

Photography and best practice for seals



Changes to national key messaging on how to 'Watch Seals Well' by the Seal Alliance, have led Cornwall Seal Group Research to adopt new guidance for the use of seal photos **for public display**.

Good photos of seals show them relaxed and unaware of the photographer. A seal looking at the camera suggests it may have been disturbed. Research shows unintentional disturbance is a big issue for seals in Cornwall.

To role model best practice, we all need to continue to be careful in the field when taking photos (to avoid disturbance) and when **sharing them online**. Our top tips for good photos and messaging for the public are:

- Seals looking relaxed (not at the camera)
- From a distance (no selfies)
- Only showing small numbers of seals to avoid attracting more visitors, which would increase disturbance
- Not showing vulnerable mums and pups in real time (only once the pup has weaned / left)

Make sure to tell people that you

- Used a big lens to zoom in for a close up
- Deliberately haven't named the location of a sensitive seal haul out or pupping site
- Avoided using photos showing beach footprints/clifftops or landmarks what would give the location away visually.

We are working towards a future long-term culture where the best seal photos do not have a seal looking at the camera. Please bear in mind that this is work in progress and we still have many resources that include seals looking at the camera. Going forward these will be phased out, as they come to their end of life. We can start by changing what we all post online and sharing this message widely.

All our photos are taken from long distances with superzoom cameras with 2/3000mm lens. Seals are oblivious to our survey work and we aim to never affect their natural wild behaviour. We always use WISE accredited operators that have exemplar seal friendly practice. Sadly, you can't tell this from just looking at the photo. This is why from now on we will be very careful to only post photos of seals not looking at the camera or taken close-up, and we encourage you and your groups to follow this guidance too.

Please feel free to contact us, Cornwall Seal Group Research Trust or Cornwall Marine Coastal Code Group for more information on disturbance and best practice in preventing it.

If you are concerned about a seal or a pup, please keep well away and make sure you can't be smelt, heard or seen. Never put a seal back in the sea. Call British Divers Marine Life Rescue 01825 765546.

www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk

www.sealresearchtrust.com

sightings@cornwallsealgroup.co.uk

www.cornwallmarinelifecode.org.uk

www.sealalliance.org

<https://www.wisescheme.org/>