

sea watch FOUNDATION



HAVE YOU SEEN THIS DOLPHIN? NATIONAL WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCH 12 -20 AUGUST 2006

This year's this event is going to be bigger than ever and we need all the help we can get! So grab your binoculars and join thousands of observers around the country! Record and report your sightings and contribute to scientific monitoring of whales, dolphins and porpoises in the UK.

If you would like to set up a watch yourself or join a manned site and would like more information, please contact Hanna Nuuttila on 01545 561227 or email: hanna.nuuttila@seawatchfoundation.org.uk

A brand new image!

Recently, Sea Watch has been looking at ways to update its image and branding. We now have a modern logo (keeping the same familiar picture) and a series of publications to promote the work of the charity. We are using a new strapline that will appear on all publications and media releases, and our new look website will be launched very soon. If you would like copies of the new publications, please contact Sea Watch Development Manager, Caroline Chipperfield at carolinechipperfield@hotmail.com. There is also a Sea Watch style guide available for anyone wishing to produce their own material. We hope you like the new image!

Editorial

Welcome to the new look May 2006 edition of the Sea Watch Foundation newsheet, covering April and May 2006. As you'll see we've had a bit of a makeover for this edition, to match our new styles and logo (details below). As well as our new image, we have lots of exciting events coming up in the next few months including training courses, National Whale and Dolphin Watch Week and a competition for kids to win a UK whale & dolphin watching trip. So it is all go! Add to that the summer sunshine and the great opportunities for seawatching and what more could you ask for? Have a great summer,
Lori

Lori Handley
Editor



COMPETITION

A national competition is being launched to highlight this year's **National Whale and Dolphin Watch Week** in August 2006. We are asking young people aged 3-18 years to research one of the 28 UK & Irish species of whale and dolphin and submit a fact file on their chosen animal. The winning entries will form a new 'young people's ID species guide' as well as the opportunity to win a special prize dolphin spotting off the British coast.

To enter the competition you must complete an application form, available from info@seawatchfoundation.org.uk. Then you must make an easy to use, interesting and useful identification guide for your chosen species of whale, dolphin or porpoise. This should include key facts about the species, how best to identify the species in question and an image of the species. This can be a drawing, painting or a collage, produced with any material or style you prefer, as long as it is not a photograph of the species. Send your completed application form, species identification notes and picture to: *Hanna Nuuttila, Sea Watch Foundation, Paragon House, Wellington Place, New Quay, SA45 9NR.*

For the most useful and easy to understand species identification guide, we will award you and your family a dolphin and whale watching tour trip in the UK for free. The runner up images will receive a cetacean ID-guide booklet and Sea Watch t-shirt. All the entries will be judged by a panel of scientists and wildlife enthusiasts. It is hoped that the best entries for each species will be published in a booklet or on the Sea Watch website.

SIGHTINGS HIGHLIGHTS

April and May 2006

Scotland

In Shetland, a pod of orcas have been seen travelling around the islands recently particularly around Bluemull and Yell Sound. A group of ten Risso's dolphins was sighted south of Aith, Fetlar. A pair and solitary minke whales were seen off Fair Isle and Sumburgh Head, and two white beaked dolphins were sighted off Bressay. In Orkney there have been several sightings of orcas and minke whales. Orcas have been seen off the Old Man of Hoy as well as Cantick Head and Tor Ness, and minke whales off Papa Westray. An injured short-beaked common dolphin was sighted off Kirkwall Harbour, Orkney in April. A humpback whale was seen off Houton Head in Scapa Flow, Orkney on 31st May.

Moving to east Scotland, there have been frequent sightings of bottlenose dolphins in Cullen Bay, Findochty and Aberdeen, and regular sightings of Risso's dolphins from Lybster viewpoint throughout April and May. In the north and north-west, plenty of minke whales have been sighted in the region of Pentland Firth and off Stoer Head, and orcas have been seen off Scourimore and in Handa Sound. A humpback whale was entangled in fishing gear and later released off Applecross Bay opposite Skye on 24th May. Two fin whales were seen off the Cairns of Coll, on 25th May.

England

A harbour porpoise was spotted between California and Newport Beach in Great Yarmouth on 20th May. Two bottlenose dolphins, one adult and one juvenile, were seen off Sandgate, Folkestone in Kent, and the animals have been around for more than three weeks. One of the dolphins has a distinctive marking on its dorsal fin and was previously seen in Seaford in Sussex. Several harbour porpoises were sighted in the River Thames in early April, near to the Millenium Dome, while another porpoise was spotted in early May at Gravesend. Five Risso's dolphins were seen off Berry Head, South Devon on 12th May. Another group of three Risso's were sighted off Pendeen lighthouse, Cornwall, on the 16th. Groups of two and three harbour porpoise were seen off Bowness and Portcarlisle, Cumbria, at the end of April. A harbour porpoise swam up the Manchester ship canal on 12th May. Solitary harbour porpoises were also sighted in Blackpool, Beckfoot and Silloth in early May.

Wales

Large groups of up to 15 to 20 bottlenose dolphins were sighted both from land and sea, all around Cardigan Bay. There were still plenty of harbour porpoises around, and one harbour porpoise was seen off the Vale of Glamorgan.

Isle of Man

A group of ten Risso's dolphins was seen north off Langness Lighthouse near Castletown on 9th and 10th May.

