

RESPONSE BY LENNOX COMMUNITY COUNCIL PER ARTHUR FEARNLEY,
SECRETARY, 18 THE MUIR, BOGMOOR, FOCHABERS, IV32 7PN
Tel - 01343 820091 E-mail 'artmojo@snpnet.com'

Question 2: Do you consider that additional sites should be included at national/regional/local level and, if so, why, how many additional sites and which sites?

Lennox Community Council would wish to promote the inclusion of the 'PORTGORDON SEAL SITE' in the list of Haul-Out sites. It is recognized that the site is small compared with other sites identified but the LCC considers that the following points justify its inclusion.

- ① The site is a haven for both Common and Grey seals - you have only 6 others listed - up to 25 roosting at a time.
- ② The site is very close to the Moray Coastal Route Road and is next to the Speyide Way and Sustrens Cycle Route. The site provides one of the closest locations for visitor viewing.
- ③ There are no other sites except Findhorn listed in the North East.
- ④ ~~Of~~ Adjacent to the site a viewing area has been established with an plyth and information board, and a car park. The LCC obtained funding from Moray Community Environmental Improvement Fund, the Moray Firth Partnership, and Lottery Awards for All.
- ⑤ The facility has increased considerably the number of visitors to the site.
- ⑥ With the increase has come an increase in human and animal harassment. A publicity campaign was recently mounted in association with the Police but since then there have been further cases of stone throwing and approaching too close to the seals.
- ⑦ The Community Council considers that a well established facility should justify some further protection such as ~~what~~ is proposed for Haul-Out sites. The designation of this site should reduce the likelihood of anti social behaviour and give the seals every chance of maintaining the affinity with this site.

Attached

- A - The initial concerns
 - B - Map of site
 - C - The Project
 - D - Text of Information Board
 - E - Opening of facility
 - F - Recent Publicity campaign
- Selection of photographs

Arthur Fearnley

with apologies for handwriting
- computer on the blink.

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Sealing the end of a colony



hauled onto the rocks have been a common sight at Portgordon for two years, but they could be scared away and move elsewhere because of over-enthusiastic humans getting too close. Picture by ERIC CORMACK

WILDLIFE experts fear a colony of seals could disappear from their home near a Moray village because they are being scared off by humans too eager to get close to them.

People have been taking seal spotting to a new extreme and, not content with watching them from the shore, have been clambering onto the rocks and even trying to touch them.

The trend emerging at Portgordon is alarming wildlife group Friends of the Moray Firth Dolphins, who fear that people are putting both themselves and the seals in danger.

The family of seals have been resident on rocks at the village's east beach for two years, and it is not uncommon to see as many as 25 of the creatures hauled out of the water to rest.

But co-ordinator Peter MacDonald said that people have been taking their enthusiasm for the seals to a dangerous new level and warned they could be scaring them away.

This is a critical time of year for the animals, said Mr MacDonald, with many newborn pups in the colony,

By LEANNE CARTER

along with mothers about to give birth.

He said: "Seals spend most of their time in the water and when they haul onto the rocks, they are resting and should not be disturbed by people invading their space.

"In recent months, people have been getting far too close trying to get photographs and even trying to touch them. This is not advisable because they are wild animals.

"Seals - even the pups - have an incredible set of teeth on them and could quite easily take your fingers off. I have seen that happen to someone involved in the rescue of a seal.

"If you are attacked by a seal, you will know all about it."

Mr MacDonald believes the seals which have now taken up residence at Portgordon came from Spey Bay a few miles along the coast.

It is most likely, he said, that something - possibly human interference - forced them to move from

that area and now they are in danger of being scared off again.

Mother seals in particular can react badly to unwanted attention, and sometimes pups miss vital feeds if they are too scared to come out of the water.

It is not uncommon for mothers to abandon their young if they feel they are being threatened.

The area of rocks where they rest is just yards from the popular Speyside Way walking route and visitors can get an excellent view of them from the shore.

But that has not stopped visitors from climbing onto the rocks, said Mr MacDonald, and in some cases children and dogs have even been let loose on their patch.

"This is one of the best places in the country to watch seals because they are so close to the shore. Our message to the public is just to watch and admire.

