British Divers Marine Life Rescue

Marine Mammal Rescue in England, Scotland and Wales

British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) was formed in 1988, when a few like-minded divers got together in response to the mass mortality of Harbour seals in the Wash area of East Anglia, to do what they could for the rescue effort.

Since 1988, BDMLR have been involved in the rescue of marine wildlife after every major marine disaster, including the Braer shipwreck in Shetland, the Sea Empress grounding in Milford Haven and mass strandings of cetaceans around the UK. Seal rescue has remained a major component of their work, with BDMLR medics rescuing seals in all seasons. Over the years, many hundreds of seals have been helped, BDMLR working closely with specialist rehabilitation facilities to ensure their long term care and eventual return to the wild.

Although seal rescue has remained a key component of the work of the charity, it has become progressively more involved in the response to stranded cetaceans in the UK. BDMLR were founder members of the Marine Animal Rescue Coalition (MARC), an affiliation of organisations with an active interest and involvement in the management of marine mammal strandings in the UK, with a primary focus of improving the response to live cetacean strandings.

Now, BDMLR attend over 450 incidents a year, with around 10% of those being cetacean rescues.

Every year, BDMLR trains over 400 people from all walks of life to become volunteer Marine Mammal Medics. Since 1988 they have trained over 8,500 and are the only marine animal rescue organisation that covers England, Wales and Scotland. They train the RSPCA, SSPCA, Coastguard and Police in marine mammal rescue and maintain direct links with them.

The charity has 20 whale rescue pontoons, 13 ambulance trailers, 50 rescue kits, three rescue boats and a special whale disentanglement kit, all located at strategic points throughout the UK, as well as around 2,500 current medics on their database ready to assist and rescue marine animals in distress.

BDMLR hotline: 01825 765546 (office hours) or 07787 433412 (Bank holidays, evenings and weekends) www.bdmlr.org.uk

Registered Charity
England and Wales No: 803438
Scotland No: SC039304

DIRECTORS
Alan Knight OBE BSc (Hons)
Mark Stevens B.Ed (Hons)
Geoff Hammock
Dave Jarvis ICIOB, ACMI, MFOS
Gavin Parsons
Faye Archell FdA. Cert Ed
Alistair Jack

COMPANY SECRETARY
Susan Ovens

PATRONS
Kate Humble
Miranda Krestovnikoff
Monty Halls
Dr Martha Holmes
Elizabeth Emanual
Amanda Levick

VETERINARY CONSULTANTS
James Barnett BSc (Hons) BVSc MRCVS
Ian Robinson PhD BVSc Cert SHP MRCVS
Paul Jepson PhD BVMS MRCVS
Steve Bexton BVMS MRCVS
Jon Cracknell BVMS CertVA CertZooMed MRCVS
Jo Hedley CertZooMed MRCVS
Darryl Thorpe BVSc MRCVS
Sean Langton BVetMed CertVA MRCVS

SCIENTIFIC CONSULTANTS
Mark Simmonds OBE
Susan C Wilson PhD, LLM

BANKERS
Cooperative Bank
26 Military Road
Chatham
Kent ME4 4JX
A/C No. 6500422900

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What to do if you see a live beached animal

Seals

Seals very often haul out at low tide to rest until the tide returns, so not every seal on land is in need of rescue. Lying on one side and waving one flipper in the air, making a 'banana' shape and barking at people who get too close, or just dozing, are completely natural behaviours and not a cause for concern. Tear stains beneath a seal's eyes are a good sign – seals lack the ducts that re-circulate tears and so they seem to cry continuously and this shows that they are well hydrated.

Pups are often left on the beach and their mothers will usually come out to suckle them at high tide, so it is important not to touch them as their mother may desert them. Young grey seal pups are born in the Autumn and Winter and although they may seem abandoned, they will not enter the sea until 3-4 weeks old once they are weaned and need to find their own food. Harbour seal pups, born from June to September, can swim within a few hours and so may be in and out of the water regularly.

Disease, parasitic infection, wounds and netting can often be a problem and some seals may suffer from these. Young pups may become separated from their mothers after a storm or spring tide (when the high and low tides have the greatest variance) and so will become undernourished very quickly.

If you think a seal is ill or distressed, then

- Call British Divers Marine Life Rescue for advice and assistance. If you can send some photographs from your mobile phone then they will give you a number or email address to send them to.
- Do not pick the seal up – observe it from a safe distance
- Do not chase it back in the sea – try to stand between it and the sea until help arrives
- Look for signs of injury and provide an accurate description of these, the size and species (if known) and location of the animal to BDMLR
- Keep other people and dogs away – these can cause stress to the animal. Seals also carry infections that can be transferred
- Avoid inhaling the seal's breath and stay away from their head as they can inflict nasty bites

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Whales, dolphins or porpoises

A whale, dolphin or porpoise stranded on the beach is obviously not a usual phenomenon. These animals do not beach under normal circumstances, and they will require assistance.

If you see one on a beach, call British Divers Marine Life Rescue immediately and then give the animal basic first aid as follows:

- Do not put it back in the sea without advice from BDMLR or a vet. You may cause it additional and unnecessary suffering.
- If the animal is on its side, if it is small enough gently roll it upright and dig shallow trenches beneath its pectoral fins.
- Keep the animal's skin wet to stop it cracking and to keep the animal cool. Seaweed or wet sheets on its back will help. Pour water over it gently but do not allow any to enter the blowhole.
- Look for signs of injury and provide an accurate description of these, the size and species (if known) and location of the animal to BDMLR. If you can send some photographs from your mobile phone then they will give you a number or email address to send them to.
- Keep other people and dogs away – these can cause stress to the animal
- Avoid inhaling the animal's breath and stay upwind if you are working close to the head.

If you find a dead cetacean

The Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme collect a wide range of data on each stranding found on UK shores and may be interested in carrying out a post-mortem examination of a dead animal. See www.ukstrandings.org for more information. In the event that you discover a dead stranded animal, please contact the CSIP hotline and give a description of the following where possible:

- Location and date found
- Species and sex
- Overall length
- Condition of the animal
- Your contact details should further information be needed

Digital images are extremely helpful in the identification of stranded species, as well as ascertaining whether the body may be suitable for post-mortem examination. If possible, please also forward any images that may have been taken with a digital camera or mobile.

The UK CSIP hotline is 0800 6520333. Callers are given a number of options to ensure they reach the correct department. You can also use this number to contact BDMLR during office hours as there is a transfer option for live animal strandings that transfers directly to them. In Scotland, please contact the Scottish Marine Animals Stranding Scheme on 01463 243030 or 07979 245893 with the same information.

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