

The development of social behaviour of Grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) during the post-weaning fast

Vaida Surviliene

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Grey seals are gregarious large marine mammals. Despite the young physical maturation age, young males show up in the breeding grounds only in their teens or later. This long development period might be related with socialization - a period when young individuals learn species specific behaviour, practice it and assess their own physical capabilities. However, it is not clear when does socialization start and what factors affect it. This project focuses on early social behaviour of grey seals within aggregations of weaners during the post-weaning fast. It aims to investigate the early social development of grey seals in accordance to sex, body mass and time spent with the same individual and explain the nature of aggregations of weaned grey seal individuals.



SMM grant was used to perform a 48 day research of grey seal behaviour in October-December, 2013. The fieldwork was performed on the research station of Sea Mammal Research Unit, the Isle of May (Scotland). Behavioural research included observations of a mother-pup relationship before weaning and interactions of weaners within weaner aggregations during the post-weaning fast.

Around 20 hours of behavioural data for every 15 focal animals were collected. Study of weaner behaviour during the post-weaning fast also included registration of location of focal weaners and animals that surrounded them. The position of focal and about 200 surrounding individuals was recorded using high quality aerial photos of survey area (SMRU). Body mass, length and girth of pups, moms and weaners was determined 4 times during the research period.

The data is currently under analysis and is prepared for the behavioural model estimating the nature of grey seal aggregations and their movements around the breeding area.