

# Russian Zoo to Locals: Baby Seals Don't Need Your Help

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The local zoo in Russia's Kaliningrad region is asking citizens to not “rescue” baby seals that show up every spring on the shores of the Baltic Sea exclave.

According to a statement from the Kaliningrad Zoo, every year in late March and early April, it receives scores of calls from local residents who have come across a baby seal on the Baltic coast. Fearing that the animal may be in trouble, some decide to push it back into the water, feed it, or catch it and take it to the zoo.

But winding up ashore when the weather warms up is a common process for baby seals that are born in late winter, the zoo said.

“Don't touch baby white-coat seals. It's possible that their mom is nearby,” the zoo's statement said, adding that learning to feed independently is an important skill baby seals must develop in order to survive in nature.

People frequently mistake discolorations caused by molting on an animal's skin for injuries, and rush baby seals to a zoo for treatment, according to media reports.

Residents of a local village tried to place a baby seal in the Kaliningrad Zoo recently, believing that it was injured — but were turned away by veterinarians who concluded that the animal looked healthy and “quite well fed,” Klops.ru news portal reported this week.

“We have been insistently explaining to citizens that they and we don't need to get involved in the natural process of the babies' adaptation to their maritime habitat,” a zoo spokesperson was quoted as saying Wednesday by the Interfax news agency.

“They should not be taken to a zoo for rescue,” the spokesperson said, adding that baby seals usually feel comfortable on the shore.

Emergencies do occasionally occur, however. Employees of Kaliningrad Zoo carried out a “real rescue operation” Wednesday after an injured seal was spotted on the shore, the zoo said on its Facebook page.

The injuries proved genuine, and the female seal was taken to the zoo for treatment, according to the post.

In its statement, the zoo asked that people who suspect that a seal might be injured should take a photo of the animal and email it to the zoo.

The Kaliningrad Zoo has raised 12 baby seals that have been found injured or abandoned on the shores over the past 20 years, according to its website.

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