

Grey Seals

Peter, in his role as a National Park Walk Leader, signed up to lead a “Seal Walk” on Skomer in September. In his usual thorough way he has been swatting up on all things “seal” and has accumulated a long list of interesting facts. We thought we would share some of these with you so here they are:

- There are 130000 - 140000 Grey Seals in the UK and another slightly larger population on the E seaboard of America
- Females are generally light grey with darker spots with pale underparts while males are dark brown/grey with lighter patches and of course, the well-known “Roman nose”
- They eat all kinds of fish including sand eels, which are also, of course, the favourite food of many seabirds particularly puffins.
- Grey Seals regularly dive 30 – 70 metres while feeding, staying underwater for up to 20 minutes
- Male Grey Seals can weigh up to 233kg and measure over 2 metres in length
- They breed all around the northern half of the UK from Cornwall in the south west to Blakeney Point in Norfolk.
- On Skomer they start pupping in September (a few in August) and pupping dates gradually get later as you travel north then eastwards along the coast so that Blakeney seals pup in November-January.
- Common or Harbour seals are smaller than Grey Seals and breed mostly on the east coast.
- Female seals mate a few weeks after pupping. The gestation period is 11.5 months but there is a delayed implantation of 3 months.
- A female seal does not eat while feeding her pup and can lose a quarter of her weight.
- Pups are fed for 18-21 days, 6 times a day for 10 minutes, on a very fatty and nutritious milk and gain 2kgs in weight each day.
- Pups weigh 14kgs at birth and have a white coat. They lose their white coat at 3-4 weeks.
- Pups can swim soon after birth but do not generally do so unless forced to e.g. by a very high tide
- The mortality rates for pups is 30% – 55%
- Female grey seals may live for 35 years, but males seldom survive to more than 25 years old



Rosemary Royle