

Paddlesport Guidelines to Avoid Bird Disturbance in Solent European Marine Sites

Introduction

These Guidelines have been produced by the Solent Forum's Natural Environment Group's working group on recreation; the Recreation Focus Group (RFG). The RFG was established to look at the issue of disturbance to birds from paddlesports; an action identified by the Solent's Relevant Authorities in the Solent European Marine Sites (SEMS) annual monitoring scheme. They also help to meet actions on recreation identified in Natural England's Solent Site Improvement Plan (SIP).

They have been broken down into three sections:

1. Before launching
2. On the water
3. After participating

Applicable Paddlesports

The Guidelines are designed for paddlesports users (canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding). They are also relevant to kite and wind surfers, paramotors, rowing boats and the use of small hovercrafts. The advice is applicable to activities taking place within the Solent European Marine Sites.

Existing Best Practice

Existing best practice material from other user groups and trade associations has been linked from the following web page to provide a resource bank. This includes leaflets already produced by Solent harbours on protecting wildlife. There is also a link to the Solent Seals Code of Conduct, produced by the Chichester Harbour Conservancy, which provides guidelines on how to avoid disturbing seals. Access the resource bank at:

http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Watersports/.

How to Use the Guidelines

These Guidelines are designed to give generic consistent advice for Paddlesports users across all SEMS sites; they will be sent to all SEMS Relevant Authorities (RAs). It is hoped that these Authorities will take this guidance and transpose it into their existing publications, digital media, maps and signage. It will help them to fulfill their requirements for managing activities under the EU Habitats Directive.

The SEMS logo will also be sent out with the Guidelines and it is hoped that RAs will use this logo in association with this guidance. Best practice shows that the most successful way to educate participants, is to use the material in this guidance in association with a map of the area and specific local information.

The Guidelines do not cover recreational boating activities. The RYA is currently developing similar guidance for boating and this will be distributed to SEMS members in due course.

Information on Bird Species and Habitats

The Guidelines do not contain specific information on bird habitats and species. This information can be accessed at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-162> or from Natural England's conservation advice packages at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/conservation-advice-packages-for-marine-protected-areas>.

What is Disturbance?

The following text has been drafted to help the public understand what disturbance is and to help introduce the advice given in the guidelines.

Many birds you see on the Solent coast during winter travel here from as far away as the arctic. Short daylight hours and poor weather means surviving the winter is particularly difficult. Many of them can only feed at low tide; with the constant movement of the tides they only have short windows of time when they can feed each day.

Coastal birds need to gather enough energy to survive the winter and to make long migratory flights back to their summer breeding grounds. If people (or their pets) go too close the birds may stop feeding or, worse still, fly away. It can take them a whole day just to refuel the energy this uses.

During the spring and summer you might notice different coastal birds. They also need our protection as many of them nest on the ground. If we go too close to them we may accidentally trample their nests or the parents may abandon it.

Please help us to protect our special birds by following these simple guidelines. With your help we can ensure that people and wildlife can continue to live alongside each other on the Solent for generations to come. Thank you.

Guidelines

Before Launching

- Visit the local harbour office website, read the harbour handbook or visit the Solent Birds website at <http://www.solentbirds.org.uk/> to find out more about the birds you might see. Pick up and read local harbour maps, signs and guidance leaflets.
- Keep to paths or trails where possible to avoid trampling on surrounding habitats and ground nesting areas. Read and adhere to signs.
- Where available please use designated parking, launch and access points.

- Carry your craft to the water. Dragging it can damage important fragile habitats like mud and marsh.
- Ensure that sails and kites have lines wrapped if you are not using or planning to launch, and that they are secured with enough ballast.

On the Water

- Look, slow down, keep your distance then move on when watching birds. Take binoculars to get a better view.
- Please avoid the shoreline except when accessing or leaving the water. It is best to leave a clearance zone between yourself and the waters edge, we suggest a distance of 50 metres. Coastal birds tend to feed in shallow water or at the waters edge. You may also accidentally erode the seabed or damage underwater plants.
- Keep your distance from birds that are resting or feeding. At least 50 metres is advisable.
- It can be difficult to know how close is “too close”. Signs that show you are too close to birds are if they start looking in your direction, they begin to call, or they fly or move away. If this happens please withdraw as safely and quickly as possible.
- Quietly does it, for the best view of birds please keep noise to a minimum. Noise can startle and disturb birds.
- Please do not feed birds or other wildlife.
- Areas of coast that are fenced off for conservation are likely to be particularly sensitive and vulnerable to disturbance, so please do not enter them.
- Kite surfers please be aware that kites may be much closer to birds than you think. Birds can perceive kites as a threat. Keep a clearance zone between your kite and the shoreline, as birds may be feeding or roosting there even if you can't see them.

After Participating

- Please take all litter home, including all food waste. Report to the harbour office any concerns, litter or pollution you may have or see when out on the water.
- Take bio-security measures to minimise the risk and prevent the spread from invasive non-native species. Check and clean equipment for living organisms including plants and return any to the water, then dry all kit. Some species survive for many days in damp conditions.
- Please report notable marine wildlife sighting to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's marine sightings page at <http://www.hiwwt.org.uk/marine-sightings> with date, time, location and a photo if possible.

- Report bird sightings on the Solent Birds app. See <http://www.solentbirds.org.uk/>.
- Find out more about the wildlife on our coast and why the Solent is such a special place. Let others know what they can do and share these guidelines.

Useful Links

- Copies of existing best practice and guidance leaflets can be viewed at http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Watersports/.
- Solent IPENS - <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4692013588938752?category=6149691318206464>.
- SEMS delivery plan - <http://www.solentems.org.uk/publications/>.
- Solent Birds website and App - <http://www.solentbirds.org.uk/>.
- Conservation advice for Marine Protected Areas: site advice packages - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/conservation-advice-packages-for-marine-protected-areas>.
- Check, clean, dry guidance on how to avoid the spread of non-native invasive species - <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/checkcleandry/>.
- British Trust for Ornithology - <https://www.bto.org/>.
- RSPB - <http://www.rspb.org.uk/>.
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust - <http://www.hiwwt.org.uk/>.