

Press release

Wilhelmshaven, 19 October 2009

Number of harbour seals and grey seals increased further in the Wadden Sea

Up-to-date report of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat is now available

“The population of the harbour seal and the grey seal continue to increase in the international Wadden Sea. This is the success of the long-term cooperation for the seal protection in the Wadden Sea,” says Jens Enemark, secretary general of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat in Wilhelmshaven. As now published by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, the numbers of harbour seals further increased in 2009. In August 2009 a total of 21,571 animals were counted, which is over 1,300 animals more respectively 6.5% than in 2008. At the same time this is the highest number of seals counted since the start of the coordinated surveys on the Wadden Sea coast of the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark over 25 years ago.

However, the population growth rate in 2009 is lower than it was in the previous three years (on average 12%). This could indicate that the maximum carrying capacity for the seal population in the Wadden Sea habitat and in the adjacent North Sea could possibly have been reached. The number of harbour seal pups in the Wadden Sea was 5,448 in June, indicating that the population structure has been normalising again since the last seal epidemic in 2002.

Also for the grey seals, the increasing trend in the population development has continued. After this originally native species of the Wadden Sea region almost completely disappeared, over the last three decades they have been recolonising again. In April 2009, 2,765 grey seals were counted during the coordinated surveys in Germany and the Netherlands, which equals a growth rate of 26% compared to 2008 (2,194 animals counted). The distribution of grey seals has gradually extended continuously from a few local sites to an almost area-wide distribution throughout the Wadden Sea with some strongholds in the Netherlands and Germany, suggesting that the grey seals could further spread in the Wadden Sea region.

The successful protection of harbour and grey seals over the last decades is a protection measure which also found its recognition in the acceptance of the Wadden Sea as World Heritage Site.

The annual reports of the seal expert group of the three Wadden Sea countries are published on the web site of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat. Those reports contain recommendations for further investigations and monitoring for the coming years.

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