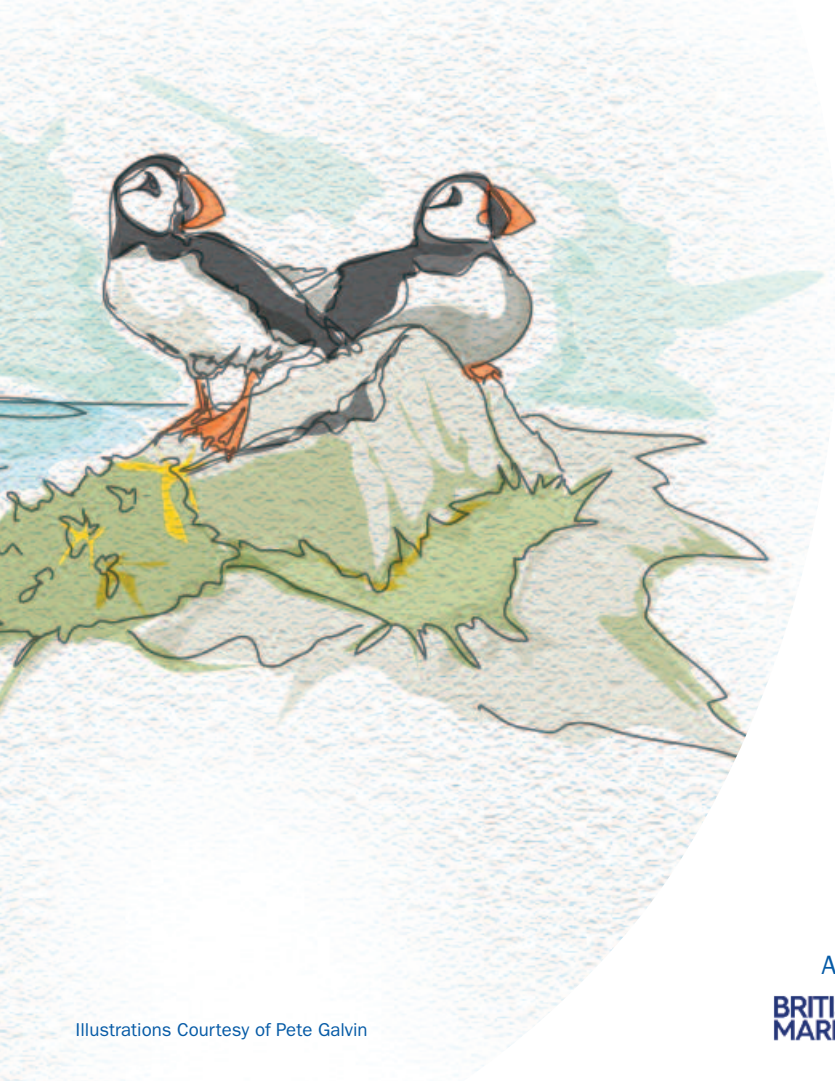


The
Green
Wildlife
Guide
for
Boaters

The Green Blue
Making the environment second nature



Illustrations Courtesy of Pete Galvin

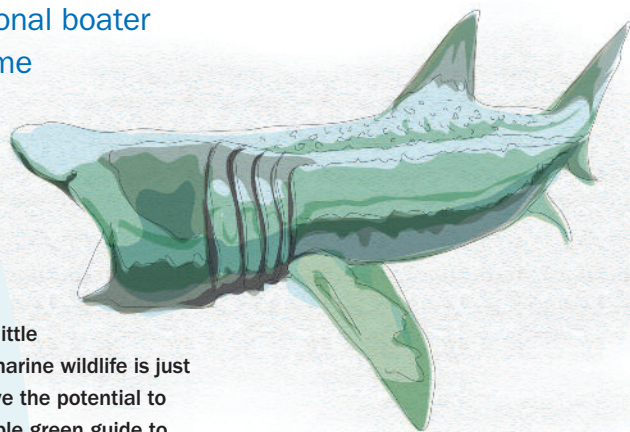


A joint Initiative



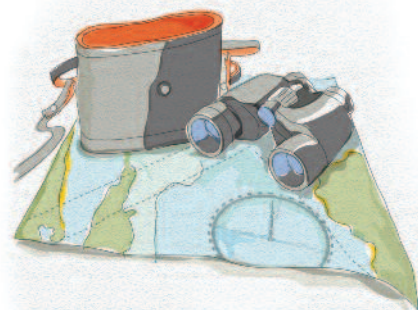
The Green Wildlife Guide for Boaters

The UK has an amazing array of marine wildlife, and as a recreational boater you may come across some extraordinary and charismatic creatures from seabirds, whales, dolphins and seals to sharks and turtles.



Whilst it might be tempting to get a little closer to see more, remember that marine wildlife is just that - wild. All types of watercraft have the potential to cause disturbance, so follow our simple green guide to keep disturbance to a minimum, get the best experience out of your wildlife encounters and keep you and your boat safe.

Remember to look out for advice and marine codes wherever you choose to go boating as they can offer a wealth of information on what species you might see, any special characteristics and any local protections you need to be aware of.



Three easy steps

See

Can you spot something in the distance or is an inquisitive creature coming to get a closer look at you?

Evaluate

How many are there, how far away, are they moving towards or away from you, are there any mothers and young?

Act

Think speed, be steady, predictable, quiet and cautious.

How close is too close?

The rule of thumb is to stay at least 100m away from marine wildlife in the water and 50m away from marine wildlife on cliffs and rocks, if you can. That said, sometimes it's difficult to judge distance, often it's the wildlife that's moving closer to you and sometimes it appears unexpectedly alongside your boat!

