



Watching Marine Wildlife with Kindness



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With the summer in the northern hemisphere now upon us, many people will be heading to the seaside for their holidays, and many will be hoping to encounter some of the wonderful marine wildlife that live there.

If you do encounter marine animals, including seals, whales, or dolphins, OceanCare recommends taking the following points into consideration:

- What is our summer holiday playground is their home; the place where they live, feed, breed and rest and they cannot just move away to somewhere else or hide from us underwater if we do something that they find disturbing or painful.
- It is better to watch wildlife from a distance. As a general rule, if the animals are looking at you, they are aware of your presence and you may be disturbing them. Similarly, if they move away or respond aggressively, you may be frightening them.
- If you go wildlife watching on a boat, go with an accredited operator who should be displaying a sign showing which body has accredited them as wildlife-friendly. Talk to them about how they are helping to keep the animals safe. OceanCare does not generally recommend swimming with marine animals because of disease and other risks to both animals and people.
- If you see fast moving vessels chasing marine animals, you should report them. In most parts of the world, marine wildlife is highly protected by law.
- Use your own boats, jet skis and other vessels responsibly and don't drive or chase the animals or get too close.
- Don't disturb wildlife with drones or other unmanned aerial devices.
- If you are worried that an animal is unwell or a youngster is abandoned, call the appropriate rescue authorities.¹ Inappropriate action, for example taking a seal pup off a beach or returning a turtle to the sea, can do more harm than good.
- Marine animals can bite, butt and scratch. They are not tame and may feel threatened if you get too close.
- Do not feed marine wildlife. Animals can find their own food and you may feed them something which is not part of their natural diet. There could be negative consequences for both wildlife and people if they become reliant on us for food.
- Keep dogs and other pets away from marine wildlife – there is a risk of disturbance, injury and disease transmission.
- Rubbish can harm marine wildlife if they eat it or get entangled in it – dispose of your litter responsibly.

¹ Who the authorities are varies between countries, but most nations have one or more organisations dedicated to animal welfare who can quickly give advice and, in some places, there are organisations dedicated to responding to marine animals in trouble, such as OceanCare's partner British Divers Marine Life Rescue: <https://bdmlr.org.uk/>

In summary, be respectful and don't crowd, touch, feed or chase marine animals. Call on the appropriate authorities if something seems to be wrong!

Additionally, OceanCare strongly advises against visiting dolphinariums or other facilities displaying dolphins and whales.

Whale Watching Handbook

There is a whale watching handbook which describes best practice produced by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and the Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS): <https://wwhandbook.iwc.int/en/> (also available in French and Spanish).

Examples of wildlife watching codes and guidance:

1. National

- [Marine and Coastal Wildlife Code: Advice for Visitors](#) (UK)
- [The Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code](#) (Scottish Natural Heritage)
- [NOAA: Wildlife Viewing Guidelines](#) (USA)
- [NOAA Viewing Marine Life](#) (USA)
- [Be Seal Wise](#) (Government of Western Australia)
- [Sharing our coasts with marine mammals](#) (Department of Conservation, New Zealand)

2. Regional

- [Code of Good Conduct for whale watching in the Mediterranean Sea](#) (Pelagos Sanctuary)
- [Be Whale Wise. Give Whales Space](#) (North America)

3. Non-governmental organisations

- Seal Alliance: [Watching Seals Well](#)
- BDMLR: [What to do if you find a seal/a stranded whale, dolphin or porpoise](#)

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