



Grey Seal - kind permission of Blyth Valley Borough Council



*Working with Wildlife*

## Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) Species Action Plan

Plan Co-ordinator	Coastal Group
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Plan Lead	National Trust
Latest version	January 2008

### Description

Grey seals vary in colour from dark brown to grey or black with blotches. Males have broad shoulders, an elongated snout with a wide heavy muzzle. Females tend to be lighter in colour than males and have a thinner snout and a less rounded profile. They are the largest native mammal of the British Isles with males reaching up to 2.3 metres long and weighing up to 230 kilograms. The cows are much smaller up to 2 metres in length and 150 kilograms in weight. The nostrils of the grey seal are almost parallel, helping to distinguish them from the common seal whose nostrils form a 'v' shape.

Their diet mainly consists of fish, but they will also eat squid, octopus and crustaceans. The average daily food requirement is estimated to be 5 kilograms, though they do not feed every day and fast during the breeding season. The oldest female was recorded to live up to 46 years, with the average male only reaching just over half this age.

Seals can be seen hauled out on rocky shore and islands, where they rest in the sun. Females arrive at the breeding sites first in order to give birth from September to November. Males compete for space nearest to the females, with the older males usually getting the best positions. A pup weighs about 15 kilograms at birth and is born with dense, soft white coat. They will gain about 2 kilograms of weight a day due to the high fat content of their mother's milk. Females will suckle their pup for approximately 3-4 weeks during which time the pup will shed its pup fur and start to develop the dense adult waterproof fur. The cows will then mate again and leave the breeding area. Pups must then learn to fish for themselves.

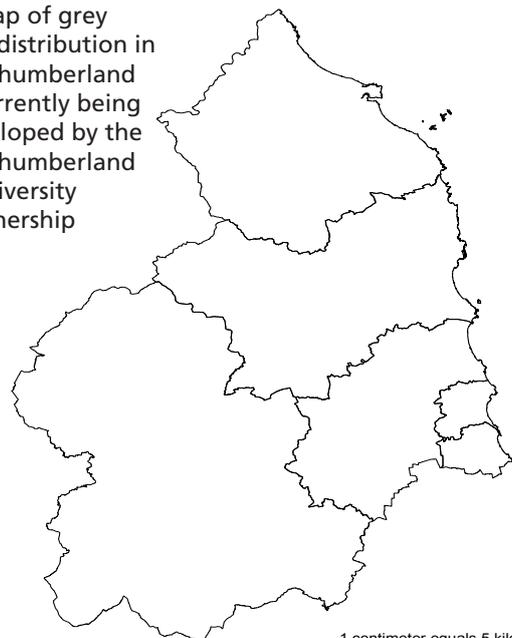
Grey seals are found in the North Atlantic Ocean; along the West Atlantic coast, East Atlantic coast and the Baltic coast. The East Atlantic stock ranges from Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Norway, the British Isles and the Wadden Sea. It is estimated that half of the world's total population are found on and around the British coasts. Seals can become entangled and drown in fishing nets and in the UK it is legal to shoot any seals that come near fisheries if you have a licence. The conservation of Seals Act provides a closed season for the grey seal during its pupping season when it is illegal to kill or take seals without a licence.

### Conservation Status

EC Habitats Directive, Annex II and V  
 Bern Convention, Appendix III  
 Seals Act 1970 – closed season 1st September to 31st December  
 Habitats Regulations, Section 3  
 North East Biodiversity Action Plan Species

### Current Extent in Northumberland

A map of grey seal distribution in Northumberland is currently being developed by the Northumberland Biodiversity Partnership



1 centimeter equals 5 kilometers

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The current Farne Island population is between 3 and 4 thousand seals, with a transient population of mainly juvenile and non-breeding seals of 1 thousand to fifteen hundred seals along the rest of the Northumberland coastline. The main breeding site in the region is the Farne Islands, with the transient population favouring rocky promontories and cliff bottom haul out sites, though the younger pups do tend to use sandy beaches for up to six or eight months, as they are less likely to injure themselves hauling out in rough weather.

### Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Shooting of Seals around fishing nets and Salmon nets (decreasing in frequency as the Salmon drift netting industry declines)
- Increase in the number of sight seeing and pleasure boats visiting breeding and haul out sites
- Increasing disturbance of resting Seals, especially pups and juveniles, due to increased accessibility of mainland coast
- Increase in inshore prawn trawling resulting in increased by-catch mortality rate amongst adult Grey Seals

### Associated Action Plans

Rocky Shore, Reefs and Islands  
Coastal Saltmarsh and Mudflat  
Maritime Cliffs and Slopes

### Further Information

The Mammal Society - <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/index.shtml>

Seal Conservation Society - <http://www.pinnipeds.org/>

### Targets

**Maintain the current range of the grey seal in Northumberland of 1 breeding haul out site by 2010**

**Maintain the breeding population of the grey seal in Northumberland of approximately 3,500 by 2010**

Code	Priority Actions	Date
GS A01	Collate all existing information on grey seals in Northumberland and identify their regular haul out sites.	2008
CGS A02	Promote the importance of Northumberland's seals through publicity material, events and training to help to ameliorate the negative attitudes towards them and reduce disturbance to juveniles	ongoing
CGS A03	Seek to establish a code of practice for sight seeing boats and pleasure craft with specific reference to seal breeding areas	2009
CGS A04	Create an information leaflet on the procedures for dealing with a stranded, hurt or dead seal	2008
CGS A05	Promote the economic value of seals to the rural economy as part of the overall nature based tourism of the county	2009
CGS A06	Increase dialect with local fishing communities regarding the legal shooting of seals	2010