 3kg payload at RAF Donna Nook, after it was dropped by an RAF Hawk during Exercise TERMINAL STRIKE last year. Crown Copyright / MOD 2021.

As custodians of large parts of the land, the MOD is keen to educate the public about these dangers and the simple actions they can take to reduce the risk of injury or worse.

Lt Col Andy Hough, DIO's Regional Commander for the East of England, said:

The pupping season presents a wonderful opportunity for members of the public to explore unique areas of the Defence Estate at Donna Nook and the surrounding region. We recognise the huge benefit to mental and physical well-being that outdoor recreation can have when safe to do so.

Due to its location and historical and active engagement with military activity, debris does often wash up with the tide, or remain in situ after air delivered training. Many of these items can be extremely dangerous. If members of the public spot anything we ask them to report it, never touch it. This includes keeping dogs on a lead and paying special attention to what they might pick up off the floor.

Just a few months ago a member of the public carried a piece of munitions debris from the beach to hand over to my colleagues. What they considered an act of diligence, put their life at risk. Had an

item exploded it would have undoubtedly led to a fatality.

In addition to accidentally disturbing UXO, a small minority deliberately search out and remove ordnance as a hobby, with some even selling what they find to collectors.

Two spent 3kg bombs near one of the targets at RAF Donna Nook. Crown Copyright / MOD 2022.

Lt Col Hough added:

Deliberate removal of UXO is not only dangerous, it's also against the law. We encourage anybody considering removing and selling UXO to stop and think about the danger they are putting themselves in.

We're really keen to see people out enjoying the pupping season. However, our message is simple. Only access military land when and where it is safe to do so, and with caution at all times.

Donna Nook is part of a public safety campaign targeting popular tourist sites in the UK. Respect the Range reinforces a key safety message about safe access to military land and training estates. More information on the campaign can be found at [gov.uk/guidance/safe-access](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safe-access).