

Flying Rings Campaign September 2022 Update from Jenny



Our voyage continues and over the summer took us around Britain from the east coast of Ireland to the Firth of Clyde in Scotland, passing through the Crinan Canal up to Mull, Skye and the Outer Hebrides.

We decided to take the Caledonian Canal to Inverness rather than the northern route via the Orkneys as the weather was very unsettled with lots of wind and rain. We're now on our final leg towards the Wash.

Being on a sailing boat brings us into the midst of wildlife and we have had some amazing close encounters. In the marina at Bangor we saw Black Guillemots for the first time, so cute! On our passage from North Uist in the Outer Hebrides to Canna, one of the Inner Hebridean Islands, we had our first sightings of Minke Whales, three altogether! A pod of dolphins sped towards us to swim around our boat 'Spirit of Space' and off Skye we saw big groups of Manx Shearwaters.

Seals abound on the West Coast of Scotland and on the East Coast. We've seen so many familiar seal heads popping out of the water to take a look at us, or 'bottling', floating upright, just resting.

On Mull we enjoyed two days with wildlife leaders and had our first sightings of White Tailed Eagles, Golden Eagles and Sea Otters (*see note*) as well as a range of other wildlife including an adder. These birds and animals are not easy to find and each sighting was an uplifting and fantastic experience.

On the voyage, I've taken opportunities to raise awareness of the plight of seals getting caught in plastic flying rings. In the Firth of Clyde I did a zoom interview with Charlotte from *BBC Look East* who was putting together a feature on the plight of seals getting entangled in lost and discarded plastic flying rings. The feature was later aired, here's the link in case you missed it:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-norfolk-62325934>

Following the news item a viewer, who is a Norfolk wildlife artist, got in touch with us via *Look East* to offer one of her paintings, a seal caught in a flying ring at Blakeney, to auction to raise funds for us.

In Mull, Peter Hall, one of our guides said we are doing a great job and he will pass the message on to other guides.

In Tobermory the chandlery were selling flying rings and the owner didn't know about the danger they pose to seals, she was shocked when I explained. Coincidentally, FoHS Seal Warden Richard Edwards, visited Tobermory a week or two later and talked to the Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust who are based there. They were interested and keen to support the campaign, so he's sent them campaign publicity and information.

On the Isle of Skye I contacted 'Skye Environmental Centre' where the International Otter Survival Fund is based. I talked to Callum who was very helpful and said they would support the campaign however they could. Later he e-mailed to say:

"This is definitely something we can help you with...I should be able to get a post up on our social media platforms later this week...we have followers from all over the world so it might get to some previously unreached areas!..I've passed it to Ben our Education Officer and he thinks it would be a great thing to get the kids involved in..they've recently fundraised for 'TeamSeas', which is a big group committed to removing



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plastic from the oceans.”

Callum put the post up and included a link to our Campaign page.

I've popped into shops selling beach toys to tell them about the seals and the campaign, and to ask if they would sell solid frisbees and discs instead of rings.

In Amble, Northumberland, one owner immediately took her dog toy rings off sale. She had some rubber solid discs which were a good substitute. She evidently loved wildlife and said she always cuts small plastic pulls to stop birds getting caught in them but she hadn't known about the danger of flying rings to seals.

There's still time to sign the petition Kate Wing started asking for plastic flying rings to be banned in order to protect our seals, please also send the link to your friends, family & contacts:

https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/613442?fbclid=IwAR33A-guWh1m2ROx5PxTwcFS3J8yLuOe-9CVMB_nyn-Vl0l6L2ZvtSk_L74

A huge 'Thank You!' to everyone who is supporting the campaign including Hilda and Richard who are holding the fort at home, FoHS Trustees Albert, Jane and David, Norfolk Councillors, especially Barbara Wright in Great Yarmouth. and Terry Parish in Heacham.

Images and text provided by Jenny Hobson.

(Editor's note: The Eurasian Otter *lutra lutra*, seen in many watery parts of the UK, thrives in remote coastal waters, sea lochs and around the Scottish islands. Sometimes referred to as Sea Otters, they are in fact the same species as seen elsewhere in UK. The Sea Otter, *Enhydra lutis* is a marine mammal native to the coasts of the northern and eastern North Pacific Ocean.)

