Cornwall Marine & Coastal Code Group

# Making unmanned aerial vehicle 'drone' use great for wildlife

(Unmanned aerial vehicle 'drone' is defined as any aerial platform which is controlled remotely from land – motorised or not - which could include balloons and kites)

- Whatever the focus of drone use, please **consider wildlife.**
- **Safety for people, wildlife and the landscape is paramount.** Keep up to date with relevant legislation and **follow the law** at all times.
- Make **prior contact** with landowners, relevant aviation authorities and relevant wildlife organisations to have the best chance of a safe and successful flight. *(N.B. not all landowners permit the use of drones.)*
- Ensure the **benefits of your flight outweigh the costs** and impacts. Adopt a **precautionary approach.**
- Visit **Cornwall Marine and Coastal Code website** to learn more about **vulnerable wildlife** and how they show signs of disturbance.
- Always **avoid disturbance and report** when it occurs: 0345 201 26 26 *(please save this number to your mobile phone).*

## Putting wildlife first

Even if the purpose for drone use does not have a wildlife focus, it is important to consider wildlife in the planned activities. We advise operators to assess the reasons for their flight and ensure the potential benefits far outweigh any potential impacts or costs.

For most wildlife it is critical to minimise disturbance to avoid impact on essential energy levels and survival prospects. All drone operations must have wildlife's best interests at heart. To do this it is essential to have a good working knowledge of the species likely to be present during drone operation *(the land owner and / or local wildlife group may be able to help you with this information).*

Wildlife responses can be very varied and, at their worst, impacts can be fatal. You will need to be familiar with normal relaxed behaviour and look for the first, often subtle, 'species specific' signs of agitation and back off when these are seen. Please take the time to learn more about these behavioural signs and aim to exceed any minimum best practice guidelines.

Particularly vulnerable species include:

- birds *(especially at nesting time and roosting sites)*
- seals *(especially when hauled out and during the pupping season)*
- cetaceans – dolphins, porpoises and whales *(particularly when feeding and with young)*

Key UAV issues for wildlife include:

- proximity
- drone sound
- visually, including lights

…the impacts of which will vary hugely depending on ambient land, air and sea conditions which need to be studied in detail prior to operation. Be aware that many species have a range of excellent senses some of which exceed our own. You will need to be mindful that they are vulnerable to varying degrees at different times during their lifecycle and depending on their cumulative life experience and what has happened immediately prior to your drone activity.

**Visit the Cornwall Marine and Coastal Code website to download the habitat and species specific codes:**
**http://www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/living-seas/cornwall-marine-and-coastal-code**

## Your local groups are here to help….

You are strongly advised to contact one or more of the;

- many local marine groups for their site specific knowledge. Find them at www.beachrangers.org.uk
- local wildlife organisations with expertise on one or more of the particular species or habitats you are operating around. Search www.cornwallmarinelifecode.org.uk

This will help you to familiarise yourself with your subjects of interest.

## Safety & permission

The safety of people (both operators and other visitors), wildlife and the landscape are of paramount importance, please ensure you consider the impact of your actions with due care.

Not all landowners permit the use of drones: Always, before your flight date, contact landowners for their permission, guidelines and protocols. Be willing to demonstrate a current and detailed understanding of the legal framework and best practice. In most instances, landowners will require drone operators to be Civil Aviation Authority qualified, licensed and appropriately trained as well as having sufficient and appropriate insurance cover in place. Under certain circumstances, landowners may permit those considered competent users to undertake drone-based activities on their land.

Drone use for scientific research may require extra and specific licensing.

Also make all necessary contact with the relevant local aviation authorities. And research your intended locations for existing land and marine based designations and byelaws and codes of conduct that might apply to your work.

## Help us achieve ‘Environmental Growth’

Cornwall Council has an ‘Environmental Growth Strategy’ recognising that Cornwall’s marine and terrestrial environment and wildlife underpin our financial economy. This strategy aims to increase everyone’s environmental skills, connect people to and effectively grow nature. This means that it isn’t enough to just avoid disturbance and other potential negative impacts on wildlife but to consider supporting and delivering environmental growth. Following and exceeding our guidance will help us grow nature in Cornwall. You can also help by:

- **Reporting disturbance:** We’d really appreciate it if you phoned in any disturbance incident you witness, even if it occurred as a result of your actions 0345 201 26 26.
- **Spreading the word:** As an operator, it would hugely help the Cornwall Marine and Coastal Code Group if you were willing to promote Cornwall’s marine code toolkit found at www.cornwallmarinelifecode.org.uk on your website to share your knowledge of it as widely as possible.
- **Telling us about your experiences with drones and wildlife to help inform best practice:** This policy is regularly reviewed in light of experience, so please feed in any lessons you learn whilst operating in Cornwall, so that we can amend this advice for everyone’s benefit. Your experiences are a valuable contribution, helping inform our understanding of best practice.