

# Be Nature Aware

As a visitor to the Berwickshire, Northumberland and North Tyneside coast you will be sharing our sea and beaches with some of the most important wildlife in the UK. Creatures such as birds, seals, or dolphins can easily become stressed or injured in the presence of people but there are some simple ways in which you can avoid disturbing wildlife. Perhaps the most important is to be aware of the signs that wildlife is reacting to your presence and to change your behaviour accordingly.



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NatureScot's [A Guide to Best Practice For Watching Marine Wildlife](#) contains more information about disturbance to coastal wildlife and how it can be avoided.

Further advice about boating around wildlife can be found at the [Green Blue website](#)

## Birds

The Berwickshire, Northumberland and North Tyneside coast supports internationally significant numbers of birds throughout the year and is used by both wintering and breeding species.

Important numbers of breeding birds can be found on cliffs, on offshore islands, or as ground nesting species on sandy beaches. Wintering birds can be found feeding or resting along all of our coast and estuaries. At high tides they may gather on artificial structures such as piers.

Disturbance to birds interferes with their ability to feed, leave them exposed to predators, and be detrimental to their ability to raise young or survive harsh winter conditions. The cumulative impact of lots of small disturbance events can have a big impact on birds.

One of the most important things you can do to reduce disturbance to birds is to look out for wildlife and be aware of the impact your presence is having. Give space to birds at the coast. Forty to 50 metres is usually enough but be guided by the behaviour of the birds and give more space if you witness signs of disturbance.

**If birds act in any of the following ways it is a sign that you are getting too close:**

- **Becoming watchful or pausing their feeding activity.**
- **Moving or flying away.**
- **Making repeated alarm calls.**
- **Showing aggressive behaviour (such a dive-bombing), or pretending to be injured as you approach (for example by pretending to have a broken wing to lure you away from eggs or chicks).**

Many of our most important bird sites will have signage for visitors. Please always follow signage and be guided by any requests from site wardens.

For more advice about how to enjoy the coast without disturbing wildlife visit: [www.spaceforshorebirds.co.uk/guidance](http://www.spaceforshorebirds.co.uk/guidance)



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## Birds at Sea

Seabirds can form large groups, or rafts, on the sea both in summer and in winter. If you see a raft of birds ahead, reduce speed to less than 6 knots as you approach. Don't drive your boat or watercraft through rafts of birds and navigate around them where practicable and safe to do so. Ideally maintain a distance of at least 50 metres from rafting birds or from cliff nesting seabirds but be watchful for signs of disturbance and modify this if necessary.

**Signs of disturbance in rafting birds include birds begin to paddle more rapidly or turn their heads from side to side to keep you in view before taking off or diving.**

**If cliff-nesting seabirds begin to fly off or to dive in numbers then this is a sign that you are too close.**



If you see someone causing a significant disturbance to wildlife then please ring 101 and ask for it to be reported to your local Police Wildlife Liaison Officer



1. [www.nature.scot/doc/guide-best-practice-watching-marine-wildlife-smwwc](http://www.nature.scot/doc/guide-best-practice-watching-marine-wildlife-smwwc)  
 2. [www.thegreenblue.org.uk/you-your-boat-main-page/you-your-boat/info-advice/wildlife-habitats/boating-around-wildlife/](http://www.thegreenblue.org.uk/you-your-boat-main-page/you-your-boat/info-advice/wildlife-habitats/boating-around-wildlife/)  
 3. [www.spaceforshorebirds.co.uk/guidance/](http://www.spaceforshorebirds.co.uk/guidance/)

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**Seal breeding season**

**Common seals:** 1st Jun – 31st Aug  
**Grey seals:** 1st Nov – 31st Jan

More information about seals and disturbance is available from the Seal Alliance's [Watching Seals Well leaflet](#)<sup>4</sup>

## Seals

There are three signs that seals are becoming disturbed:

- Head up and looking at you - if you notice this behaviour, back off and/or change your method and speed of approach.
- Shifting around and becoming agitated – if this happens you are getting too close and should back off carefully.
- Stampeding into the water – at this point seals are definitely being disturbed.