As always, please send your raw sightings data to Hanna Nuuttila, Sea Watch Foundation Sightings Officer, at: <hanna.nuuttila@seawatchfoundation.org.uk>

REGIONAL ROUNDUP

Orkney and North Scotland

From Chris Booth, Regional coordinator for Orkney and North Scotland

An orca was seen off Papa Westray on 19th April and three were seen off the same location on the following day. Several orca sightings were reported in May, starting with three off the east side of South Ronaldsay on 5th. Twelve were seen in Hoxa Sound on 10th and seven were seen moving north, off the West Mainland, giving shore based watchers excellent views. Six orcas were in Scapa Flow on 15th when an adult male was seen holding a seal in its mouth while younger members of the pod bit pieces out of it. There were several reports of sightings from the ferry between Caithness and Orkney, including six to ten on the 19th and over ten on 20th. This latter pod included two adult males. A pod of twelve and then a smaller group of four were seen in the Pentland Firth off Hoy on the 21st, and five to six were off Sanday on 28th.

Four Risso's dolphins were seen in Scapa Flow on the 28th April and five off the Brough of Birsay on the 29th. Again, four Risso's were seen off West Mainland on 10th May and seven in Scapa Flow on 11th. One Risso was seen off Noup Head, Westray on 17th. Twelve were seen between Swona and Switha on 26th, and finally four were recorded off Birsay on 27th.

Five minke whales were sighted off Birsay and two off Papa Westray on the 29th April. Between four and six were seen off Costa Head, West Mainland and six off Papa Westray on 5th May. Two minke whales were seen, again off Papa Westray, on 9th, and individuals were sighted off the west mainland on the 10th and 18th May.

A common dolphin was seen for some time in Kirkwall Harbour on 20th April. Two harbour porpoises were reported off West Mainland on 10th May, and finally a humpback whale was seen off Houton Head, Scapa Flow on 31st May.

Three strandings were also reported during April-May. A white-sided dolphin stranded in Scapa Flow on 31st March/1st April. A long dead sperm whale was washed ashore in Papa Westray on 14th April, and a common dolphin stranded on Sanday on 11th May.

We also received reports from Caithness and Sutherland of sightings in the Pentland Firth. Single minke whales were seen on the following dates: Thurso Bay - 24th, 26th, 28th, 30th and 31st May; Scarf Skerry - 27th and 28th May; and Strathy Point - 27th May. Two harbour porpoises were seen from Thurso on 28th May, and one Risso's dolphin was seen in Thurso Bay on the same day. Finally, eight orcas were seen off Scarf Skerry also on 28th May.

From David Thomas, John O'Groats Ferries

We have started our summer sailings to Orkney from John O'Groats on the "Pentland Venture" so have some sightings for May. We saw single minke whales on 9th and 25th May, halfway across Pentland Firth to Orkney. We were also fortunate enough to have some good orca sightings. On the 15th May, we sighted five orcas at Burwick, Orkney. On the 18th May, ten were seen halfway across the Firth. The best sighting was on the 21st May during a special charter to Hoy, when twelve orcas were spotted heading west, near Swona, and another five were seen shortly after.

North East Scotland

From Iain MacDonald, Regional coordinator for North East Scotland

In April, Risso's dolphins were present off Lybster with two seen on the 19th, one with a juvenile on 21st, one with a juvenile on 23rd, and two on 29th. Harbour porpoises were seen on only a few days, with one off Lybster on 19th, one on the 20th off Strathsteven, and one off Lybster on 29th. Star sighting of the month belonged to a small group of bottlenose dolphins seen off Lybster on 29th. Two adults, two juveniles and a calf, breached for over twenty minutes close to the harbour.

Very few sightings were reported during May, a month which is often good for cetacean watching. In calm conditions on 10th, a single porpoise and a possible white-sided dolphin were seen off Lybster. Further south at Strathsteven, bottlenose dolphins were recorded spread over a wide area. The total comprised a single mother and calf, a group of five adults, another group of six adults and a third group of four adults. On 21st, a single bottlenose dolphin with a circular mark on the right-hand side of its dorsal fin was seen off Lybster Harbour.

Northern Scotland: Moray Firth

From Howard Hartley Loates, regional coordinator for Moray Firth (Sutors of Cromarty to Kessock/Inverness)

The 15th May saw Peter Evans travel up to Inverness (en route to Shetland) to give a talk on the Whales & Dolphins of Northern Scotland. Thirty-eight people turned out for a fascinating presentation. This was followed by a discussion about the formation of an Inverness Sea Watch Group, and nineteen people showed an interest in becoming involved. Disappointingly though, only two people turned up to a watch day I organised, but hopefully next time will see a better turnout. The bottlenose dolphins started to show more regularly at Chanonry Point and were also seen regularly off the Sutors of Cromarty and certainly were seen more frequently as the end of May approached. Apparently up to 20 animals have occasionally been seen performing at Chanonry Point. A common dolphin and calf were seen at Chanonry Point by Charlie Phillips, and then three adult common dolphins were spotted by Gwyn Tanner on 17th May from the Dolphin Cruise Avoch boat. A minke whale was seen from the South Sutor of Cromarty on 27th May, and another was seen in the same area from the EcoVentures boat on 5th June. There have been a number of strandings during the period. Some post weaned porpoises did not survive their early days for reasons unknown and came ashore at a number of places in the Moray Firth and Aberdeen area.

Finally, the organising of watchers for the National Whale & Dolphin Watch Week is now near the top of the pile of things to organise so volunteers please step forward!

