MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY

THE 2 MINUTE FOUNDATION

FINAL STRAW FOUNDATION

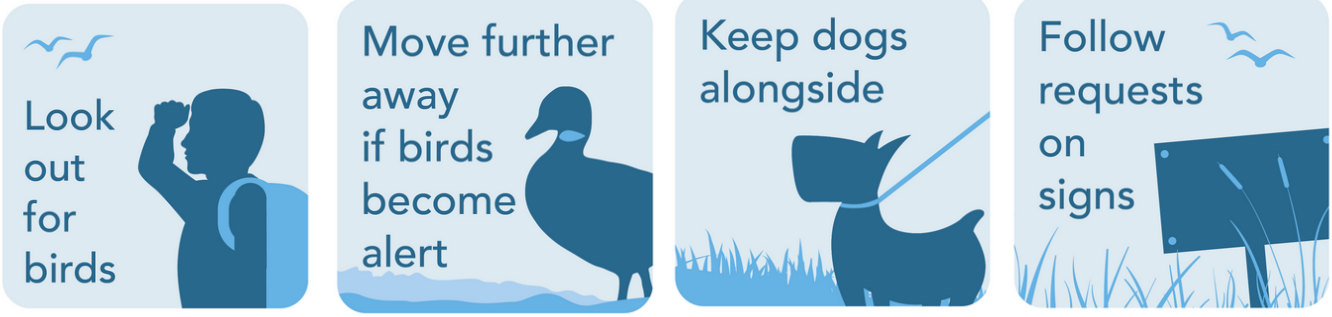
BIRD AWARE SOLENT

## Leader information pack

# Wildlife aware beach cleans

**Removing litter from beaches is a great way to support wildlife which lives on the coast.**

Since this activity may cause disturbance, help keep birds and other wildlife protected by following the Bird Aware Coastal Code:




Here's some steps to help protect the wildlife in the area you plan to clean:

- Check if the beach you're cleaning is protected because of its special wildlife features or habitats. You can check this through Defra or Natural England. Be sure to follow designation guidelines.
- When you seek permission for your beach clean from the council or land owner, ask if there are any known sensitive habitats or species.
- If you find your site is very sensitive, limit the number of beach cleaner volunteers if possible to reduce the chance of disturbing wildlife.
- Think about the tide when planning your beach clean. It may be more sensitive at higher or lower tides, depending on how wildlife uses the site.
- Keep wildlife rescue numbers on hand, just in case.

**Include these tips into existing risk assessment documents and briefing notes.**

It's a great idea to bring binoculars on your pre-event visit

# Pre-event check for wildlife habitats

Your pre-visit should take place at the same level of tide as your planned clean-up time - and preferably within a week of your planned clean.

Plan the route your group will take when they arrive to reach the site. Make sure they'll be able to follow requests on signs and won't need to walk on sensitive habitats such as vegetated shingle or saltmarsh.

Identify the potentially sensitive wildlife on your site:

- **Resting birds**
  Shingle beaches, spits and islands, as well as manmade structures like jetties are used by resting birds. They may be very well camouflaged.
- **Feeding birds**
  Mudflats and saltmarsh habitats are essential feeding grounds. Birds will mostly be found near the water line.
- **Nesting birds (April to September)**
  You might find areas of beach are roped off or marked with signs where birds are nesting on the ground. Avoid cleaning in their vicinity.
- **Seals**
  Look our for seals that are 'hauled out' or resting on land, especially during breeding season: June to August for common seals and November to January for grey seals.
- **Vulnerable marine or coastal plants**
  Take care of marine plants on beaches and in more sheltered locations which support highly specialised plants.
- **Large pieces of litter and debris**
  Large items such as tyres or pallets may have become habitat for wildlife. Many small animals like invertebrates are nocturnal and may not be visible in daylight hours but may still be hiding inside large pieces of debris.

**Tip**

If you find your site is very sensitive, limit the number of beach cleaner volunteers to reduce the chance of disturbing wildlife.

# Wildlife briefing for participants

## Sensitive habitats

- **Point out all the potentially sensitive areas and wildlife you identified during your pre-visit**
  Let participants know why these areas are sensitive.
- **Remind participants that larger bits of rubbish and debris may have become wildlife habitats**
  They should check very carefully before removing or moving, keeping in mind that tiny animals may be hidden in crevices.
- **Ask them to leave natural items on site**
  Items such as shells, feathers, cuttlefish bones and plants enrich a habitat.
- **Advise them to tread carefully**
  Watch where they place their feet to avoid damaging vegetation.
- **Remind them to check with you if unsure**
  For example they should check with you before removing material that has anything growing on it.
- **Ask them to follow directions on signs**
  And stick to paths where they exist.

## Strandlines

Strandlines (high water marks) are important habitats for many small creatures and a vital feeding ground for birds.

### Tip

If it's essential to clear litter on the strandline, pick a time JUST after the tide has turned to go out as it's likely to be less damaging to wildlife.

Remind participants to:

- **Leave seaweed and other natural items in place and undisturbed**
- **Avoid turning things over and digging for litter**
- **Walk beside rather than on strandline material**
- **Only remove visible litter.**

# Looking out for wildlife

**Remind participants about the Bird Aware Coastal Code:**

Look out for birds, move further away if they become alert, keep dogs alongside you and follow instructions on signs.

Signs of birds becoming alert include: moving/lifting their heads, calling, turning, stretching or flapping wings, walking or swimming away. If anyone has a dog with them, they must keep it alongside them, under control, on a short lead if necessary.

If birds fly away from an area, avoid cleaning that patch of ground as they might return.

**If the clean-up volunteers are lucky enough to see seals during their beach clean-up, remind them to:**

- **Remain vigilant to seals becoming alert to their presence**
  Look out for signs such as:
  - seals lifting their heads/becoming alert
  - seals becoming restless or shifting around
  - seals moving into the water: flushing or stampeding into the water.
- **Move slowly away if there is any change in the seals' behaviour.**

# Share your findings

Some things you find on the coast may be of interest to researchers. Consider contributing your valuable data to the following projects:

- **Mermaids purses**
  Great Eggcase Hunt and The Shark Trust
- **Dead birds**
  Report to the Defra helpline: 03459 33 55 77
- **Nurdles (pellets of plastic)**
  Great Nurdle Hunt
- **2 Minute Beach Clean app**
  Search for **BeachClean** in the app store
- **Species of note**
  Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
  Sussex Biodiversity Record Office
- Use the **Marine Conservation Society Beachwatch app** to report all litter. Here's **why**.

**Tip**

**If you find an animal that may be injured or in distress and you're unsure what to do, call a local rescue organisation.**