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# Seal Watching

around SKOMER MARINE CONSERVATION ZONE

// How to watch seals and pups responsibly



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# Seal and seal pup facts

## Did you know that?

The Pembrokeshire coast is home to hundreds of **Atlantic grey seals**. The females give birth to their single pups on quiet beaches and in caves, from August through to December.

When not feeding or travelling, grey seals **“haul out”** (come ashore) on rocks or beaches, or rest in the sea at the surface or underwater.

Mother seals come ashore to feed their pups three or four times a day. Pups must **treble their birth weight** in their first three weeks, so they need every feed. By the time the pup is weaned, the mother has lost up to a third of her body weight.

After about three weeks, the pups are left to fend for themselves. By this time they have **shed their white coats**. They leave the beaches, but return to shore regularly to rest.

Mating takes place as soon as the mother has left her weaned pup, though the **male seals often harass females** while they're still feeding a pup.

After mating, seals manage to delay being pregnant for three months. Once pregnancy starts it lasts nine months – **a year from mating!** Mature females may have a pup every year.

The white, furry pups spend their **first three weeks on shore**, feeding and sleeping. Some can be quite active and can go for frequent swims, even when less than a week old.

**When:** August - December

**Where:** On beaches of the Marloes Peninsula and Skomer Island.

**How:** Seals are easily disturbed. Please keep as still, quiet and inconspicuous as possible. If viewing from the cliffs above, keep low and take care not to cast your shadow on the beach below.

### Never approach seals close up

If disturbed, mothers will keep away and the pups will miss feeds. Sometimes the mother may become aggressive or may even abandon her pup.

**DANGER!** Keep well away from the edges of cliffs as a strong gust of wind or a slip could be fatal.

## How to tell a pup's age



**CLASS III (11-15 DAYS)**  
Body rounded or barrel-shaped. Neck not visible. White coat.



**CLASS I (0-5 DAYS)**  
Body shape thin, neck well-defined, skin in loose folds around body. Coat may be stained yellowish. Movements are rather uncoordinated.



**CLASS IV (16-20 DAYS)**  
Shape like III but patches of white fur have moulted (fallen out and replaced by adult coat). Weaned or near weaning.



**CLASS II (6-10 DAYS)**  
Smoother outline. Neck still visible but no loose folds on body. Coat whiter. Very vocal.



**CLASS V (21 DAYS PLUS)**  
White fur fully moulted. Loses some weight after weaning. Often move away from breeding area.

# Seal facts

## When cow meets bull

**Female seals (cows)** live for about 35 years, **males (bulls)** for about 25 years.

Both become sexually mature at four to five years. Successful mating males are likely to be 11-16 years old.

Male seals can be recognised by their larger size and the “Roman nose” shape of their muzzle. Females often have a lighter background colour on the neck.

Males rarely fight each other but compete for females using threatening gestures and noises during the breeding season.



// Cow



// Photos by Skomer Marine Conservation Zone Staff

// Bull

To find out more about the Skomer Marine Conservation Zone visit the exhibition (usually open daily between Easter and October) at the address below or download NRW's PlacesToGo app by scanning the relevant QR code.



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Apple Appstore



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