Grampian

From Pete MacDonald, regional coordinator for North Grampian

Cetacean watching in the Moray Firth was a bit of a hit and miss affair during April, mainly due to the weather. A cold north-easterly wind was a constant threat to the system but a few sightings were encountered - mainly bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise - but only on a few occasions when the wind died down. We had a few watches but sadly no sightings. It was heartening that, despite the conditions, over thirty people turn up to the watch at Hopeman.

From the second week in May, bottlenose dolphins started to appear on a more regular basis, and a group of 20+ seemed to be in the area. From the 7th to the 13th May, dolphins were seen over a wide area. It was also good to see big numbers of harbour porpoise (10+ at times) in Cullen, and during the third week of the month, porpoise numbers were similar to past years. With the increased dolphin activity, the porpoise seem to head further out, but can you blame them? A minke whale was seen off Lossiemouth on May 18th.

The weather was far from spring-like with hail, snow and cold winds in the third week of the month, but, all-in-all, watching has been good with only ten days of no sightings in our area.

The Friends of the Moray Firth Dolphins now have a new website (www.loupers.co.uk) so please feel free to take a look. We are also planning a few workshops in July and August and details will be posted on the web.

South Grampian

From Kevin Hepworth, regional coordinator for South Grampian

Due to the start of light evenings, sightings have been increasing with the ability to watch until 10.30 pm by the end of May. Although the usual Summer influx of species other than bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise is still a month or so away, there have been reports of minke whales and lone reports of white-beaked dolphins and orca. The last couple of months have also been a particularly busy time with various activities currently on the go or being initiated.

April Highlights

We had 74 cetacean sightings reported in April. Most of these were of bottlenose dolphins (68), four were of harbour porpoise and there were two sightings of what were most likely minke whales (probably the same animal) off Montrose and then later the same day at Johnshaven. As usual at this time of year, harbour porpoise sightings were lean again, with singles off Whinnyfold on the 2nd April, Newtonhill on the 8th April and Cove on the 15th April. Three porpoise seen off Aberdeen Beach on the 10th April was the only sighting of more than a single animal. The more 'usual suspects' were much in evidence all month, with a trimodal distribution from the usual feeding areas of Aberdeen (20 records), Stonehaven (19 records) and Montrose (29 records), although this is also a reflection of where the effort is concentrated. Notable sightings were of 45+ off Girdleness on the 13th April and up to 40 animals off Scurdiness at Montrose daily during the month. 30+ on the 15th April in Stonehaven Bay was one of the larger groups encountered there. Generally, group sizes were of the order of 12-20 animals, with three or four calves and some notable animals in Black and Decker, Cutter, Goblin Seal and Ben Nevis



Bottlenose dolphin, K. Hepworth

In addition, April saw the first two of the joint (Sea Watch Foundation, Aberdeen University & East Grampian Coastal Partnership) Northlink Ferry Based Surveys, which were run on the 6th and 25th April. Both were relatively quiet, with bottlenose dolphins at Aberdeen Harbour and little else except a single breaching dolphin (species unknown) off Fair Isle. The 6th April survey was hampered by big seas on the way up and poor visibility at times during the blizzards on the way back from Shetland.

We had a Northlink Ferry Based Survey training day on the 22nd April, which was attended by 23 people. The day took the form of a visit to the Northlink Office, MV Hascosay, form filling session at Torry Battery (blessed with 15+ obliging bottlenose dolphins) and a lecture/ID session at Aberdeen University.

Application for EGCP funding to run sea-based surveys north of Aberdeen and up to 12 miles offshore from Port Erroll & Stonehaven was successful. We were only able to conduct one Sea Watch boat survey from Stonehaven in April due to the weather.

May Highlights (and lowlights)

Fifty eight sightings were reported in May. Again the majority of the sightings were of bottlenose dolphins (38), 16 sightings were of harbour porpoise, two were of minke whales, one of white-beaked dolphins and finally there was one orca sighting

The poor weather this month led to a downturn in cetacean reports and boat based surveys (with the Northlink Ferry Surveys) were few and far between again.

An evening boat trip encountered our first orca of the season, with a single male heading north past Newtonhill on the 27th May. The only (early) report of white-beaked dolphins was of five from the M.V. Hascosay ferry survey on the 9th May off Slains Castle. Hopefully this will be the first of many of this species which graces the Grampian coastline during June-September. Two minke whale sightings were received, one off Peterhead from the M.V. Hascosay on the 9th May and the second of a single animal heading north past Johnshaven on the 19th May. As usual in May, and despite the poor sea conditions (Force 4-5 southeasterlies), harbour porpoise reports improved dramatically with 16 reported sightings. Most notable were six off Peterhead on the 9th May and four seen feeding in Cruden Bay on the 13th May. A drop in bottlenose sightings occurred, but this reflects a drop in effort and the fact that the dredger has been present in Aberdeen Harbour all month rather than a drop in animals in the region. The dredging activity has led to smaller groups off Aberdeen Harbour and also the loss of 'opportunistic' sightings as each dredging cycle of sand collection and dumping out at sea lasted approximately 50 minutes and generally pushed the animals out of the harbour and round to the opposite side of Girdleness each time the dredger left/entered the harbour. Despite this, good sightings of 20-25 animals were had from the 23-27th May with a newborn calf much in evidence along with 3-4 slightly larger but still young calves.

We successfully ran seven Northlink Ferry Based surveys in May, with the first minke whales and white-beaked dolphins of the season on the 9-11th May survey. May saw an influx of harbour porpoise sightings, which was encouraging after a relatively poor start to the year for this species. The first EGCP/SWF survey was carried out from Port Erroll, with some harbour porpoise encounters on the 13th May.



