

# IAATO Guidelines for Seal Watching



## General Code of Conduct for Viewing Seals on Land and Ice:



- When viewing seals do not surround or separate them, especially mothers and pups. Stay on the side where they can see you.



- On beaches, avoid getting between seals and the sea. Walk 'above' them.



- Suggested minimum distances from seals ashore are 5 meters/15 feet. Certain species and behaviors require a specific distance to be kept (see below).

## Understanding Seal Behavior

- Seals hauled out on land, rock or ice are sensitive to boats and human presence. Noises, smells and sights may elicit a reaction.
- Leopard seals are particularly inquisitive and can quickly become aggressive.
- Be aware of seal behaviour that indicates a seal has been disturbed. Such behaviours include:
  - An increase in alert or vigilance
  - Head turning
  - Change in posture from lying to erect
  - Hurriedly moving away from an approaching vessel vehicles or people
  - Open mouth threat displays (leopard seals on ice, elephant seals on land)
  - Aggressive displays or bluff charges in your direction
  - Biting zodiac pontoons by leopard seals



## Viewing Seals on Land and Ice

- **STAY LOW** – Try not to break their horizon or tower over hauled-out seals.
- Pups are often left alone when the mother is feeding. **They are not abandoned** and should not be touched.
- Any seal response other than a raised head should be avoided.
- Do not initiate interactions.
- If an individual or herd moves towards water, or a hurried entry into water by many individuals occurs, you should retreat slowly and carefully.
- Be aware that fur seals and sea lions are highly mobile on land and might charge (and potentially bite) if approached too closely - keep at least 15 meters/45 feet from them.
- Be aware of animals in tussock grass. A field guide should lead carrying walking stick or equivalent to keep the seal at a distance.
- Keep a minimum distance from jousting bull elephant seals of 25 meters/75 feet.
- Avoid sudden movements and keep all noises low.
- On beaches where there are concentrations of breeding seals, it is recommended to remain on your feet for wildlife observations.

If in doubt: **RETREAT SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY.**