**SEABIRDS-AND-SEALS - ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

The team at Seabirds-and-Seals are committed to providing a good quality of service, whilst minimising the environmental impact of our activities.

As part of our commitment, we are members of the Green Tourism Business Scheme, which provides accreditation and encouragement for tourism businesses to help the awareness and responsibility we have for our environment.

The Green Tourism Contact for our business is Mrs Marie Leask – Please get in touch if any queries through the website Contact page.

The following outlines how we have tried to offer a low impact experience for our customers, who can be reassured that they are having a good time as well as being kind to our environment. A Carbon Footprint calculator created by CO2balance.com

will work out how energy efficient you are in terms of carbon emissions, as well as calculating the footprint of your travels.

Our main environmental aim, as a cruising company, is to make sure that we leave no trace of our activities on the pristine natural environments that we visit. In fact, we do better than that – if we find any waste, especially plastic on our shore trips we try to take as much of it on board as possible and then dispose of it properly ashore.

Our crews are hand-picked and a commitment to environmental sustainability is a major criterion in joining our team. In fact, often they come up with new ideas on how we can further reduce our impact – for example our multi-use water bottles were a great idea in 2019 and much appreciated by guests.  There is a specialist tour guide onboard every one of our cruises, with a qualification through Napier University on Tourism Leadership/Management and specialises on the local area, plus all the wildlife we encounter along the way. We have many close ties with local wildlife company ‘Shetland Wildlife’ who also manages ‘Shetland Cetecaean Group’ and we are also Marine Conservation Society members, as well as WiSe Accredited Operator’s. These vital crew members know the marine habitats of the Shetland Islands, where to find wildlife and identify species for our guests.  There is no doubt that our guests love the sociable and informal way they gain wildlife knowledge which then fires their own passion for protecting the environment. Guests also help with cetacean sightings that are reported to Shetland Cetecean Sightings through our WhatsApp group, as well as to other groups such as ‘Orca Watch’, providing statistical information for their vital work.

We have noticed that our guests are also very interested in protecting the environment and are happy to contribute suggestions and receive information.  On all our tours we encourage responsible and sustainable tourism which outlines how they can support the environment while visiting the area as well as our own commitments. Our Green Initiative Crew member is ‘Marie Leask’ and she is very excited about this role, monitoring our green polices and suggest ways in which we can improve to minimise our environmental impact.

We further support the environment and our local community by buying supplies for our refreshment stop on each tour locally, in particular Fairtrade.  We are very fortunate to have a wide variety of wonderful produce available.

**Carbon Footprint/Management**

Monitoring our carbon footprint is a very important factor in helping to understand the impact of our behaviour on global warming.  Below is a list of policies we have implemented aboard to limit our carbon footprint:

As we only provide light refreshments on our tours – we buy local Fairtrade produce from our local Co-Op store. We plan, budget and buy accordingly to avoid waste.

We try to avoid buying products with excessive plastic packaging. We advise on our website that we cater for dietary requirements, always carry gluten free provisions, but when booking to let us know if any other dietary requirements e.g vegan and we will certainly be sure to accommodate those requests.

* **We encourage our guests to take along refillable water bottles.**
* **We do not use straws, plastic cutlery or plates.**
* **We recycle as much of our waste as possible.**
* **We buy items with minimal packaging.**
* **We purchase Eco-Friendly Merchandise/products and where possible items with minimal packaging**
* **Engine revolutions are kept to a minimum to reduce fuel consumption. All fuel usage is recorded in our log book so that fuel consumption can be tightly monitored.**
* **Our company depends largely on the internet and word of mouth for marketing to reduce paper waste.**
* **Our trips start/finish close to the bus station, this makes it easy for our guests to travel to our departure location in Lerwick by public transport. We encourage this wherever possible, with links to public transport provided on our website.  Our vessel boarding and disembarkation times, where possible, tie in with the bus timetables.**
* **Guests are given information on electric charging points in the local area and to near our departure location.**
* **All guests and crew use the designated recyclable bins provided.**
* **LEDS are fitted aboard our vessel.**
* **Our marketing is predominantly online based and with a very large percentage of repeat bookings it allows for minimal paper waste.**
* **At the end of every season we 'Plant a Tree' for every guest who has taken a cruise with us.**
* **We suggest guests look for the Green Tourism badge when booking local attractions and accommodation.**
* **Through a careful choice of engines fitted to the boat, it means that while she is capable of achieving 22kts of boat speed, we instruct skippers to run all tours not exceeding 16.5kts. This represents a 25% reduction in boat speed with the corresponding reductions in emissions, noise, wake effects, environmental impact and fuel usage.**
* **We lift our boat out of the water, when our season comes to an end, to minimise the impact on fuel and wildlife.**
* **We use low energy LEDs where possible.**
* **When purchasing equipment, priority is given to the products that consume less water, energy and fuel.**

**SEABIRDS-AND-SEALS – SUSTAINABLE TOURISM POLICY**

Our sustainable tourism policy outlines how we take a sustainable tourism approach for our cruises. We are passionate about the natural landscapes and wild places we visit and we are committed to operating in a manner that does not harm these pristine environments.

Our stated aim is to protect the wonderful marine environment and the wildlife it supports.

We are proud to say that we have recently joined the Green Tourism Scheme and currently waiting to be graded, we will update this section and the logo on our homepage as soon as we have been graded.