Bottlenose dolphin, *K. Hepworth*

dolphin attacks – this is in contrast to Aberdeen and yet both locations have had similar high bottlenose dolphin activity, so further investigation may reveal these animals are not all casualties of attacks).

We were able to complete our land-based watch site photo collection exercise, which will feed into preparation of a SWF Grampian cetacean leaflet. We also provided Aberdeen City Council with photographic images of bottlenose dolphins to use in the production of a booklet about 'Aberdeen's Maritime Heritage Trail'. As in April, we were only able to conduct one Sea Watch survey from Stonehaven due to strong prevailing winds.

Unfortunately there have been a large number of strandings of harbour porpoise off Aberdeen (four animals were discovered in poor and emaciated condition, and probably died of starvation) and Montrose (five animals stranded, which were reputedly casualties of bottlenose

West Sutherland

Andy Summers, Sutherland Highland Ranger.

It has been a reasonably quiet couple of months with very few minke whales. There was a spell of activity during some good weather in mid April when sand eels were seen coming into the bays around the coast. The highlight was two orcas seen in Handa Sound on the 18th April, seen by many visiting birdwatchers. A minke whale appeared in the same place a few days later. Throughout May, porpoises have been seen at Stoer Head lighthouse and Clachtoll Bay. Once again the Sound of Handa was the place to be, with another sighting of an orca there on the 10th May and a pod of eight or more Risso's Dolphins on 15th May. An unidentified dolphin was reported bow-riding the life boat, which was pulling a stricken boat into Lochinver Harbour on 17th May. Meanwhile another visitor to the area was lucky enough to spot a pod of 30 plus bottlenose dolphins heading northwards towards Stoer.

North West Scotland

From Iain Birks, regional coordinator for North West Scotland

We continue to have good sightings of harbour porpoise well within Loch Gairloch and environs, and spectacular close interactions even though this is not 'supposed' to happen. Our porpoises do not read behavioural theses, thank goodness! We have also had a successful refloat of a stranded common dolphin at Aultbea, Loch Ewe, involving Ian French of Gairloch Marine Life Centre and British Divers Marine Life Rescue and myself along with the Coastguard. Fish shoal activity has been very pronounced and we are hoping that this will lead to some good sightings in the weeks to come. Sightings have been reported of both bottlenose and common dolphins within metres of the shore during this period.

West and South West Scotland (Hebrides)

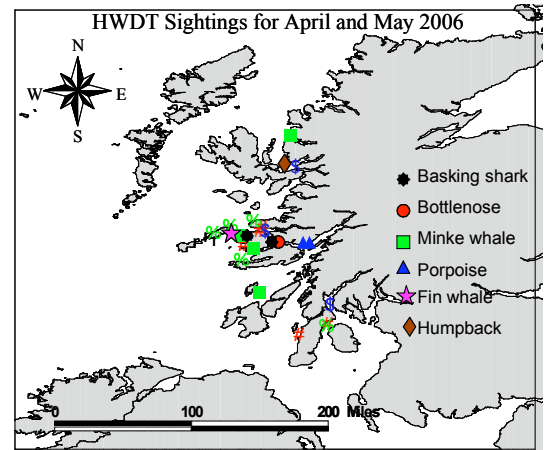
From Laura Mandleberg, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust Sightings Officer

The first sighting of a minke whale in the Hebrides for 2006 was reported from a local whale-watch operator, Sealife Surveys, on the 14th April, nearly a month later than the first sighting of minke whale last season. Despite a slightly late start to the 2006 whale-watching season, sightings of minke whales have continued to increase since then, in particular off the Isle of Mull coast. Throughout May, local whale-watch boats have been finding whales on a daily basis feeding in the areas where they are usually found at this time of year (out towards Coll and Tiree, entrance to the Sound of Mull, Staffa and the Treshnish Isles.

Further north, the first minke whale of the season so far was seen in late April by Summer Queen Cruises, a boat-operator working around the Summer Isles. In the Clyde area, a minke whale was seen moving southwards down Upper Loch Fyne, in between Leack and Furnace. Minke whales occur less frequently in this area, but the sighting could correspond to an abundance of small schooling fish, most likely herring. Reports of gannets also seen feeding in these areas is a good indication that herring are in good supply.

The most exciting sighting of the season so far was a sighting of two fin whales on 25th May just off the Cairns of Coll. At the end of April a small group of bottlenose dolphins were seen in the Sound of Gigha by staff at the Muasdale Holiday Park. Bottlenose dolphins are sighted regularly from this point indicating that this part of the coast is at least on occasions an important area for this species. Closer to home, several sightings of two or three dolphins have been reported around the Mull coast over the last few weeks, including a possible report of a pair of dolphins south of Raasay.

The first basking shark report of 2006 was received on 21st April and was sighted off the coast of Coll. Most reports so far have been concentrated around the Coll and Tiree coastline, with more recent sightings off Croig (north Mull) and Loch Fyne. So the season appears to be underway, if not a little late getting started! We will keep you posted...



North West England

From Dave McGrath, Sustainability Education Officer at Solaris Centre, Blackpool

The weather this spring has been very variable for cetacean watching. There have been long spells of calm seas, but, in between, the sea has been extremely rough, making watching almost impossible. However, we do have the following sightings to report: On 21st April, birders from Fylde Bird Club reported two harbour porpoises from Starr Gate, South Shore. On 29th April, bird watchers again reported at least eight harbour porpoises from Starr Gate. It looks like this is the best place to look for porpoises in this area, as there appears to be a small resident population at the mouth of the Ribble estuary. On 9th May, local photographer Phil Ashman was able to get some photographs of a bottlenose dolphin off South Promenade. This was a rare sighting from the Fylde coast.

