

Procedural guidelines for studying grey seals in southwest England, 2006

Under the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive), member states are required to designate and conserve Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). The purpose of SACs is to maintain or restore habitats and species listed in Annex I and Annex II to Favourable Conservation Status. The grey seal *Halichoerus grypus Fabricius*, is a species listed in Annex II of the Habitats Directive. In the southwest, they are interest features of several marine Special Areas of Conservation and part of the reason for notification of a number of coastal SSSIs.

The work presented in this report is based on and developed out of sixteen years fieldwork studying grey seals in southwest England (here describing the Isles of Scilly, Cornwall, Devonshire and Lundy) between 1990 and 2006. It provides methods and procedures for monitoring seals and the sites they use that will generate datasets that will help to inform how targets could be set for their management.

The seal attributes that need to be measured are as given in the JNCC Common Standards Monitoring Guidance. These include trends in annual pup production, trends in abundance and distribution, levels of disturbance and other unintentional impacts on both seals and the sites they use. It is likely that in the future, photo-identification will be used to collect life history data and to help understand seal movements around sea areas and between sites.

What was done

Introduced, described, assessed and presented here as the basis for future monitoring of grey seals in southwest England are the techniques tested at North Wales sites between 2001 and 2005 and at southwest England sites between 1991 and 2000, 2006 and 2007. This includes



Left profile of female grey seal during the survey period
recommendations about how to store the data in site-based and (individual) seal-based catalogues.

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The guidelines describe how to collect the several types of seal and seal site data that will be required to inform discussions and decision-making by coastal managers in ways that are repeatable and comparable between sites and over long periods of time.

Sections of the guidelines covered include:

- Guidelines for all Fieldwork
- Pup Production
- Distribution & Abundance
- Disturbance
- Tracking by Photo-ID
- Seal-Fisheries Interactions
- Databases

Results and conclusions

These Procedural Guidelines are effective in enabling the deployment of methods to ensure the capture of data that is both repeatable, comparable and therefore of best use to coastal managers. The Guidelines provide methods and procedures for monitoring seals and the sites they use that will generate datasets that will help to inform how targets could be set for their management.

Natural England's viewpoint

Natural England welcomes these Procedural Guidelines as a major step towards providing a tool to assist with the standardisation for monitoring of grey seals throughout the Southwest. This study will help to ensure that the information and data collected is comparable and repeatable, thus generating reliable and accurate long term data sets which will enable informed discussions and decisions to be made about grey seals and thus provide more effective management of the sites they use.

Selected references

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Further information

For the full details of the research covered by this information note see Natural England Research Report NERR017 - *South West Grey Seal monitoring procedural guidelines*.

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Keywords

Grey Seals, *Halichoerus grypus*, procedural guidelines, South-west England, Cornwall, Devon, Isles of Scilly, Lundy, pup production, fieldwork, distribution, abundance, disturbance, photo id, fisheries, databases, marine, monitoring, common standards monitoring, Habitats Directive, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), SSSIs.

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