The best you can do is use common sense and err on the side of caution. You can judge distance by counting how far away you are in boat lengths.

For nesting birds on cliffs, and seals hauled out on rocks and ledges use binoculars to get a better view. If you don't need binoculars to see the detail you're probably too close!

In fact, using binoculars is a great way to get a good look at all marine wildlife, not just birds and seals, without getting too close.

What should you do?

If you spot something over 100m away, stay on course at a steady speed, but be prepared to slow down to let it move out of your path.

If you spot something less than 100m away, stay on course and slow down, but be prepared to stop altogether to avoid risk of collision.

Stay at least 50m away from wildlife on cliffs and rocks, and consider slowing down to a speed that reduces noise.

How slow do I need to go?

As a general principle, slow down to a speed that allows you to take action if needed to avoid a collision. However, don't put your boat at risk as it's necessary at times to maintain speed for the boat's safety in strong currents or rough weather.

If you need to put the engine into neutral to avoid propeller injury, only do so if it is safe for you and your boat. Only re-engage the engine once you've checked around you.

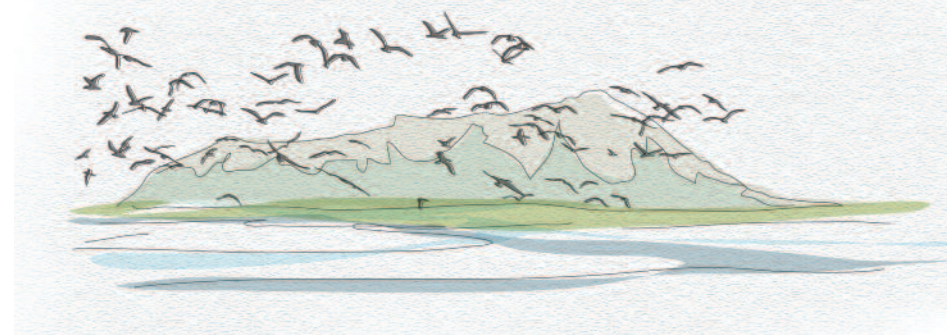
How long is too long?

If something appears unexpectedly alongside you, for example, a pod of dolphins on the bow wave, let them decide how long they want to stay, and let them decide when it's time to leave. Do not be tempted to follow them.

If you see a marine animal and you're far enough away to minimise disturbance, spend no more than 15 minutes observing quietly, and if you notice any signs of distress leave immediately.

What shouldn't you do?