"We hope to be able to erect an information panel there in the future to tell people more about the Atlantic grey seal, but also warning them to leave the seals alone," he added.

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S P E Y B A Y

SEAL SITE

BUCKIE

Buckpool

Portgordon

Clochan

Atalloth



CROWN COPYRIGHT

BB

LENNOX COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT PORTGORDON EAST - ATLANTIC GREY SEALS

Project - Provide quality information/interpretation panel at a site adjacent to the former ice house east of Portgordon. This facility is at the nearest point where the Atlantic Grey Seal Colony can be viewed and where access for walkers, cyclists and motorists already exists.

Design - The panel is of a high quality design similar to others in the area and was prepared by J Tasker, Graphic Design. A stone plinth to house the panel has been erected by local stone mason, George Reid.

Benefits - The site offers a superb opportunity to view the seals (often there can be around 20 seals basking on the rocks) and the panel provides an informative and educational tool to enhance the enjoyment of visitors to the site. The panel also complements a number of other such panels on the Speyside Way. It is very important to safeguard the site and included on the panel is valuable advice on how visitors should conduct themselves in the vicinity of the site to ensure that the colony is not unduly disturbed or the environment damaged. This is something which does not exist at present.

Funding - The Community Council is indebted to three organisations for funding the project - Moray Council (Community Environmental Improvement Fund), Moray Firth Partnership (Community Grants Scheme), and The National Lottery (Awards for All). It is hoped that some additional environmental improvements can be carried out at the site and that litter and 'doggie' bins will be installed courtesy of Moray Council

Financial Statement-

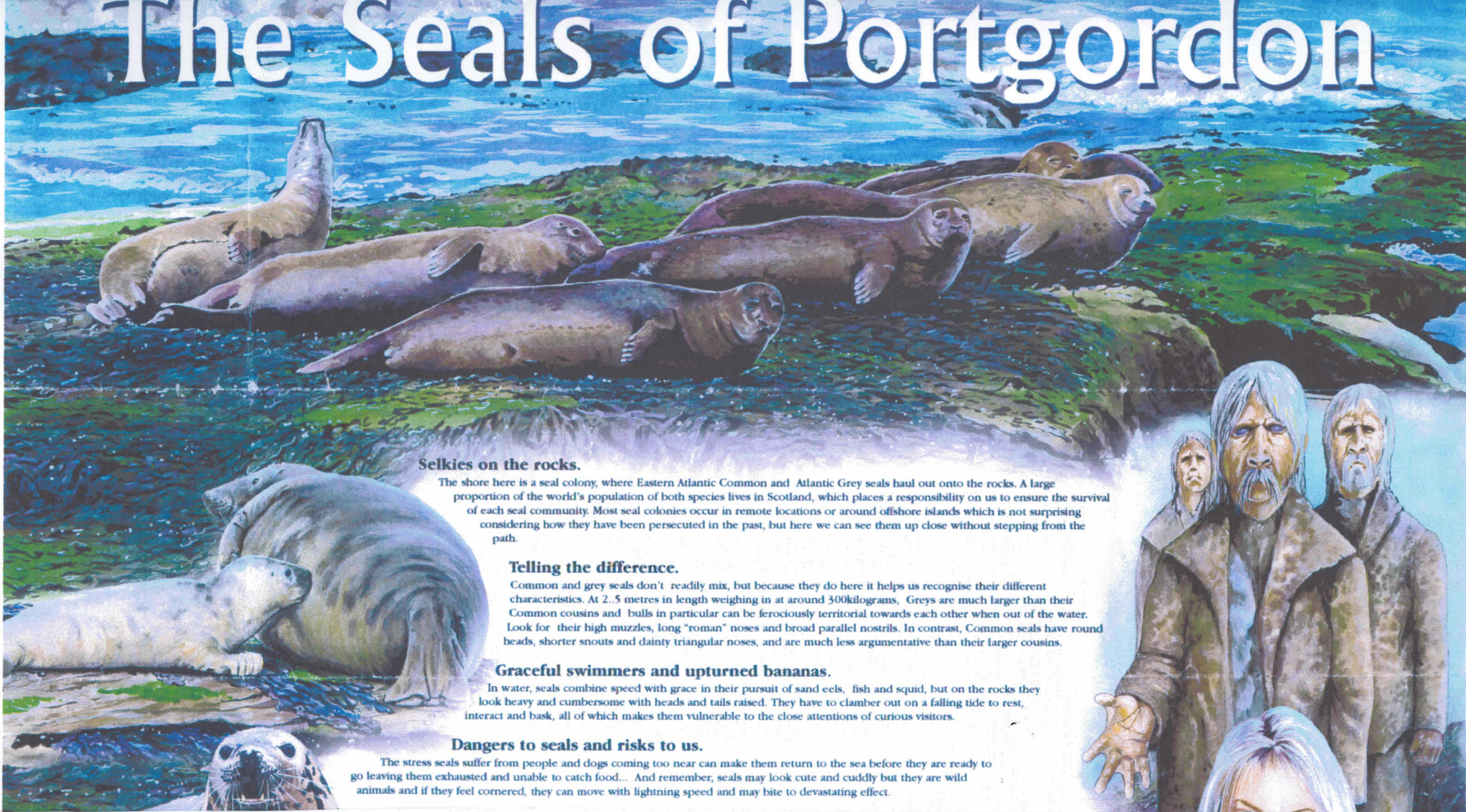
Grants	Moray Community Environmental Fund	£1500
	MFP Community Grants Scheme	£938
	National Lottery Awards for All	<u>£1200</u>
	TOTAL	£3638
Expend	Construction of Plinth	£600
	Design & Manufacture of Panel	<u>£2937.50</u>
	TOTAL	£3537.50