Avoid displacing or disturbing seals. Seals may be inquisitive, but please do not take advantage. Do not seek out encounters with seals.

## Hauling-out

Seals will come onto land ("haul out") to rest, moult, and breed. Finding a seal on a beach is a common sight and the animal is most likely just resting. Please keep your distance and remain quiet, to avoid disturbing seals. Many of our most important haul-out sites receive legal protection against deliberate or reckless disturbance.

## Pupping

Whilst remarkable to see, please keep your distance and remain quiet. It's also important not to come between a mother and her pup, as this could lead to abandonment.

Mothers regularly leave their pups alone on the shore while they rest, play and forage for food nearby. Lone pups are a common sight and are quite safe.

Do not approach seals directly, at land or at sea. Pass by at an oblique angle and at a respectful distance. Moving closer for a better view will increase the risk of disturbance – use binoculars for a better view



## Cetaceans (Whales, Dolphins, Porpoises)

On sighting Cetacean a while on the water, first slow down and take time to assess what the animal(s) are doing. Knowing what their original behaviour is can help you determine if you cause a disturbance.

The most obvious sign of disturbance to Cetaceans is that they will move away but other indicator can include behavioural changes such as increased swimming speed, bunching together, repeated head or tail slaps, or changes in diving/surfacing patterns. Cetaceans are particularly sensitive to disturbance when their young are present.

Allow animals to decide for themselves how close they wish to approach and whether or not they choose to interact.

Always approach Cetaceans cautiously at a speed of less than 6 knots.

A distance of 300 metres from marine mammals is often called the "caution zone". When in this zone only approach animals at an oblique angle and keep your distance.

If animals are moving in a consistent direction then maintain a steady parallel course. Do not approach from directly behind or front, and do not cut them off by moving across their path.

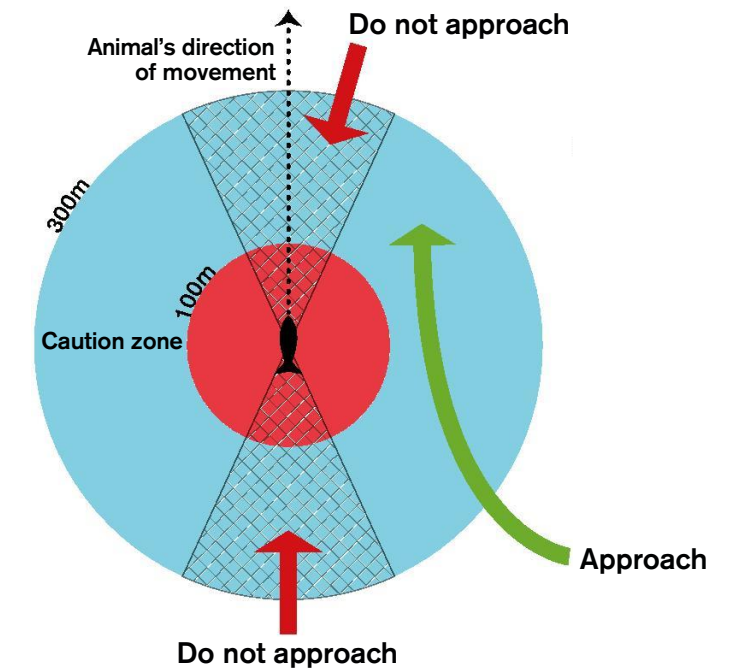


Diagram taken from [www.nature.scot/doc/guide-best-practice-watching-marine-wildlife-smwvc](http://www.nature.scot/doc/guide-best-practice-watching-marine-wildlife-smwvc)

4. [www.bdmlr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Seal-Alliance-LEAFLET.pdf](http://www.bdmlr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Seal-Alliance-LEAFLET.pdf)