



## Isle of May National Nature Reserve

Voluntary Code of Conduct  
Seabirds, Seals and Waterborne vessels

During the spring and summer months, **March to August** the Isle of May supports large colonies of breeding seabirds, many of which are vulnerable to disturbance. Cliff nesting seabirds are easily flushed from their nest sites causing eggs to be lost. Large rafts of birds also congregate on the sea and care must be taken to avoid scattering them.

During the autumn and early winter, **October to January** the island supports a large grey seal breeding colony with large numbers of individuals coming ashore to pup and breed. During this time they are very sensitive to disturbance, resulting in pup mortality. **If landing is necessary it is restricted to landing at the West landing, Altarstanes.**

This voluntary code has also been developed to help inform all boat users on safe and conservation minded access around the Isle of May. Please follow the guidelines listed below in order to safeguard the islands large numbers of breeding seabirds and seals. Please also observe the British Sub-Aqua Code of Conduct ([www.bsac.com](http://www.bsac.com)) and the Marine Wildlife Watching Code ([www.marinecode.org](http://www.marinecode.org))

### Spring and Summer

- **Keep a reasonable distance (c.50m) from the cliffs during seabird breeding season (March-August)**  
This is particularly important from late March until early August when nesting birds are vulnerable to disturbance. Adult birds are easily scared from nest sites, losing eggs or leaving eggs and chicks to predators and the elements.
- **Reduce boat speed to “no-wake” speed when approaching the island or rafts of birds on the water**  
Please keep to a slow, steady boat speed and course to minimise wash and disturbance, i.e. not exceeding five knots. This will greatly reduce the chance of scaring birds from nests and reduce the chances of striking birds (including young birds which can not fly) on the water.
- **Please do not land anywhere on the island other than the Altarstanes or Kirkhaven landings**  
Landing at other sites will cause disturbance to breeding birds and collapse of fragile Puffin burrows.
- **Please show courtesy to other users of the landings**  
Allow them to easily moor, unload passengers or cargo. This will be made easier if careful attention is paid to information given by the NatureScot staff such as the imminent arrival of other boats.
- **Please do not discard fishing line, hooks or other litter into the water**
- **Please do not dive in the harbours for your own safety and that of others**

## Autumn and Winter

- **Please keep a reasonable distance (c.100m) from major haul out/breeding areas such as Mars rocks, Rona and Maiden rocks and keep to “no-wake” speed**  
Large numbers of seals come to pup and breed on the Isle May from **October to January**. Seals are protected by law and are particularly sensitive to disturbance at haul out/breeding sites. Care needs to be exercised during this period as females that have been frightened back into the sea may crush pups and abort breeding. Seals that are alarmed may bite and even pups can cause substantial injury. Seal saliva contains bacteria that are not found in the human population and even minor bites often become seriously infected and require hospital treatment
- **Reduce speed when approaching seals in the water**  
If you see a seal(s) in the sea - slow down to “no-wake” speed. Any passage in these areas should be at low speed to minimise wash and disturbance, i.e. not exceeding five knots. Keep to a slow steady boat speed and course. Do not chase the seal – let the seal approach you. They are inquisitive animals but are easily frightened by careless boat handling.
- **Do not land anywhere on the island other than the Altarstanes during the pupping season. Landing at Kirkhaven harbour is not permitted during the seal breeding season (October-January)**  
If landing at Altarstanes please exercise care when walking around the island and remain on the marked paths and follow any onsite instructions. Do not approach haul out or pupping areas, any attempt to approach may cause distress to both the pup and the cow and may result in injury.
- **Please remember that seals are wild animals and can be aggressive. The sea is their territory.**