

Appreciating Wildlife

Sea Birds

Cliff nesting seabirds are most vulnerable when the adults are with their eggs and young chicks. If they are suddenly scared off the ledges they may lose their young, which may fall or be taken by predators. It is good practice to move by quietly and steadily so as not to panic the birds. As well as being aware of cliff nesting birds whilst you are on the water, remember that your presence whilst walking on cliff tops could also be threatening to the birds.

In preparation for your journey check to see what animals and birds might be affected by your presence and when the breeding and nesting times are and manage your behavior and journeys appropriately.

Many birds nest in burrows or even on open ground along the tops of cliffs. Walking over a burrow can crush the nest, or cause the adult to desert its young, so do try to be aware of their presence. Be vigilant for nest grounds and move out of any breeding area as soon as you realise you are in or close to it.

It is therefore vital that we do our best to avoid disturbance and help seabird numbers to become re-established.

Birds on the Open Sea

Try to avoid panicking seabirds on the water into flight. Adult birds at sea are likely to be feeding or resting so disturbance is likely to cause them to expend extra energy, thereby reducing their feeding time, which in turn affects their survival chances. In late summer many birds moult and are at their weakest and most vulnerable. You can help by moving away quietly and steadily as soon as you are aware of being close to a colony.

Seal colonies

Never land on a beach with a colony of breeding seals, except in an emergency.

Avoid beaches with small pups on them, as a sudden disturbance can lead to pups being squashed, or separated from their parents. Common seal pups can go into the sea almost immediately after birth, whereas grey seal pups remain on the beach for about 3 weeks as they cannot swim.

Seals will often watch kayakers pass by, either from a rock or in the water. Do not use your ability to approach quietly as a way to get close to seals. If you approach silently, seals (and other animals) may be startled by your sudden appearance. The best way to avoid causing them to panic is to avoid making eye contact. If you watch a seal out of the corner of your eyes it is far less likely to dive. Try to maintain a slow, steady and predictable rhythm as you paddle past seals.

Please be aware that many tour boat owners make a living from taking tourists to look at seal colonies. The seals usually stay put when these boats approach, but often take to the water when kayaks are in the same area. Difficulties arise when kayakers cause the seals to leave

their rocks and beaches, to be followed by tour boats with tourists who are disappointed at not seeing the seals hauled out on land and this in turn leaves the tour boat owners annoyed. You can assist by being aware of the areas where such tour boats operate and take extra care to avoid disturbing the seals.

Porpoises, Dolphins, Whales and Basking Sharks

Many cetaceans (porpoises, dolphins and whales) and basking sharks etc can be seen from a sea kayak, but it is important to be aware how you can be a danger to the animal, and how it can be a danger to you.

When approaching large animals - such as cetaceans and basking sharks, remember - a moving kayak outline can appear threatening when heading straight towards them. Always approach at an oblique angle. Move steadily and predictably, and do not go too close.

Never chase after a cetacean or basking shark. If they want to see you they will come over and check you out, but if they choose to swim away from you then respect their wish.

- **Porpoises** never show any interest in kayaks so you will just see them swim by without altering their course.
- **Dolphins** on the other hand are more inquisitive and will often come over towards you. The best advice if you are close to dolphins is to just stay still and watch, or maintain a straight course and they will follow if they are interested in you.
- There are various species of **whales** and they can also come close to you. Their colossal size is obvious when they are next to you, so avoid blocking their escape route, but otherwise stay still and let them do the moving.
- Avoid getting too close to a **basking shark** as it could easily capsize you if you get in front of it, or cause you serious injury if it lashed out with its powerful tail with you alongside it.

Otters

Otters are commonly encountered along many coastlines. They should be observed from a distance that doesn't disturb their routine activities, such as fishing, resting and playing. Under no circumstances should they be pursued by kayak.

Identification of Species

It is always interesting to get home from a trip and look up in a wildlife book the bird or mammal that you have seen. Most people who canoe at sea have a few wildlife books to help them with their identification queries.