

Sea Kayaking and Wildlife

Sea kayaking gives excellent opportunities to get to remote islands, beaches, cliffs, caves and tunnels. However, different species of wildlife use all these landforms as breeding venues at different times of the year. Cave mouths and cliffs are used extensively by species such as cormorants, shags, guillemots, razorbills gulls, fulmars, eagles, falcons and buzzards. Islands and beaches are typically used by species such as seals, gulls, terns, ducks and waders. In addition, on some large inland lochs that may be used by sea kayakers, species like Black-throated Divers nest.



Photo Fiona Duff

In a sea kayak it is all too easy to get close enough to other animals and birds at breeding or resting sites, that they are disturbed and leave their nests and/or young, or have their rest period interrupted. Frequently on sea cliffs one bird jumping off will prompt many others nearby, resulting in large numbers leaving their breeding ledges unwillingly. Birds leaving in haste can dislodge eggs and young from ledges with obviously disastrous results. Both species of seal, the common (harbour) and grey haul out on skerries, sandbars and beaches in between hunting excursions. Disturbing them so that they feel the need to move back into the safer environment of the sea is an unnecessary energy loss for them. Otters may have relatively poor eyesight, but have a much stronger sense of smell and hearing, so this should be borne in mind.



Photos: Fiona Duff

White-tailed eagles have recently returned (with a little help) to our shores. Many nest on coastal cliffs, and when doing so can be surprisingly well hidden for such big birds. They have a long breeding season, effectively from March to August, and the species is listed on Schedule One of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) - thus being afforded special protection from disturbance and harassment at all times of the year. (If you know the location of a nest site you should take active steps to avoid going near it.) When disturbed, they may take off and fly round the corner out of sight. They may, however show specific flight patterns in the immediate area overhead, 'stalling' in flight, possibly putting their legs down and often calling (kok kok kok) at the same time. These are unmistakable signs that they are being disturbed by some nearby event.

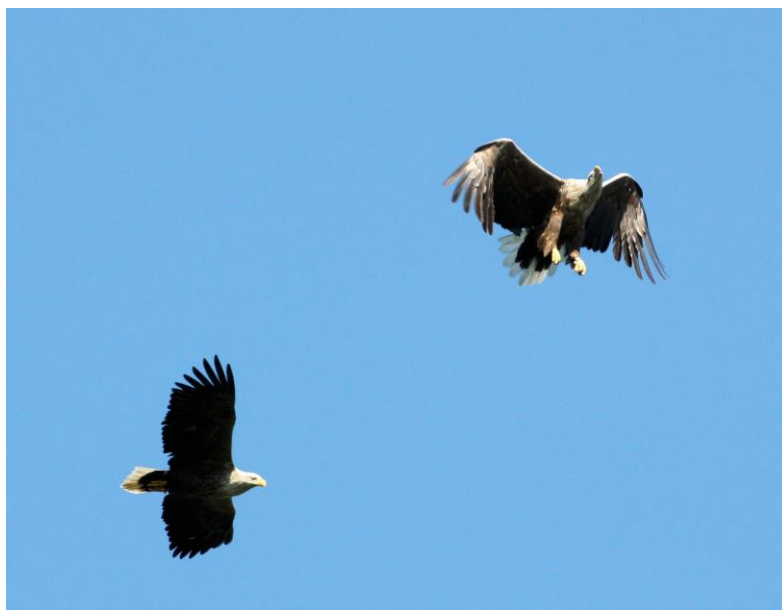


Photo: Iain Erskine

The eagle on the right shows clear signs of anxiety

In many cases 'inappropriate disturbance events' can be foreseen and avoided. Spotting hauled out seals in the distance, or seeing razorbill colonies on cliffs that you are approaching, can result in an immediate but minor change in a paddling plan; *i.e.* giving them a bit more distance than you were otherwise going to (*at least* 100 metres). In situations where the disturbance has already happened, immediately turning and going further out to sea (*at least* 100 metres) - especially if there are likely to be more nest cliffs up ahead - is obviously an appropriate response. The RSPB's advice for White-tailed Eagle nests and boats is 300 metres - at least!

The British Canoeing website has a very useful download 'You, Your Canoe and the Marine Environment'

<https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/uploads/documents/You-Your-Canoe-and-the-Marine-Environment.pdf>

The Scottish Canoe Association also has a very informative download 'Kayaking - A Guide to Good Environmental Practice'

(<https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/b9315d6a/files/uploaded/SCA%20Sea%20Kayak%20Environmental%20Guidelines.pdf>).