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Calls for seal cull after Aberdeen man's dog mauled by bull seal



Matthew Will had to shoot his dog after it was attacked by a seal

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A CALL for a seal cull in one of Scotland's nature reserves was made last night after a dog mauled by a bull seal had to be destroyed.

• Dog owner forced to shoot pet after it was attacked by seal

Matthew Will said he had to shoot his black labrador, Fly, after it was severely injured by a bull seal in a stream on the Ythan estuary in Aberdeenshire.

Wildfowler Mr Will was shooting ducks when his three-year-old labrador ran into the water to retrieve a downed bird. Fly was dragged under the water and bitten by a seal more than twice the dog's size. It was the latest in a series of seal attacks on dogs at the estuary, which borders the Forvie National Nature Reserve, owned by Scottish Natural Heritage and home to more than 1,000 grey and common seals.

Last night, Audrey Forbes-Clarke, the fishery manager for the local Udney Trust, called for a cull of seals in the area. For you to enjoy all the features of this website Scotsman.com requires permission to use cookies.

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She warned it was only a matter of time before humans were attacked, declaring: "Children are paddling there in the summer and they will be fair game for the seals as well."

Mr Will, 21, of Inverugie, Peterhead, had earlier spoken of his terror when his pet was attacked last Friday after it entered the Tarty Burn.

He said: "There was a sudden and terrific thrashing and howling in the water.

"This huge seal – more than twice the size of the dog – was flinging Fly around and pulling him the water. I was horrified. The seal was enormous. It was terrible."

Mr Will finally succeeded in driving off the seal and dragged his badly mutilated pet to the bank.

"Fly was horribly injured. Both his hind legs were completely crushed and mangled, his rib-cage smashed and his left eye torn out. He was pouring with blood and in spasms of agony," said Mr Will. Grief-stricken, Mr Will decided to shoot Fly rather than prolong his suffering.

Mrs Forbes-Clarke said that she had put up warning signs about the risk of seal attacks earlier this year after a labrador owned by a local hotelier was bitten by a seal. Another seal attacked two dogs owned by a local woman.

Mrs Forbes-Clarke said: "What worries me most is the human factor. One of our regular fishermen was chased out of the water by a seal earlier this year and he said he has never been so terrified in his life."

She added that there had been an "explosion" in common and grey seal numbers in the estuary where the local coastal netting fishery, which had a license to shoot seals marauding their nets, was based.

"Every year the numbers are escalating because they are breeding and there is nothing we can do to control them, and we desperately need a cull to control their numbers," she said.

Callan Duck, a senior research scientist at the Sea Mammal Research Unit at St Andrews University, said it was a "particularly unusual" incident.

He added: "Normally seals are not aggressive. I have never heard of anything like that at all. If I had a dog, I wouldn't be worried about letting it go into the water if there were seals around. I would be more concerned about the dog scaring the seals."

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