# Anglers’ rising aggression threatens Devon and Cornwall wild seals



A recent incident at a picturesque Devon beauty spot has drawn widespread condemnation after an angler was allegedly caught attempting to hook a wild seal. Footage captures the shocking moment a woman sought to ensnare the marine mammal while fishing off the rocks. This incident has raised serious concerns about the treatment of seals and their interactions with humans, especially in populated coastal areas.

The alarming trend of aggressive behaviour towards seals is not isolated. Reports indicate similar incidents, including one where an angler threw a beer bottle at a seal that was interfering with his line. Duncan Kenny, who witnessed the event at Hope's Nose near Torquay, described the act as "appalling and inconsiderate." He recounted how the seal was merely pursuing its natural instinct to hunt when it was struck by the bottle, which sparked outrage among conservationists. The Seal Project charity noted that this is part of a “concerning pattern” of aggression towards seals, highlighting that they had received multiple reports of such incidents in recent weeks.

Adding to the mounting evidence of hostility towards seals, shocking footage from a fishing vessel near Cornwall depicted fishermen jabbing at a seal with a pole tipped with a sharp hook. The clip, emanating from the Roseland Peninsula, prompted outcry from both local observers and marine conservation groups. Dan Jarvis, director of welfare and conservation for British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR), condemned the act as illegal and indicative of the direct persecution seals face from those regarding them as competition for fishing resources.

The threats to seals extend beyond human aggression; they are also increasingly susceptible to harmful interactions with fishing gear. Distressingly, a well-known seal in South Devon, affectionately named Sammy, was discovered with multiple fishing hooks embedded in her body—not an uncommon scenario. The Seal Project reported similar cases, indicating an alarming trend of entanglement among seals in the area. These incidents often restrict seals' ability to hunt and pose a significant risk to their survival.

Despite the prevailing negativity towards seals from some quarters, there are hopeful narratives. One heartwarming encounter was recorded in which a young grey seal engaged in a delightful tug-of-war with a fisherman over a conger eel. The fisherman, showing clear empathy for the creature, managed to guide the seal safely away from harm while preserving his catch—an example of how humans and wildlife can interact positively. Nevertheless, conservationists advocate for a cautious approach, advising against feeding or drawing too close to wild seals.

As the pressure on marine life mounts, experts emphasise the need for increased awareness and education to foster coexistence with these remarkable creatures. With incidents of violence against seals seemingly on the rise, it is crucial for fishing communities to understand their responsibility under UK law to protect these animals.