North East England

From Andy Tait, regional coordinator for North East England

In April we received just one sighting, which was of two porpoise foraging off South Tyne Pier on the 2nd. On the 16th April we had two strandings; one of a very young striped dolphin at Whitley Bay. This dolphin was alive when it stranded but had to be euthanized because of its poor condition. On the same day an adult porpoise was found dead on the beach at Druridge Bay in healthy looking condition. On 2nd May three porpoises were seen heading west off the Inner Farne and another was seen foraging in the same area.

Eastern England: East Anglia

From Mark Iley, Essex Wildlife Trust

Unfortunately, the only cetacean report I have for this period was of a dead porpoise found near Goldhanger, Essex on the 16th April.

Eastern England: Thames Estuary

From Renata Kowalik, Thames Marine Mammals Sightings Survey, Marine & Freshwater Conservation Programme, Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

The beginning of April was relatively busy with a total of 37 sightings sent in. The majority of these were harbour porpoise sightings. In most cases there were one or two animals spotted, but groups of up to eight animals were observed near Blackfriars Bridge over a period of several days. Unfortunately, a couple of the porpoise strayed as far upstream as Kew Gardens, which was an unusual event for those that observed them but may have resulted in the two strandings that were collected by ZSL's Institute of Zoology. In addition, a group of up to ten bottlenose dolphins were spotted by sailors in Greenwich Reach around Deptford. Two seal sightings were also sent in, one of which was identified as a common seal.

May was much quieter with only seven sightings sent in including two seals, one dolphin spotted near Hammersmith Bridge, and four porpoises seen out in the estuary near Cliffe Fort.

Southern England: Kent

From David Walker, Dungeness Bird Observatory.

Harbour porpoise was the only cetacean species seen from the Dungeness Bird Observatory during April and May. Porpoises were seen on 22 days in April, with a maximum of four on 17th, 21st and 23rd. In May, porpoises were seen on

21 days, but the number of individuals was greater than in the previous month, with a maximum of twelve seen on the 6th.

From Jo Malpass, SWF trustee

On 13th April, a dead whale was reported by a member of the public at Kingsdown beach near Deal in Kent early Thursday morning. Following a phone call from Trevor Weeks at the British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) HQ, I went down to the beach but the tide had risen and there was no sight of the animal. At around 5pm, I returned to the beach and was able to identify the whale as a juvenile humpback. It measured 9m in length and was placed in an upright position facing the sea. It appeared to have been involved with a ship strike due to the slice, which had almost cut its body in two. My husband, Tim, later joined me and helped to keep the public informed and away from the carcass. Mark and Alison Stevens arrived at the scene, and Mark and Jo took blubber, skin and muscle samples to send off to Paul Jepson, at the Institute of Zoology in London, for analysis. The BDMLR team left the site at approximately 9pm, when it was dark, having spoken to the coastguard regarding its disposal.



Stranded humpback, *J. Malpass*

Southern England: Sussex

From Stephen Savage, regional coordinator for Sussex

Several bottlenose dolphin sightings were reported during April and May. A bottlenose dolphin was present off Seaford, East Sussex in April. It was first reported on 21st April when it was seen feeding.

Two further sightings occurred on the 24th and 27th April. Liaising with local contact Stephen Marsh, a marine medic contact for BDMLR, we have found out that this dolphin is now present (June) off Folkestone in Kent. It was last seen off Seaford on 3rd May, and has been seen off Folkestone on several occasions in the latter part of May. The dolphin was identified as the same animal due to a distinctive marking on the dorsal fin. This dolphin has a distinct but unusual yellowish white circular patch on the left side of its dorsal fin about 1.5 inches wide (photographed) and Stephen Marsh noticed a similar mark lower down on the right side of the dorsal fin (more next issue). If anyone recognises this description, BDMLR have forwarded a photo to me that may help identify this individual. BDMLR are monitoring the dolphin. A bottlenose dolphin was also seen off Lancing on the same day. Three bottlenose dolphins were also reported off Birling Gap on 30th May. Finally, a common seal was observed for half an hour swimming slowly east, parallel with the shore at Hove beach, before heading out to sea.

In May we took part in the first of three local wildlife events. The Lowtide Festival took place on 27th May and is a celebration of the oceans through science, art and storytelling. This was the 12th year that the event has been run by Brighton based River Ocean Foundation. The Sussex group had a Sea Watch display in the Marine lab tent (or really I should I say yurt – which are amazing structures). This year, the event took place on Hove lawns and was well attended by faithful followers of this annual event, and also a new audience due to the event's new site.

South West England: North Devon

From David Jenkins

Constant poor weather through the spring into early May has meant that training plans and monitoring were postponed until the middle of May. Then, with the onset of a maritime high pressure system, sightings of harbour porpoise began to pick up off the North Devon headlands. From ones and twos to in excess of ten, the best sighting being off Hartland Point (June 4th), when as many as twenty were present over a large area, in association with about 40 gannets. One issue yet to be resolved is the apparent absence of young, although bad weather and overlooking small young could explain this. The only authenticated sighting of a neonate was recorded on the 10th April. This was seen at Combe Martin Bay with a group of four adults.