Don't... turn your propeller towards the animals, chase, change course to get a closer look, steer directly towards them, over crowd them or box them in with other boats, block them between you and the shore, split or steer through a group, separate mothers and young, or outstay your welcome if you pause to take a look.



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Sky

A glance up from the helm at a rocky outcrop can reveal colonies of chattering seabirds: stunning razorbills with black plumage and distinctive white eyebrow between the eye and the bill, or unmistakable puffins with brightly coloured bills. Built for speed over, on and in the water is the Manx shearwater: black above and white below, it transforms from one shade to the other with every flap so easy to recognise on board or from the shore.

Birds may be using the water at any time of the year but typically breed between April and July when cliffs and rocks may be occupied. Young and moulting adult birds may be flightless and therefore particularly vulnerable after breeding around August and September. Cliffs are also used as winter roosting sites between October and March.

Getting too close to occupied cliffs might make birds take flight, leaving nests, eggs or chicks abandoned and vulnerable to predators. Slow down but keep in mind that even the noise of flapping sails can cause disturbance. Better still, be considerate and use binoculars to observe at a distance.

You may also spot rafts of birds on the water. The main reason is to rest and they do this in large numbers for safety. Avoid steering into rafting birds. Breaking up rafts can make birds more vulnerable to predators and use up energy.



Sea

Over 28 species of cetacean (dolphins, porpoises and whales) have been recorded in UK waters, and there are over 20 species of resident sharks commonly found all year round.

The most nimble is the bottlenose dolphin, capable of a swift 20 miles per hour. The short stubby 'bottlenose' beak makes it easy to spot. If it joins you on the bow wave, stay on course and let it decide how long it wants to stay. Do not be tempted to follow when it swims away.

You might also be lucky enough to spot a basking shark on its annual journey between May and September, from the south west of England to the west coast of Scotland. As spring approaches, these gentle giants come to the surface to filter feed with their vast mouths agape in a feeding induced trance. It is during these times that they are at their most vulnerable as they might not be aware of your presence so keep your distance and slow down to protect them and your boat.

The same goes for whales and other large marine mammals that may surface in unpredictable locations; slow down and allow them to pass.



Shores

The UK is home to the common seal and the grey seal. Seals are often seen hauled out on banks and rocks. Resting in this way is essential for them to warm up and to restore their energy for their next hunting dive.

The typical sign that they are aware of your presence is 'heads up'. If distressed, they will often shuffle at speed into the water.

Be particularly careful and keep your distance if you spot mothers and seal pups. Depending on where you are in the UK, this could be any time between June and November. Excessive wake from boats can also wash seals off or into rocks, which can cause injury. Think speed and slow down.



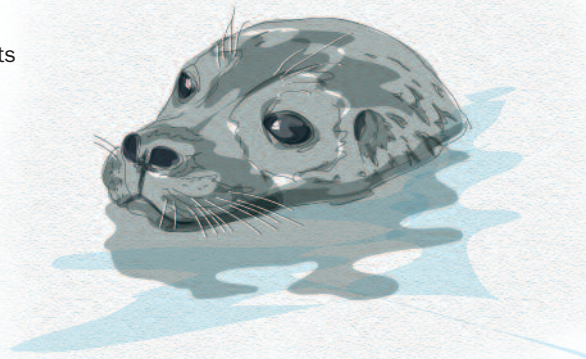
Shallows and Seabed

Shallow habitats provide important sanctuary, feeding and nursery grounds for many species, including marine invertebrates, sponges, tube worms, sea squirts, sea mats and fish. From the slender *Serpula vermicularis* tube worm that lives in a calcareous tube with its plume of feather-like radioles, to the fast growing *Membranipora membranacea* sea mat with its grey-white lacy appearance, the shallows support a rich variety of unique wildlife.

Smaller craft can often access small bays, inlets and shallow reaches. Keep a depth of water under the boat. Use designated launching and landing spots to protect shoreline habitats and keep wake to a minimum to prevent erosion to banks and shorelines.