The growing evidence of seals facing aggression from anglers, combined with the ongoing issue of entanglement, has underscored the importance of responsible fishing practices and wildlife conservation in preserving the delicate balance of marine ecosystems.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14794661/video-Cruel-angler-tries-hook-wild-seal-Devon-beauty-spot.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-53543472)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-53543472), [[3]](https://www.cornwalllive.com/news/cornwall-news/horrific-footage-shows-fisherman-attacking-9040877)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-05-30/warning-issued-after-seal-found-with-fish-hooks-embedded-in-her-face), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-67274653)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2021-01-28/moment-seal-uses-eel-in-game-of-tug-of-war-with-devon-fisherman)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14794661/video-Cruel-angler-tries-hook-wild-seal-Devon-beauty-spot.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-53543472> - An angler threw a beer bottle at a seal when it interfered with his fishing line, a charity has said. Photos taken at Hope's Nose, near Torquay, appear to show a man hurling a projectile at the creature from a cliff. Duncan Kenny, who took the pictures, said the grey seal was hunting when the angler emptied the bottle and launched it, hitting the animal on the back. Mr Kenny called it "appalling and inconsiderate behaviour". He said he was collecting litter at the Devon beauty spot with members of the Seal Project conservation charity when he witnessed the attack on Sunday morning. "The seal made an attempt to get the fishing line," he said. "The angler finished his beer, drained the bottle and threw it at the seal. "The bottle hit the seal on the back and it swam off." Mr Kenny said that "fortunately seals are robust creatures", but said the seal was simply doing what was in its nature. "By throwing a glass bottle at it you are stopping it from hunting," he said. The Seal Project said it was "not an isolated case" and it had received "numerous reports of this aggressive behaviour recently".
3. <https://www.cornwalllive.com/news/cornwall-news/horrific-footage-shows-fisherman-attacking-9040877> - Shocking footage has emerged appearing to show a fisherman attacking a seal using a pole with a sharp hook on the end. The video was taken on Sunday off the Roseland peninsula on Cornwall's south coast. The video shows a seal bobbing around in the water next to a Padstow-registered vessel. Two fishermen can be seen peering over the side of the boat at the seal, before one of them violently jabs down multiple times with a long pole. The pole then emerges from the water and can be seen to have a sharp-looking hook on the end. The person who recorded the footage told CornwallLive: "I was out on a morning walk this morning on the coast path near to Hemmick beach. I had my camera with me as I am always on the lookout for wildlife to film. I saw a seal and started filming. It approached a fishing boat that was passing by. The boat turned around to reach the seal. A man on board took a long pole with a sharp hook on the end and jabbed at the seal. He then did it a second time. The seal was behind the boat at the time but it is very clear what is happening. I saw the seal in the sea for a minute after the boat had moved on but then it disappeared so I am unsure how badly it was hurt. The fisherman (left) can be seen jabbing at the seal. I am a huge wildlife lover and was of course incredibly shocked and upset. The fishing boat was only passing through but deliberately stopped and turned around to reach the seal. I personally think it is important to highlight this barbaric behaviour." CornwallLive has shared the footage with British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR). Its director of welfare and conservation, Dan Jarvis said: "The footage is quite shocking! On the face of it appears there is clear intent to cause injury to a seal, which is illegal. It demonstrates once again the threats and direct persecution that seals face against unfair competition for shared natural resources they have every right to use." BDMLR pointed out that they often hear rumours of such behaviour but rarely get evidence, so the clip has been passed to colleagues at Natural England, Marine Management Organisation and Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority to view and respond to from a potential enforcement perspective. A statement from Cornwall Seal Group said: "It is possible for all to see that this seal was ‘bottling’ or resting vertically at the surface. Not interacting with the vessel or its gear at all. It appears the fishers waited until the seal drifted into hitting range. Any successful, hard hit on the skull would likely cause severe and potentially life-threatening injury. This looks to be an intentional attempt at injuring a seal which is illegal. It is illegal to injure, take or kill a seal in England."
4. <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2021-01-28/moment-seal-uses-eel-in-game-of-tug-of-war-with-devon-fisherman> - The extraordinary moment a seal got into a tug of war over an eel with a North Devon fisherman has been captured on camera. Hundreds have been sharing the unusual footage filmed by local angler Mark Frith as he battled to reel in a conger eel off Ilfracombe Pier, before it climbed up the pier to take back the catch. It was around 5pm on Tuesday 26 January when the experienced fisherman found someone else was tugging on his line. The grey seal turned out to be five-month-old Chili, who was rescued from Blackpool Sands in South Devon in November last year. He was cared for at the West Hatch Animal Centre in Taunton, where he was given his name, before being released into the wild in Devon earlier this month. Mark, who has more than 30 years of fishing experience, told ITV West Country: "It was the weirdest thing. I've got a border collie and that's what that seal was doing, it was like a dog with a toy." Wary of the seal getting injured, Mark tried to pull in the eel without the inquisitive creature getting tangled or causing the line to snap. It was about 20 minutes where I couldn't let go of the line. "[The seal] was having a whale of a time. You wouldn't believe the single mindedness of it. Thinking he would just give up, Mark didn't expect the seal to venture up the sea steps to claim his catch. The seal had a red tag fixed to its tail, and Mark suspected it may have been released after being cared for as it had no fear for humans. After taking his meal, Mark then decided to reward seal with some fish. However, the British Divers Marine Life Rescue urge people to avoid wild seals whenever possible and to never feed them. Mark also checked for any damage or hooks from the fishing line. Thankfully, the seal was given the all clear. Amazingly, so was the conger eel who came out of the incident unscathed and returned to the sea along with the seal. It was Mark's former step-son, Ben Mitchell Hunt, who shared the video on Facebook after editing in with some commentary.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-05-30/warning-issued-after-seal-found-with-fish-hooks-embedded-in-her-face> - A well-known grey seal has been spotted off the south Devon coast with fish hooks embedded in her skin. The Seal Project, a Brixham charity, posted distressing images on its social media site, revealing how the seal, who is known locally as Sammy, had anglers' hooks on her body. The post, published on Sunday 28 May, revealed that the "well-known adult female seal" had one "directly above her right eye". The were hooks embedded along Sammy's body Credit: Seal Project There were others embedded along her body and one was even trailing a fish head that had caught on a hook further down the line. They wrote: "These will come out by themselves and there is nothing we can do as either BDMLR [British Divers Marine Life Rescue] Marine Mammal Medics or as The Seal Project to help her. As an adult seal these just have to come out by themselves. "She is the second seal seen in a week within Brixham, caught in angling lines. "Those we spoke to this evening were very respectful, and in awe of these amazing creatures, but not everyone appreciates that these creatures deserve our respect and that refraining from angling around them, and refraining from feeding them is key to preventing issues like this."
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-67274653> - A young grey seal has been saved from a tangle of fishing hooks and lines on a beach in Cornwall. British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) said the seal pup was found washed up at Porthgwarra beach, near Land's End. The pup was tangled up in a set of mackerel "feathers", with about six of the 12 hooks piercing its body, including one in its mouth. Volunteers cut away the hooks and released the seal back into the sea. Dan Jarvis, from BDMLR, said entanglements were deadly for seals, especially young pups. He said: "With a hook in its mouth and another in its flipper, the fishing line was drawn very tightly across its body, that would slow the seal down in the water. "If a seal pup like this is unable to swim, feed or dive properly, especially in the stormy weather, there is a good chance it will starve to death." Mr Jarvis said the charity was seeing more entanglement cases each winter. "Climate change may be a factor in this as the seal pupping season seems to be starting earlier and the mackerel handlining season is going on longer, so these accidental interactions are more likely to occur," he said. The seal had a small tear to its lip but was released out to sea in "relatively good condition", the charity said.