We are a member of the Marine Conservation Society (MCS), the charity working for ‘seas full of life’. The Marine Conservation Society is a UK-wide community of ocean lovers all working together towards our vision of a sea full of life, where nature flourishes and people thrive.

**Committed to the Culture and Heritage of Local Communities**

Our cruise itineraries take in the coastline and islands of Bressay & Noss and we have a commitment to the local communities which we engage with; their way of life, culture and heritage add enormously to the positive experience our guests have whilst on our tours. We are committed to working with local businesses and communities to ensure we bring benefits which help the local economy Many guests will require further travel information before and after their cruise and we will recommend where we can. Our cruising area is dotted with delightful communities along the coastlines and we love to introduce our guests to these through our live commentary. Any local event such as food or music festivals, are advertised on our website – a link is provided to a ‘local what’s on’ for festivals etc. This gives our guests a true flavour of the area and an opportunity to meet the locals.

We only use local produce for our refreshments stop and will highlight the food specialities of the area, which are of excellent quality. We promote the history and culture of the area and make suggestions of authentic local food, drink and craft gifts to purchase and take home. Local trades are used in the maintenance of our vessel, with berthing fees supporting the local marina.

During our safety briefing before casting off, passengers are advised on our environmental responsibility, for example not to throw anything overboard or dispose of toilet roll/sanitary towels down the toilet, instead use the hygiene bags provided.

**Locally Sourced Produce**

All food and drink on board is sourced locally to keep the carbon footprint to a minimum and also because no finer provisions can be found elsewhere. We encourage our guests to shop locally as we have some very find seafood shops all caught in a sustainable way, as well as highly rated farm shops, offering very fine produce.

**Low Carbon Footprint**

Our vessel “Seabird” was chosen for our cruises because she boasts magnificent Yanmar engines, which is known worldwide for economy and reliability. The engine is also perfect for economical cruising and good for the marine environment. The engine is ‘keel cooled’ which means there is no overboard discharge from the cooling system and therefore no possibility of heavy metal contaminants entering the ecosystem.

There is masses of space on the deck for stowing passengers own bicycles. This encourages guests to explore the waters we visit and also onshore “under their own steam”, thus causing no pollution through their activities.

We cruise in an area which is a magnificent habitat for a large variety of bird and animal species. When these are spotted we are very careful to observe at a respectful distance to ensure we cause no disturbance to the presence of wildlife. As a business with 30 years of experience, we continue to lead the way for responsible boat-based ecotourism. At all times we follow the Nature Scot Marine Wildlife watching code and we are also Wise Accredited Operators, proudly adhering to strict protocols to minimize disturbance to marine wildlife.

**Our promise to sustain the environment**

We are committed to excellence in offering experiences to people who have a feel for the sea and its wildlife, both below and above the waves, as well as ashore. Our aim is to respect the sea and the local marine and shore-based environment. To leave everything as we find it is our motto, respecting the delicate eco-system balance of sky, sea and shore. To achieve our policy we have a series of aims:

Our aim is to create sustainable tourism by respecting the local sea and shore-based environment. We adhere to high standards of economic, environmental and social policy and practice in our interactions with clients, staff, core suppliers and partners as well as the wider social and ecological environment. We purchase Eco-Friendly merchandise and provide Fairtrade refreshments on all our tours.

We look after our clients to the best of our ability and supporting them on the vessel in personnel safety and creating a respect for the marine environment. Our on board skills training aims to develop confidence and competence and we have extensive briefing of our safety and environmental procedures to our crew.

We have responsible standards of crew recruitment and development. At all times there are always two team members available. Our fully qualified skippers have sailed many thousands of sea miles. All activities in the water are monitored to protect both humans and the marine life.

Our onboard policy is that all rubbish is brought ashore.

Our skippers and onboard wildlife guides discuss the local shore and marine environment, wildlife and ecosystems. We explain how to behave in a responsible manner to the animals (for example puffin and seal colonies) and birds (especially breeding colonies) that we encounter. We also help clients gain an awareness of local marine environment by encouraging them to study the nautical charts of the region as well making them aware of the ever changing Scottish weather patterns. The skipper keeps the clients regularly informed of local meteorological reports.

**Our promise to support the local communities**

We make use of the services of the local marina, shops, guides and services such as chandleries, crew when possible, etc.

We work in collaboration with a local business who offers each passenger 20% discount. This local business has 3 local cafes and the vouchers can be used at a café of choice, this supports our local businesses and promotes Shetland.

We encourage our guests to visit locally important heritage sites, visit local gardens, craft shops and participate in cultural events. We also work with local wildlife and tour guides. Tourism is increasingly a vital part of the income for the local residents of the Shetland Islands. Thus we use local products and local services with the intention of helping to support local businesses, create employment and contribute to the overall sustainable development of not only our starting point of our voyage but also in the islands and communities of our beautiful Shetland Islands. .

We aim to create a good relationship with tourism and the local communities and at all times are aware and try to bring awareness to the fragile marine ecosystems through which we sail.

**Thank you for reading our Environmental & Sustainable Policies – both will be reviewed on an annual basis.**

**POLICY REVIEWED:** 01.02.2023

**REVIEWED BY:** MARIE LEASK – GREEN TOURISM LEADER