

Great Blasket Island Intertidal Survey (Trá Bán)

There is a large grey seal colony that is known to haul out on the stretch of beach (Trá Bán) that is to be surveyed. Tours to the island take place during the summer months of April –October with visitors often paying a visit to Trá Bán¹².

Two resting sites for grey seals have been mapped on Trá Bán as part of the conservation objectives for the Blasket Islands SAC³. Although there is just two designated resting points, due to the mobile nature of this species they have the potential to occur anywhere along the beach. While the intertidal survey is in progress a distance buffer of 100 m will be used as guidance, as recommended by Seal Rescue Ireland⁴ to minimise disturbance to seals. The survey team will monitor the seals behaviour, in particular, alert/head up reactions to their presence, and will adapt their approach to avoid disturbance. If this is not possible the survey would be abandoned.

Trá Bán also has grey seal moulting and breeding sites mapped as part of the conservation objectives for the site³. The intertidal survey will only take part outside of the moulting (November - March) and breeding seasons (September-December). This will remove any potential for disturbance during these critical time periods for grey seals.

The field team manager will brief the AQUAFAC (APEM) intertidal survey team before the survey about best practices for working close to a seal haul-out area. The survey group will be restricted to two people working on the Trá Bán transect. In addition to the recommendations by Seal Rescue Ireland, when working on or close to Trá Bán transect the survey team will minimise visual, olfactory and auditory cues by keeping a low profile (e.g. avoiding casting shadows over the colony), minimising noise (i.e. approach quietly), and taking wind direction into account (i.e. approach the transect downwind of the colony, where possible), whilst limiting their time in proximity to the colony by working efficiently.

¹ <https://www.marinetours.ie/tours/blasket-island-ferry-and-eco-marine-tour.html>

² <https://www.blasketislandferry.com/>

³ [https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/Blasket%20Islands%20SAC%20\(002172\)%20Conservation%20objectives%20supporting%20document%20-%20Marine%20habitats%20\[Version%201\].pdf](https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/Blasket%20Islands%20SAC%20(002172)%20Conservation%20objectives%20supporting%20document%20-%20Marine%20habitats%20[Version%201].pdf)

⁴ <https://www.sealrescueireland.org/seal-faqs/#:~:text=If%20you%20see%20a%20seal%20in%20the%20wild%2C%20make%20sure,care%20and%20respect%20it%20deserves.>