Although the weather wasn't great, volunteers managed to get in 31 hours of watches through this period from all around North Devon. During these watches, there were sightings of 58 porpoises, which gives a very coarse relative abundance of 1.8 porpoises per hour! No live sightings of other cetaceans have been recorded in this area, and there been no strandings in the area for around twelve months.

South West England: South Devon

From Gavin Black

We have a bit of catching up to do on our summary for south Devon, so we start with a round up of our news for February-March.

There was limited cetacean activity around Devon in February and March. However, there was an abundance of porpoises off Berry Head. Twenty-nine sightings were made over the two months of small groups of up to six individuals. This is the first time in a long period that porpoises have been seen regularly on the south coast, which is very encouraging. Whether this reflects a return to former haunts or an increase in time spent watching by Nigel

Smallbones (South Devon co-coordinator) and his team of surveyors is not known for certain. I'm happy to report that Nigel is now working full-time at Berry Head National Nature Reserve and will be organising regular watches from this spectacular site.

A group of 6-10 bottlenose dolphins moved swiftly round the south Devon coast in mid March. A group was first sighted in Torbay on 8th March then three days later, possibly the same group was seen off Wembury on 11th March, and then again just two hours later off Rame Head.

Moving on to April and May... Although May gave some unseasonably poor weather, there have been some exciting incidental records in April and May this year. Together with at least 20 hours spent watching from the coast in South Devon, this has given us some great records.

Risso's dolphins were sighted on 12th May off Berry Head. Mike Langman was lucky enough to have a group of five Risso's (two female and calf pairs and a male) come in close to Berry Head. This follows a report of possible Risso's dolphins seen in Start Bay four days before. Twenty common dolphins were sighted feeding south of Plymouth, off Rame Head, on 23rd April. Five days later, on 28th, a group of 20 unidentified dolphins was seen about five miles south of Plymouth. And a possible pilot whale was spotted off Berry Head on 9th April.

Although not as prolific as the North Devon coast, there were several sightings of harbour porpoises along the South Devon coast. A pair was spotted well up the Tamar Estuary on 6th April. However, all the rest were seen off Berry Head. This continues Berry Head's long run of porpoise sightings (seen almost daily since Christmas). Almost all were seen by South Devon co-coordinator Nigel Smallbones and his team of volunteers. Sightings of porpoise here stopped abruptly on 12th April - none has been seen since. Interestingly this coincides exactly with bottlenose dolphins that turned up on the same day. Are the dolphins displacing the porpoises? Anecdotal records that Nigel has been getting suggest the porpoises have moved further offshore.

The bottlenose dolphins were seen regularly in groups of up to eight by Nigel and his team from Berry Head over the following two weeks. One individual was particularly noticeable due to its size. This male was estimated to be just over 4m! Bottlenose dolphins were seen one other time six weeks later off Torre Abbey Sands.

The Dolphin Protection Programme has now recruited 90 volunteers to join the Sea Watch Foundation network and to carry out regular watches throughout Devon. As the data come in, we hope to start assessing relative abundances and finding out whether cetaceans visit areas other than Tor Bay!

There were three strandings in this period in Devon. All were common dolphins, and all on the south coast.

South West England: Cornwall From David Ball, Silver Dolphin Centre, Porthleven

The weather wasn't kind to us during April, with some bad storms and waves breaking in Mounts Bay that stopped boats leaving Penzance Harbour. However, we still had reports coming in.

There were eight reported sightings of the local bottlenose dolphin pod; several of these confirmed that they have three or more calves. We have had some great pictures sent to us to help build a photo-ID catalogue for the dolphins around our coast. Our volunteers will be spending more time out on the cliff tops and on boat trips, to continue our research on the local cetaceans.

There were also three reported common dolphin sightings, five unidentified dolphin reports, and four harbour porpoise sightings. In addition, a minke whale off Carn Glouce was reported through Jean Lawman of the National Coastwatch Institution.

Fortunately, the weather changed for the better in May, with some days of flat blue seas that were great for observing, and volunteers taking boat trips as part of our research. Again, the bottlenose and their young have been around with nine reports split between the north and south coasts. We had three harbour porpoise sightings and two unidentified dolphins reported. We also had two sightings of Risso's dolphins reported and one of these sightings was by Orca Seafaris, who reported five adults and a juvenile in the mouth of the Helford River. This confirms the need for our work as we are getting more and more sightings of calves of different species. There was another minke sighting, again by Orca Seafaris, south-east of St Anthony's Head.

While it is great to see these cetaceans, it has been marred by reports of basking sharks being harassed by boats. As we are part of PAVV, the Partnership for Action against Wildlife crime, we do have people report harassment to us. We forward it to the police and also go out to see if we can see who is responsible. If you see any harassment, please report it to the police or give us a call. Also, with the IWC meeting underway as I write this, we are looking at a possible resumption of whaling. With all the activity around our coast, maybe we should be looking at putting pressure on the government and European parliament to create a North East Atlantic sanctuary around our coasts. We still have cetacean by-catch wash up on our beaches, and this problem is not going to go away. We ran two Cornish Marine Life Rescue courses, one for 14 of our volunteers and another for a group of veterinary students. We have two more planned, one on 8th July and one on 12th August. This marine mammal medic course is free as is membership to Cornish Marine Life Rescue. April and May have been busy months at the centre with a well attended open day in April, which is mainly due to the volunteers who worked hard to make it a success.

For more information on the work of the centre, contact the Silver Dolphin Centre on 01736 364860 or 07881 688 234 www.silverdolphinmarineconservationanddiving.co.uk

From Dan Jarvis, Cornwall Wildlife Trust

(information reproduced with permission of the Cornwall Wildlife Trust www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/).

