

# Jersey Canoe Club -Code of Conduct for Wildlife Encounters

Whilst paddling around the coast of Jersey and its adjacent reef areas, several wildlife species may be encountered. These include cetaceans (dolphins and whales), pinnipeds (seals) and various seabirds. To avoid disturbance to any of these animals and to comply with the Jersey Marine and Coastal Wildlife Code, the following information is offered.

## General Information:

There is no reason why kayakers and marine wildlife cannot co-exist if care is taken to follow the Codes of Conduct.

Wildlife encounters are one of the many reasons we paddle and care taken will enhance the experience and preserve that experience for future generations.

Get to know and understand the area in which you are paddling or intend to paddle and the possible impact that your presence may have on any wildlife present.

Learn to recognise signs of disturbance and thus avoid conflict.

There will always be a chance surprise encounter which will alarm paddler and animal alike, in this event back away slowly and give the animal/s room to recover and return to normal.

Viewing distances are advisory, the critical factor is that when viewing wildlife you do not cause distress or disturbance to the animals. In the event of any signs of disturbance back away slowly and quietly and view from a greater distance through binoculars if necessary.

The only exception to the following advice is in the event of a rescue intervention or danger to life situation. This action then takes priority.

## Seals:

The most common species around Jersey is the Atlantic Grey Seal. The most likely locations for encountering seals are amongst the reefs and gutters of the south east coast, the north coast, and also the reefs, including Les Ecrehous, Les Dirouilles, the Paternosters and Les Minquiers. The largest concentration and therefore likelihood of an encounter is likely to be at Les Ecrehous. To avoid disturbance it is advised not to approach any animals closer than 50 metres, especially if they are hauled out on the many rocks which uncover at low water. The WiSe (Wildlife Safe) code lists types of behaviour that indicate disturbance as follows:-

- 1) At rest (obviously relaxed or sleeping).
- 2) Casually aware of your presence but attention unfocussed.
- 3) Alert and staring at you ("The Tripwire Moment") animals will show signs of concern at your proximity such as head erect, whiskers bristling, nervous movement etc.
- 4) Shuffling or milling if on rocks.
- 5) Stampede into the sea or if already in sea crash diving.

When paddling in any of these areas it is advised that a quiet approach is adopted which will enable a better view without disturbance and that the use of binoculars for closer observation is adopted rather than a close physical

approach. Young animals in particular may approach you due to their inquisitive nature and in this event, extreme care should be taken not to make sudden movements which could result in panicking the animal into an attack on you or your kayak.

Bites from seals are to be avoided due to incapacity caused to the paddler and the likely risk of infection to wounds. Remember that large seals have extremely powerful jaws which might cause considerable damage to a kayak or its occupant.

If any signs are noticed indicating that they are aware of your presence and becoming uneasy you should stop your approach and slowly back away and then resume paddling but at a distance which does not cause further disturbance or distress. In any event only remain in the area for a maximum of 15 minutes in order to avoid pressuring the animals which might lead to disturbance.

## **Cetaceans:**

Various species of cetaceans have been recorded around our coastal waters from the smallest, the Harbour Porpoise to very rare sightings of large baleen whales. The most likely species which will be encountered is the Bottle-nosed Dolphin. These can occur in groups of varying sizes but in summer will probably be in “family” groups of up to ten (10) individuals. In the Spring and Autumn, larger groups of up to thirty (30) animals may be encountered.

Regardless of group size, do not attempt to get closer than fifty (50) metres and in any event approach slowly and quietly from as far away as one hundred (100) metres to allow the animals to become aware of your presence and adjust to it. Animals, especially from family groups with young, may approach closely and then veer away and this should be taken as a warning of unhappiness with your presence or proximity.

If any signs are noticed indicating that they are becoming uneasy you should stop forward paddling and slowly back away and then resume paddling but at a distance which does not cause further disturbance or distress. Be careful not to encircle animals either deliberately or accidentally if paddling with a number of fellow paddlers, cetaceans require “sea room” relative to their size and no attempt should be made to restrict their passage or behaviour. In any event only remain in the area for a maximum of fifteen (15) minutes in order to avoid pressuring the animals which might lead to disturbance.

Learn to recognise different types of behaviour - tracking (maintaining a steady speed, surfacing rate and direction), playing or play fighting within the group (obvious interaction between individuals, some jumping or leaping), feeding (usually indicated by a group holding position within the tide flow and diving or turning rapidly, some signs of fish may be seen and also some seabird activity), signs of sexual activity (one or more animals closely interacting with another individual). If reporting obvious activity describe the details that you see when submitting your report.

## **Seabirds:**

Many species of seabirds are likely to be encountered around the coastal areas and offshore reefs. All can be sensitive to disturbance and it is recommended that no approach closer than 50 metres is attempted and if near known breeding sites no closer than 200 metres. When paddling in any of these areas it is advised that a quiet approach is adopted which will enable a better view without disturbance and that the use of binoculars for closer observation is adopted rather than a close physical approach. If birds are disturbed they may abandon a site and particularly in the breeding season be triggered into panic flight from ledges resulting in abandoned eggs or young which then become vulnerable to predators. In the event that

groups of birds are encountered whilst paddling offshore, alter course to give a wide berth until safely clear and then resume your course. Close approaches or attempts to pass through a group of birds may cause them to drop food intended for young or disturb them whilst in the course of feeding with consequent loss to the adult birds themselves and the young which are reliant upon them.

## **Basking Sharks, Turtles and Sunfish:**

We do have visits by Basking Sharks although these are infrequent. Basking Sharks are large animals up to 10 metres in length and normally docile. They have poor eyesight and can become preoccupied when feeding on plankton at the surface which is the most likely time of an encounter. At these times they can be unpredictable, making sudden and rapid changes of direction in pursuit of their prey. When feeding it is often possible to see the tip of the snout and also tips of dorsal and tail fins and a close pass by the shark will reveal the white inside of the large open mouth and gill rakers which trap the plankton as the animal swims.

Periodically the animal closes the mouth to swallow accumulated food particles. Basking Sharks are most likely to be encountered when undertaking paddles offshore. It is quite likely that if an animal is seen on the surface that more are in the vicinity and care should be taken not to encircle or surprise them when feeding.

Occasional sightings of Leatherback Turtles have been recorded. These are large animals up to 2 metres in length which primarily feed on jellyfish and which may also be encountered in areas of plankton where basking sharks may appear. They will come to the surface to breathe and can easily be mistaken for large surface debris as is encountered at any time when making open water passage. Care should be taken to maintain a safe distance as an animal could panic and crash dive and as a consequence quite easily overturn a kayak.

In the same conditions as Basking Sharks and Leatherback Turtles might be encountered, there is also the possibility of seeing a Sunfish. Again these are large and from a distance could resemble discarded white plastic but with splashing on the surface being caused by their large fins. They tend to drift with the tidal current but if disturbed can dive with some speed and again should be treated with care if encountered.

In the case of all of these species, viewing should be limited to 15 minutes and if any signs of disturbance are observed then moved away slowly and resume your course when at a safe distance of 100 metres or more.

Although sightings of many of the species are rare in Jersey waters, members of the JCC are well known travellers and so may encounter a wide variety of species in more distant waters. Often one of the highlights of such trips, Whale Sharks in Baja, Humpback Whales in Baja or Basking Sharks in Scotland. In such circumstances the kayakers must all always exhibit responsible behaviour whilst enjoying such special moments.