The remaining £100.50 will be spent on improving the surface of the viewing area

Publicity- The award of the grants was publicised in an article in the local paper along with a photograph of the site. The panel acknowledges the funders with the appropriate names and logos. On completion of the works the Community Council arranged for an informal opening ceremony attended by two Moray Councillors, both the Speyside and Countryside Rangers, the designer, two Community Councillors, photographers from the Northern Scott and the Banffshire Advertiser and the Chairman of the Community Council. A press release was issued and subsequently both local newspapers gave excellent publicity to the project.

Secretary, 11th December 2007

The Seals of Portgordon



Selkies on the rocks.

The shore here is a seal colony, where Eastern Atlantic Common and Atlantic Grey seals haul out onto the rocks. A large proportion of the world's population of both species lives in Scotland, which places a responsibility on us to ensure the survival of each seal community. Most seal colonies occur in remote locations or around offshore islands which is not surprising considering how they have been persecuted in the past, but here we can see them up close without stepping on the path.

Telling the difference.

Common and grey seals don't readily mix, but because they do here it helps us recognise their different characteristics. At 2.5 metres in length weighing in at around 300 kilograms, Greys are much larger than their Common cousins and bulls in particular can be ferociously territorial towards each other when out of the water. Look for their high muzzles, long "roman" noses and broad parallel nostrils. In contrast, Common seals have round heads, shorter snouts and dainty triangular noses, and are much less argumentative than their larger cousins.

Graceful swimmers and upturned bananas.

In water, seals combine speed with grace in their pursuit of sand eels, fish and squid, but on the rocks they look heavy and cumbersome with heads and tails raised. They have to clamber out on a falling tide to rest, interact and bask, all of which makes them vulnerable to the close attentions of curious visitors.

Dangers to seals and risks to us.

The stress seals suffer from people and dogs coming too near can make them return to the sea before they are ready to go leaving them exhausted and unable to catch food... And remember, seals may look cute and cuddly but they are wild animals and if they feel cornered, they can move with lightning speed and may bite to devastating effect.

Fireside tales of silky sirens.

