



Snow White (with a tracker) is released together with Luke. PHOTO JEROEN HOEKENDIJK

Seal with tracker provides wealth of data

Researcher Sophie Brasseur of Wageningen Marine Research monitored a seal she called Snow White for months. She discovered that he liked to fish near IJmuiden and to chill out on the island of Ameland.

The young seal came to Ecomare's seal refuge on Texel island at the end of last year. He was treated and then freed in January with a tracker. The tracker has probably fallen off since then, as the researchers haven't received any signals since June. 'In July and August, the seals moult and the tracker probably came off with the fur.'

Unique opportunity

Brasseur: 'This was a unique opportunity to get a glimpse of the life of a young seal. In the wild, we would never track a young animal; catching them would cause stress in animals that are already vulnerable.' Brasseur discovered that Snow developed his own favourite spots over time. 'To begin with he swam

aimlessly around the whole Wadden Sea, and after some time he started exploring the western North Sea as well. After a few months he began to stay above IJmuiden to forage, and to swim to Ameland to rest.'

Brasseur says you can't really draw conclusions based on data from a single seal. She hopes this project will pave the way to further research. 'We still don't know much about the development of young seals. Where do they go and how do they develop a preference for certain areas? For Ecomare, this is relevant in order to determine the best time and place to release animals, and for scientists to gain a better understanding of how young seals develop.'