IAATO Leopard Seal Watching Guidelines

- When viewing Leopard Seals do not surround or chase them. Stay on the side where they can see you.
- On beaches avoid getting between seals and the sea. While in water craft, avoid getting between the Leopard Seal and the Ice.
- Suggested minimum distances from Leopard Seals ashore, on the ice and in the water are 5-15 meters/15-45 feet – some behaviors, require a further distance to be kept (see below).
- When close to Leopard Seals keep voices low, don't whistle or shout.
- Keep radio volume down.
- Communicate with other boats and ship to minimize disturbance to the animal(s).
- Avoid sudden movements on land or in boats that might frighten the animal(s).
- If a Leopard Seal is swimming around the watercraft, keep all hands and feet inside the boat, and move into the bottom/centre of the boat.

Understanding Leopard Seal Behavior

Leopard Seals hauled out on land, rock or ice, are sensitive to boats and human presence. Noises, smells and sights may elicit a reaction.

Leopard Seals are much more inquisitive than other Antarctic Ice Seals, and their behaviors can change from inquisitive to aggressive quickly. Be vigilant in your observations.

Be aware of seal behavior that indicates a Leopard Seal has been disturbed. Such behaviors include, but are not limited to:

- An increase in alert or vigilance Head turning
- Change in posture from lying to erect
- Hurriedly moving away from the approaching vessel Open mouth displays
- Aggressive displays or bluff charges in your direction
- Biting Zodiac pontoons (Zodiacs should be lifted out of the water when at the ship when not it use, if this is not possible cones (or buckets) should be placed over the end of the pontoons)

Viewing seals

- Try not to break their horizon or tower over hauled-out seals – stay low.
- Leopard Seal mothers and pups should be given extra distance (at least 25 meters/75 feet) so as not to disturb this very short term of nursing.
- Any seal response other than a raised head should be avoided.
- An open mouth display while on ice or on shore is a stress reaction. Move away slowly. If an individual moves towards the water from land or the edge of the ice floe you should retreat slowly and carefully.
- Do not rest watercraft on the same ice floe as the seal, even if the appropriate distance away – this can illicit a protective reaction.
- Consideration should be given to the number of watercraft near a hauled out Leopard Seal so as not to crowd it.
- Be aware Leopard Seals are highly mobile and might charge (and potentially bite water craft) if approached too closely - keep at least 5-15 meters/15-45 feet from them.
- Extra caution should be taken when operating human powered watercraft.

Identification and Data Collection

Identifying and, in many cases, recording species for the voyage log purposes is part of most onboard naturalists' remit. Logs, which include these records coupled with latitude and longitude of sightings, species identification, vocalization recordings and any additional information such as identification photographs, are of immense value.

Information on Leopard Seal citizen science projects can be found through the IAATO website or by contacting **iaato@iaato.org**.