



University of
St Andrews

Participant Information

**Collection, storage, and analysis of citizen-provided data on seal observations –
Debbie Russell**

What is the study about?

We invite you to submit information regarding sightings of seals being aggressive towards marine mammals. In the UK and overseas, there have been observations of grey seals preying on grey seal pups, harbour seal adults and pups, and harbour porpoises. Currently, strandings networks collect data on predation occurrence by investigating cause of death from carcasses. However, given that only a proportion of carcasses are found, instances of predation are likely under-reported using this approach. Our study aims to understand the extent of this behaviour, and to investigate whether seal predation could be contributing to harbour seal population declines observed on the North and East coasts of Scotland. Reports and images of seals acting aggressively towards marine mammals will allow us to a) identify individual seals through photographic identification (to estimate a minimum number of predatory seals), b) plot the geographical and seasonal extent of this behaviour, and c) estimate the effect this could have on seal numbers.

Can I be involved?

This information sheet has been written to help you decide if you would like to be involved and what information you would like to submit. If you do decide to take part you will be free to withdraw your data in the subsequent 24 hours, without providing a reason.

What can I do to help?

Submit reports of aggressive interactions you have observed, with an option to upload any associated media (images/video), answering up to 25 optional questions (e.g. number of aggressors, species of victim, identifying features, behaviour observed etc.). Providing your own details (name, email address) is optional. The most critical information are the date and location of your observation (to enable us to distinguish unique reports).

Are there any risks associated with taking part?

Your participation is voluntary and any sightings are made entirely at your own risk. Please be aware that seals can be aggressive and bite, do not approach them - make observations from a distance.

Informed consent

It is important that you have the opportunity to ask any questions in relation to the research before you provide your consent by submitting a report. A contact email address and phone number are provided.

What information about me or recordings of me ('my data') will you be collecting?

You have the option to provide your name and contact details (email address). This information may be used to: 1) to clarify details about the report, 2) to request larger files via online data sharing platforms or through hardware which we will post out (i.e. USB stick), (4) to link sightings of multiple events by a single observer. By submitting media you are agreeing for it to be used for research purposes (e.g. identification

of individual seals, species and age of the victim). You have the option to agree for the media to be shared and/or used in publications, and if you choose this then we ask for your consent to credit the photos/videos. The University of St Andrews will not forward your contact details to any other parties and will not or use them for any other purpose than the above.

How will my data be securely stored, who will have access to it?

- Your data will be stored in a **PSEUDONYMISED** form, which means that your sightings data will be edited so that you are referred to by a unique reference. On the completion of any follow up scenarios (described above) the original data will be deleted. There will be a 'key' document, which will link your unique reference to your real identity. The sightings data and key will be kept on a separate password protected secure folders at the University of St Andrews, and only the project team (< 5 individuals) will have access to them. The key will enable new sightings to be linked to previous sightings by the same observer.
- An **ANONYMISED** form of the data may be shared and/or made publicly available. In this form no-one would be able to identify you.
- If you submit image/video files that you indicate can be published/shared and wish to be credited for these. Your name (or other chosen credit) will be linked to these media, and thus will be published or shared with them. Your contact details provided will be stored along with these media in a secure folder for access by the project team.
- This is an ongoing, long term study with no planned end date.

Will my participation be confidential?

Your participation will only be known to the project team, and if agreed by yourself (via checkboxes on the form), your name (or other chosen credit) will be attached to images/media used in publications. However, you can indicate you do not wish for media to be shared or published, but for research purposes only.

Use of your personal data and data protection rights

The University of St Andrews (the 'Data Controller') is bound by the UK 2018 Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which require a lawful basis for all processing of personal data (in this case it is the 'performance of a task carried out in the public interest' – namely, for research purposes) and an additional lawful basis for processing personal data containing special characteristics (in this case it is 'public interest research'). You have a range of rights under data protection legislation. For more information on data protection legislation and your rights visit <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/terms/data-protection/rights/>. For any queries, email dataprot@st-andrews.ac.uk.

After 24 hours, you will be unable to withdraw your sightings data as after this period an anonymised version may have been catalogued and have been shared.

Ethical Approvals

This research proposal has been scrutinised and subsequently granted ethical approval by the University of St Andrews Teaching and Research Ethics Committee.

What should I do if I have concerns about this study?

In the first instance, you are encouraged to raise your concerns with the researcher. However, if you do not feel comfortable doing so, then you should contact the School Ethics Contact (contact details below). A full outline of the procedures governed by the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee is available at <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/research/integrity-ethics/humans/ethical-guidance/complaints/>.

Contact details

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