Be aware of disturbing birds that might be in the shallows at low tide. This includes estuaries, saltmarshes, mud and sandflats, which can be overwintering sites for migratory birds.

Anchor with care - use existing mooring buoys if available, and if not, deploy your anchor correctly to avoid drag and scouring of sensitive plant or animal habitats.



The Green Wildlife Guide for Boaters

What is disturbance?

Disturbance is any activity or noise that could change the behaviour of an animal (such as feeding, resting and breeding). This could risk its well-being and even survival. Birds can lose energy by taking flight to escape disturbance, thereby making them more vulnerable to predators. Losing energy will also affect their overall condition and survival rate. The same goes for young birds about to fledge that may leave the nest prematurely, and mothers and young marine mammals whose bond is disturbed leaving the young alone and exposed. Cetaceans, seals and sharks risk injury from collisions and propellers.

What can cause disturbance?

- Flapping sails
- Noise from powered craft
- Flash photography
- Abrupt movement, sudden stopping, sudden acceleration, tacking and gybing
- Dragging hulls across shoreline habitats when launching and landing
- Excessive speed and wake
- Approaching head on
- Getting too close
- Crowding
- Circling
- Separating
- Chasing
- Jumping in the water to get a closer look
- Swimming alongside
- Feeding
- Touching

How to spot signs of distress?

Unless you are very familiar with the usual behaviour of marine wildlife, it will be difficult to detect definite signs of distress. You can however look out for clues such as an alert 'heads up' response, freezing motionless, alarm calls, prolonged diving, or a sudden stampede from rocks into the water. Other signs might include birds taking flight, rapid paddling, or aggressive behaviour towards your boat.

For some of the cliff nesting birds one sign is 'head-bobbing.' It's an early warning sign and might help you to take action that prevents them taking flight, by which time the damage is done.



Keep up to date and above board

Seeing marine wildlife from the water is always a thrill and the developing network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) around the UK has an amazing array of creatures. Designated to protect habitats and species from damage, MPA is a generic term and includes different types of legal protection such as Marine Conservation Zones, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. As the network develops some areas might have certain protections. Some have already been protected for some time and remain accessible. A good example is Skomer Island and its rich marine life and seabird colonies. For more information on specific protected features and areas when planning your trip look at the JNCC's interactive map

<http://tinyurl.com/jnccmap>

Whether you are in a MPA or not, it is worth noting the legislation that protects wildlife in the UK. This includes the Marine Acts, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Habitats Regulations. Most of the marine wildlife you will see around the UK are protected species. Offences might be summarised as intentionally (or, in Scotland, recklessly) killing, injuring or taking a protected species, without a lawful excuse; and intentionally or recklessly destroying, damaging or obstructing a protected species' place of shelter or protection, or disturbing a protected species while within it, without a lawful excuse. For more information on which marine species are protected, and by what legislation visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protected-marine-species>

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlandsnature/protected-species/>

Wherever you are, and whichever species you encounter, acting responsibly and cautiously to minimise the risk of disturbance is always the safest course of action.

Wildlife Sightings and Strandings

If you are keen to report your wildlife sightings use the following schemes:

For whales, dolphins and porpoises
<http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/sightingsform>

For basking sharks, turtles and jellyfish
http://www.mcsuk.org/what_we_do/Wildlife+protection/Report+wildlife+sightings

For seabirds
<http://app.bto.org/birdtrack/main/datahome.jsp>

For more information on your local marine life and habitats, contact your local Wildlife Trust
www.wildlifetrusts.org/your-local-trust

If you spot a stranded or injured marine animal, do not approach or touch it. Call the numbers on this website.

<http://ukstrandings.org/how-to-report-a-stranding>

Be prepared to provide your name and contact details, location and time of sighting, what you saw, and weather conditions.



The Green Blue

The Green Blue is a UK wide programme created by British Marine and the Royal Yachting Association in 2005 to enable the UK recreational boating sector to decrease its impact on the environment by:

- Raising awareness amongst industry and users
- Reducing harmful discharges
- Reducing environmental disturbance
- Encouraging sustainable choices

For more information visit our website
www.thegreenblue.org.uk



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