

# PORTHCOTHAN - part of the Padstow Bay and Surrounds Marine Conservation Zone



BALLAN WRASSE



COELOPA FRIGIDA



SANDHOPPER



KESTREL



GREY SEAL



WHIMBREL



ROCK PIPET



VOLE



FOX



PINK SEA FAN

## What's special about this marine conservation zone?

The rocky and sandy beaches and undersea habitats here are part of a national network of marine conservation zones (MCZs) around the UK coastline. These areas protect a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species. Porthcothan is part of the 'Padstow Bay and Surrounds MCZ', which extends along the coast from Park Head to Pentire Point and out to 50m depths. This stretch of coastline is characterised by exposed cliffs, rocky shores and sandy wave-exposed bays. The small offshore islands provide nesting habitats for several species of seabird and are haul out sites for Grey seal.

The sandy shores provide a habitat for creatures such as polychaete worms which are found buried within the sediments and sand-hoppers which inhabit strandlines high on the shore. The flat rocky reefs are among the most extensive in north Cornwall. They support rich communities of animals and seaweeds, with rockpools, overhangs and crevices providing refuges from the strong waves and tidal currents. The brown seaweed *Bifurcaria bifurcata* is found growing on open rock. This is unusual as this species predominantly occurs in rockpools.

Kelp forests can be seen at extreme low tide, extending into deeper water, with several species of kelp growing encrusting pink algae. The cold water kelp *Alaria esculenta* has been recorded in high abundance here. The kelp forest off Porthcothan is very productive. Kelp is sometimes called an 'ecosystem engineer' because it provides food, protection, a living home and a hunting ground for so many species of invertebrates, fish, sea mammals, such as the grey seal, and sea birds like the razor bill and the shag. Crustaceans, molluscs and small fish feed off young shoots and kelp releases spores which become part of the phytoplankton of the ocean. Kelp forests are extremely important in protecting the coast from increasing storminess linked to climate change.

Further out, where reduced sunlight limits the growth of seaweeds, the reefs are dominated by animals such as sea squirts, pink sea-fans and spiny starfish. The spiny lobster *Palinurus elephas* can be found in subtidal rocky crevices.

## Seaweed on the Beach

The Strandline is the line of debris left by every tide on a beach. This debris contains natural and man-made material. Beaches are living places. When seaweed washes onto a beach it's part of a natural system which has evolved over millions of years.

The strandline is a habitat for insects, beetles and sandhoppers, a small crustacean. Sandhoppers lay eggs in burrows under the seaweed layer and in sand where seaweed has been allowed to rot into the surface. All these creatures live off the seaweed as part of their life cycle and are a very important part of the food chain. Birds such as the rock pipet and the whimbrel (a red list species) eat the insects and sandhoppers as do voles and other small mammals. Foxes and bats come down to the beach at night for food.

Seaweed breaks down into the sand and the nutrients released feed plants which only grow on beaches. Plants like sea rocket and sea couch grass are called 'pioneer species', they grow in the strandline and help to establish small dunes nearest to the sea. When these dunes are firm enough marram grass can grow and the dunes will build higher. This process is continuous so that new dunes form at the front and then slowly move back every year. Sand dunes support many other species of insect and plants. They are also a natural sea defence which is even more important now that the sea level is rising.

When cleaning the beach of plastic it is very important to disturb the strandline as little as possible and to leave all seaweed in place so we don't disturb the sandhoppers and other invertebrates that live there.

## SEASHORE CODE

- Look out for your safety at all times, check the tide times and keep away from cliffs
- Always carefully replace overturned rocks and seaweeds as they were
- Avoid removing seaweed from rocks, it takes years to grow
- Please leave any live creatures where you find them. Report live strandings of sea mammals to British Divers Marine Life rescue on 01825 765546, noting the place, the state of the tide and any injuries you can see without getting too close
- Report dead seals, porpoises, dolphins and whales to the 24 hr Cornwall Wildlife Trust stranding hotline - 0345 201 2626

Photographs courtesy of:

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## HOW TO AVOID DISTURBING SEALS ON LAND AND AT SEA

**BEFORE INTERACTION** **AFTER INTERACTION**

**THE IDEAL SEAL INTERACTION**

AVOID LARGE GROUPS AND PUPS

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE

STAY LOW AND DOWNWIND

PUT SEALS FIRST - THEY NEED REST TOO

IF SEALS LOOK AT YOU, YOU ARE TOO CLOSE

KEEP QUIET AND WHISPER

USE BINOCULARS FOR THE BEST VIEW WITHOUT DISTURBING SEALS!

ENJOY THE NATURAL WILD BEHAVIOUR OF THESE AMAZING CREATURES!

PLEASE LEAVE CORNWALL'S GLOBALLY RARE SEALS AS AND WHERE YOU FIND THEM FOR EVERYONE TO ENJOY! MAKE ENCOUNTERS GREAT FOR SEALS AND GREAT FOR YOU!

KEEP MOVING WITH A PREDICTABLE COURSE

SLOW, NO WAKE, CRAFT-SIDE ON

KEEP YOUR DISTANCE IF SEALS LOOK AT YOU, YOU ARE TOO CLOSE

KEEP QUIET AND WHISPER

NEVER FEED - IT INCREASES THE RISK OF INJURY, SUCH AS A FISH HOOK NEAR THE EYE

PLEASE LEAVE CORNWALL'S GLOBALLY RARE SEALS AS AND WHERE YOU FIND THEM FOR EVERYONE TO ENJOY! MAKE ENCOUNTERS GREAT FOR SEALS AND GREAT FOR YOU!

CONCERNED ABOUT A SEAL? RING BOMBLR - 0125 765546 SEEN A SEAL DISTURBED? RING 0345 201 2626