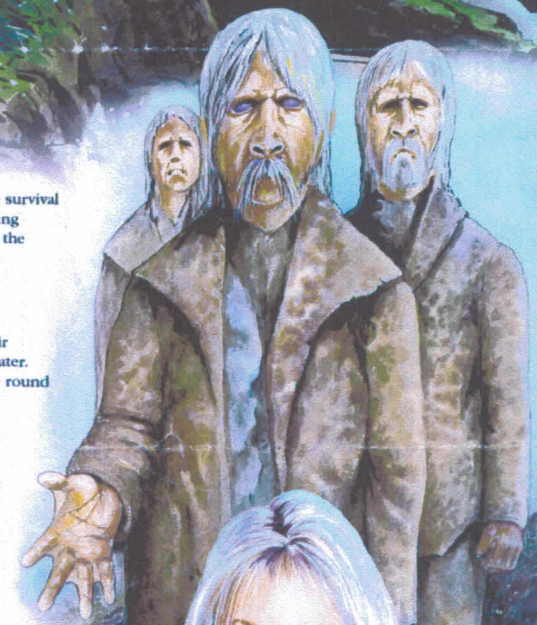
Seals have in the past been disparaged because of the perceived damage they cause to salmon stocks and fish nets, but this is only one aspect of our relationships with seals. In many coastal communities, the wailing cries of grey seals on the shore spawned strange stories of selkies, named after the seals' silky fur, who could move between the two worlds of life as beguiling maidens who were discovered on the shore and who lived, married and had children before abandoning their human family to return to the sea as seals, or as sinister fur clad seal folk who would wreak retribution on the fishermen who persecuted them.

Leaving fairy stories aside, these beautiful inspiring creatures are a special part of Port Gordon's heritage and natural world. They form an important link in the web of life that keeps the life of the Firth in balance and for this alone they deserve our appreciation and protection.

Western European waters are the principal home of European Common and Atlantic Grey seals. A large proportion of both species live in Scotland, and both share the sea and shoreline here in Port Gordon. This is an amazing demonstration of trust and confidence, given the degree to which seals were once hunted. Most colonies in Scotland occur in remote locations or around offshore islands.

Seals have to haul out at low tide, using powerful front flippers to lumber ashore, allowing them to rest, interact and breed, maintaining a link with the ancient common ancestry they share with modern day weasels and stoats. Their back legs have all but disappeared but they are perfectly designed for speed and grace beneath the waves in their pursuit of the sand eels, whitefish, flounders and squid which makes up much of their diet.

Despite all this, both they and us are at risk.



Panel gets the seal of approval

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A COLONY of seals which have set up home on rocks near a Moray village will now be living in perfect harmony with their human neighbours.

It is hoped a new information panel will educate people about the seals found at Portgordon and urge them to keep their distance from the creatures.

Fears have been expressed that unwanted attention from humans could force the colony to

move elsewhere, and cause mothers to abandon their pups.

Wildlife experts also fear that people - who have even been trying to touch the seals - could be attacked by the wild animals if they feel under threat.

The information panel on the Speyside Way has been developed with grant assistance by Lennox Community Council and was unveiled last week.

A spokesman for the group said they had been approached on a number

By **LEANNE CARTER**

of occasions to ask why the site, which is on the Speyside Way, had not been identified.

He added: "The site offers a superb opportunity to view the seals - often there can be around 20 seals basking on the rocks - and the panel provides an informative and educational tool to enhance the enjoyment of visitors to the site.

"It is very important to safeguard the site and included on the panel is valuable advice on how visitors should conduct themselves in the vicinity of the site to ensure that the colony is not unduly disturbed or the environment damaged."

The colony is a mix of Atlantic grey and eastern Atlantic common seals and the panel, which sits on a stone plinth, explains how to tell the difference.

Designed by local artist, John Tasker, it also gives

details about their habitat and eating habits, and also tells about the role of seals in local folklore.

Grant assistance to pay for the project was obtained from Moray Council, the Moray Firth Partnership and the lottery's Awards for All scheme.

It is hoped that further improvements will be made to the site, which also incorporates an old grass-roofed ice house, with the installation of litter and doggie bins.



Colin Murray (left), chairman of Lennox Community Council, carries out the official unveiling of the new information panel to educate the public about the seal colony at Portgordon. NS

PORTGORDON LAUNCH FOR SEALS CAMPAIGN

DO NOT let your dog attack seals on the beach or face a criminal record - that was the warning being highlighted last week in a bid to safeguard the protected species locally.

Following the issue of dogs attacking seals being raised at a recent Lennox Community Council (LCC) meeting, they have joined forces with Grampian Police to highlight the problem of dogs attacking seals on the shorefront between Portgordon and Buckpool.