As we move into summer the number of sightings reported to the Trust's long-running sightings scheme, Seaquest Southwest, has increased dramatically, especially reports of bottlenose dolphins. In the first week of April there were several reports, mostly from the Penzance area of Mount's Bay, of bottlenose dolphins playing close inshore, while later in April and for the latter half of May a pod has been seen repeatedly traversing the coast between St Ives and Porthtowan on numerous occasions, but usually in St Ives Bay. This pod has been easy to identify due to the very young calf that frequently makes itself obvious with its playful behaviour, and also because of several dorsal fin ID shots taken by Cornwall Seal Group members. Individual sightings of bottlenose dolphin pods came from Sennen, Cape Cornwall, St Agnes, Padstow, Polzeath and the Mouls, all on the north coast. As ever, we are keeping a watchful eye on watercraft users, as now is the time of year where harassment incidents start to occur (and already have). Harassment of marine wildlife should be reported to the Devon and Cornwall Police Wildlife Liaison Officer on 08452 777444. BDMLR Medics are also available to attend these incidents and can be contacted on the hotline number given at the end of this report.

Common dolphin sightings have been fairly sporadic, with a lone dolphin being seen off Land's End and at least three more near the Runnelstone during the first regular cetacean survey being carried out by the University of Exeter in Cornwall, in conjunction with the Cornwall Wildlife Trust, during April. Other sightings have come from Trevone near Padstow, and a couple more around the Lizard peninsula, including a pod of approximately 50 on 24th April.

There was a single sighting of Risso's dolphins during this period, on 16th May, by Geevor near Pendeen, where three individuals were being active at the surface about 500 yards offshore to the delight of onlookers. Unidentified dolphin pods were seen at Kynance Cove on the Lizard, the Runnelstone, St Ives Bay, Newquay and at the Mouls.

Harbour porpoises were seen in small numbers throughout the period at Fowey, Mousehole (three sightings), Tater-Du near Lamorna, the Runnelstone and nearby Porthgwarra, the Brisons, Botallack and one more just north of Bude. The first Mousehole sighting is of particular interest as this was of a mother and calf pair in early April.

The only other cetacean species recorded during April and May was a minke whale at Carn Glouce near Land's End early in the morning of 9th April.

Basking shark sightings are on the increase now, but only individuals or small groups have been observed and reported thus far. Most sightings have come from the usual haunts of Fal Bay and the Lizard and Land's End peninsulas, with other records at Fowey and Mevagissey to the south-east of the county, and finally Tintagel in the north-east. That's all the sightings for this article, but the next one is already looking set to be a bumper issue!

Other News

British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org) have been called out to three cetacean incidents, all in May. The first two occurred on the same day on May 3rd when a small harbour porpoise was seen in the outer harbour at Porthleven, and was apparently not faring well against the incoming swell. Medics attended and observed the uninjured animal for a few hours before it made its way back out to sea under its own steam. The second incident that day was during the afternoon when a dolphin was spotted offshore at Porthtowan, apparently caught in a net. Over a dozen medics carried out a search for a few hours between Portreath and St Agnes but there was no sign of any dolphins whatsoever. It later transpired that the sighting was more likely a case of mistaken identity though. The final callout was on 15th May when a neonate harbour porpoise live stranded at Newquay in front of the Blue Reef Aquarium. Despite a search by medics, nearby boat users and kayakers, the mother could not be found, and a local BDMLR veterinarian attended to euthanase the poor animal, as it was dependant upon its mother to survive – but also not in good body condition, suggesting they may have been separated for some time.

The Cornwall Wildlife Trust Strandings Network has also been kept busy with a couple of rare strandings. On the 21st April, a relatively fresh bottlenose dolphin carcass was reported ashore at Watermill Cove on St Mary's, Isles of Scilly. A full report on this unusual event can be found on the Strandings Network website (www.cwtstrandings.org). The other rare stranding was that of the skeletal remains of a pilot whale at Newquay towards the end of May. Network volunteers were able to catalogue and remove the bones, and the Natural History Museum has allowed for it to be mounted and used for educational purposes here in Cornwall. On a disappointing note, the Government has recently announced that it will be cutting funding for Post Mortem examinations on cetaceans across the UK. Obviously this will have a serious effect on the amount of information that can be gathered nationally about cetaceans around the country, but also it will damage efforts to prevent by-catch and other human-caused methods of injury and death. More information can be found on the above website.

Now we are out of the grey seal rescue season, things have quietened down at the National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn1.html). One more pup was brought in late in April, however, by a joint RSPCA/BDMLR operation from Polzeath after it was found entangled in a net. Releases have continued to be carried out, and many more are ready to go over the coming weeks! As previously reported, the Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) has developed a localised code of conduct for watercraft in St Ives Bay, which has now been issued around the local area. Also, the postcards have now been printed to help raise funds to create awareness of seals around Cornwall through education. The excellent photos on the postcards were taken by CSG member Simon Bone, who hosts numerous galleries on his website (www.cornishseals.co.uk).

Events

The CWT Strandings Network and Cornwall Seal Group, along with BDMLR, Surfers Against Sewage and others, had display stands and events at Godrevy during the first weekend of June as part of the National Trust's 'Sun Sea and Surf Festival'. The weekend was very hot so that, as well as raising awareness of marine conservation issues to the many visitors, everyone got a nice tan and were also treated to a spectacular sighting of the local bottlenose dolphin pod and their calf!

