

Welcome to the **National Seal Sanctuary**

The National Seal Sanctuary was founded in 1958 at St Agnes on the North Coast of Cornwall by Ken and Mary Jones who had moved to the area to open a beach café. The Sanctuary moved to Gweek, near Helston in 1975, opening to visitors Whitsun 1976.

On arrival at the Sanctuary, you will be welcomed at reception, where there are information boards of the early days and rescues that have taken place over the years.

After a five minute walk to the seal pools you will see on your left the seal hospital. In the SOS audio-visual room, you will see a film showing, Rescue, Rehabilitation and Release.

Next to the hospital are the paddocks with our ponies and goats, which have been given a home at the Sanctuary.

At the main pool area we have our rescued pups and resident seals and sea lions. Here you will learn the difference between seals and sea lions from a member of the animal care team. Feeding and talks take place at different times during the day - you will be informed of the time of the next scheduled feed talk on arrival.

A 300 yard walk pass, the Café and BBQ is Otter Creek, where you will meet Bamboo and Thai our Asian short-clawed Otters.

Aims of the Sanctuary

- To rescue and provide professional treatment for sick, injured or distressed marine mammals who are found around our shores.
- To rehabilitate or provide and maintain a home for the unfortunate animals that would otherwise would perish in the wild.
- To release the rehabilitated marine mammals safely back into their natural environment.
- To create a greater awareness of the marine environment through the work that is undertaken.

Each year over 30 pups are rescued from probable death and brought here to the Sanctuary. A rescue normally begins with a telephone call from a concerned member of the public. Usually they have come upon a seal or pup lying alone on a beach, which may be in need of help.

On arrival at the Sanctuary the seal pup is placed in a quiet isolation unit to minimise its level of distress. Here the Animal Care Team will carry out a full medical examination, to determine what medical treatment is required.

When a pup reaches 20~25 kilograms and is free from wounds and infection, it is moved to the nursery pools to continue to gain further body weight. After a few days the access gate is opened into the convalescent pool. Here the pup will be with other rescued animals and some of the residents. The convalescence pool is where the pups have to compete for their share of fish ready for release back to the wild.

After a few months, normally in the early spring, with the pup fit and healthy and weighing a minimum of 50 kilograms, it is now ready for a safe return to the sea.

There are two species of seals found in the UK waters, the Grey and the Common and they belong to the 'True Seal' family. The Grey is the seal found around the Cornish coast.

Although awkward on land, Grey Seals are masters of the water. Their torpedo shaped bodies and small fore flippers when tightly closed to their sides render them streamline and agile. They also have a thick layer of blubber which keeps them warm even in the coldest of seas.

Seals are equipped with an excellent range of senses. They can see well on land and underwater, and a silvery layer behind the retina in the eye, similar to a cat's eye, helps them to hunt in low light levels.

We hope you have enjoyed your visit to the National Seal Sanctuary and have learnt more about the mammals around our coast.