Buckie Community Beat Officer PC Mairi Page warned that it was a criminal offence to attack seals and that they should not be approached if spotted on the beach for any reason.

"The issue of dogs attacking seals or people throwing stones at seals usually arises at some point during the spring and summer," she told the 'Advertiser'. "It has to be highlighted that these are criminal offences as seals are protected animals by law under the Protection of Mammals Act.

"People should also be aware that seals in real life are not the cute and cuddly animals which they may appear to be. They have very sharp teeth and could give a person or dog a extremely nasty bite which, due to the infection they would more than likely get, would take a while to heal.

"If it is being attacked, an adult seal will make its displeasure known very quickly.

"A seal pup may become distressed if bitten by a dog and may even die if it is bitten on its head or flippers."

Community Warden Dave Crawford noted that crime against wildlife was a serious matter.

He explained: "Many people may think that this sort of thing is not taken seriously, but they would be wrong.



Launching the seal protection campaign at the Portgordon foreshore are, left to right: Councillor Douglas Ross; Hamish Carter, Lennox Community Council; Councillor Anita McDonald; Councillor George McIntyre; Community Warden Dave Crawford; Community Beat Officer PC Mairi Page.

"We would urge anyone who may have information regarding attacks on seals to get in touch as soon as possible."

Dead seals occasionally wash up and in such circumstances they should not be approached, rather Environmental Health should be informed.

Similarly, a seal pup spotted on its own on a beach with no mother in sight should not be presumed abandoned; indeed, this is very rarely the case as the mother will usually leave it on the shore while she hunts for food.

In such instances the seal pup should be left alone, although if concerned the SSPCA can be informed.

The campaign was strongly backed by the area's three elected members, Councillors George McIntyre, Douglas Ross and Anita McDonald, and they united in condemnation of those who allow their dogs to attack seals or themselves seek to harm them.

Councillor McIntyre said: "People who indulge in this sort of behaviour are breaking the law.

"This area has been specifically identified by Lennox Community Council as one where this needs to be stopped.

"The schools of seals are an attraction and we need to tackle this sort of anti-social behaviour, es-

pecially when we are trying to attract more tourists to the area."

Councillor Ross that reports of attacks on seals were "quite disturbing".

"It is quite disturbing to hear reports of people letting their dogs attacks seals," he continued. "Not only is it an offence but they are endangering the dogs' safety as well.

"This is worthwhile campaign which is being run by the police and Lennox Community Council.

"Dog owners must ensure that they control their pets properly to avoid harm to both the seals and the dogs."

Councillor Anita McDonald called on the seals to be "properly protected" and hoped that the campaign would raise awareness of the issue amongst the wider public.

She added: "Seals should be properly protected as far as is possible; attacking or harming them is a criminal offence and rightly so.

"They are not only a vital part of our natural wildlife and heritage they are a big tourist attraction in the area.

"A lot of people come down here to the Portgordon foreshore, literally in all weathers, to enjoy watching the seals."

Lennox Community Council Secretary Arthur Fearnley highlighted that the group were likely to seek the local site's inclusion on a scheme that would grant seals extra protection.

"The Scottish Government has just announced a consultation on the proposed location of over 100 seal 'haul out' sites (these are sites used by seals for resting or socialising)," he said. "These sites, once designated, would result in additional protection measures being introduced to reduce the possibility of 'human harassment'.

"Unfortunately, Portgordon is not included on the list of sites. Although it is a relatively small site it does harbour gray and common seals and Lennox Community Council is likely to request its inclusion when it replies to the consultation."

Anyone who believes they have information regarding attacks on seals should contact Grampian Police on 0845 600 5 700 or, in confidence and if the information is not urgent, Crimestoppers on 0800 555111. If someone witnesses an attack in progress, they should phone 999 immediately.



Seals enjoy a rest on Portgordon foreshore last week.



Lennox Community Council

FOCHABERS - PORTGORDON - SPEY BAY - CLOCHAN - ENZIE

Seal Haul-Out Consultation

SECRETARY : Arthur Fearnley
18 The Muir
Bogmoor
Fochabers
Moray

With compliments

Arthur Fearnley - 2/6/11

IV32 7PN
01343 820091