With the recent warm weather and influx of tourists to the area, several awareness raising and fundraising events have been organised in the county by the various conservation charities and groups. BDMLR have held dolphin rescue demonstrations for St Ives Round Table, who very graciously donated over £5000 to the charity earlier this year, and also at Falmouth as part of the Fal Festival. More events and a Marine Mammal Medic course are to be held soon, and the dates and locations of these can be viewed on the 'Training' page of their website. A charity auction was also held in Newquay at the beginning of June, having been organised by medics Jenny Haley and Michelle Spillane-Smith. During the day, two rescue demos were carried out and merchandise sold at a stand at the top of the beach at Porth, Newquay, and the auction was held during the evening. In all, the day was a huge success and raised a further £1200 to go towards this year's funds for rescue equipment. Congratulations and thank you to everyone involved in this event and a big well done to Jenny and Michelle for their efforts and enthusiasm! A new group is in the process of being set up by Falmouth Marine College lecturer, Jason Birt. Cornwall Marine Educators (CME) aims to pool the educational resources on offer from a wide variety of marine-related organisations to make it easier for schools and other groups to find out what there is available to them. The first newsletter is due to be issued imminently (mid-June). Jason is currently putting a lot of effort into getting this project up and running, which we all hope will be a big success – well done Jason and keep up the good work!

Emergency numbers:

For live seals, call the **National Seal Sanctuary** on 01326 221361.

People are warned to not approach or handle any pups that they may find on the beach, as this can cause the mother to reject it, as well as the danger of being bitten and risk of infection.

For dead cetaceans, seals etc., call the **Cornwall Wildlife Trust** hotline on 0845 2012626. People are advised not to touch carcasses due to the risk of infection. CWT is the official recorder of dead marine wildlife in Cornwall.

For live marine animals in distress, call **British Divers Marine Life Rescue** on 01825 765546. People are advised not to immediately return stranded cetaceans to the water, but to keep the animal upright and wet, avoiding getting water in the blowhole, until a thorough health check can be made by trained medics and veterinarians.

Wales

From Hanna Nuuttila, Sightings Officer, Sea Watch Foundation

The beginning of April was still a little quiet, but from mid April in New Quay we started to have more sightings, thanks to our great team of volunteers who arrived eager to get the field season started! During the month, the bottlenose dolphins were sighted frequently from the New Quay Pier but harbour porpoises were still around too! The New Quay lifeboat reported a fantastic encounter with five dolphins, bow riding the all-weather life boat during an exercise in the bay.

Both dolphins and porpoises were also reported from Mwnt, New Quay Birds Rock, and further offshore in New Quay Bay, by local observers and fishermen. Three unidentified whales were sighted off Birds Rock on the 23rd April, which got everybody very excited; however, nothing was confirmed nor seen again. A large group of 20 or so bottlenose dolphins were recorded foraging off Ynys Las, near Borth, by Friends of Cardigan Bay (FoCB).

Sea Watch started its photo-identification surveys onboard the sailing boat "Celine", and had great encounters with bottlenose dolphins, northwest of Aberystwyth. Harbour porpoise were also sighted, but in decreasing numbers.

In South Wales, a single harbour porpoise was spotted off the slipway at Sully, Vale of Glamorgan on the 24th April. The relatively good weather continued into May as did the steady stream of sightings of bottlenose dolphins from New Quay Pier. Groups of up to 15 bottlenose dolphins were sighted by several different individuals, both from land and from the sea. On the 9th May, a group of ten dolphins was spotted bow-riding a sailing boat in outer Cardigan Bay, and on 5th the dolphins were seen off Aberystwyth Harbour and Borth. Although porpoises were seen less and less in New Quay Bay, we had several sightings from Mwnt, Aberystwyth Pier, and Borth during early May. On the 5th of May, around ten porpoises were seen from Mwnt headland, foraging off both Mwnt and Cardigan Island. A very interesting sighting was made from Mwnt headland on the 7th when two harbour porpoises were sighted at the same time as a group of 15 or so bottlenose dolphins were feeding not far off Cardigan Island. No interactions were observed, however.

Sea Watch line transect surveys from New Quay began in earnest and plenty of bottlenose dolphins were spotted during three separate surveys, in groups of between 10 to 15 animals, bow-riding, leaping and breaching all around our survey vessel. Harbour porpoises and grey seals were also seen several times. The end of month had a spell of bad weather and this was reflected in the decreased number of sightings in the area.



Risso's dolphin, PGH Evans

Isle of Man

From John Galpin, regional coordinator for the Isle of Man

April sightings were mostly of harbour porpoises, generally from the south of the island. This probably reflects distribution of effort and the opportunity to observe sightings, since persistent northerly winds continued to make observations difficult along any part of the exposed coastline.

During a fine break in the weather, a welcome report of harbour porpoises in Ramsey Bay, in the North of Mann, reflected the presence of these animals all around the coast. There was a single sighting of four common dolphins close to the shore at Kallow Point near Port St. Mary, the first for 2006.

May continued in much the same vein: another single sighting of common dolphins on the west coast, followed by occasional sightings of harbour porpoises throughout the rest of the month. However, two significant sightings in May were recorded. The first was the return of Risso's dolphins, seen earlier in the year. This was to prove the first of a number of excellent sightings of these magnificent dolphins from all around the southern half of Mann. The May sighting was of a pod of ten dolphins and most likely the bulk of the ten adults and two juveniles that have figured greatly in the June listings. They were seen by large numbers of people on the 9th and 10th of May, leaping and breaching close to the shore at Langness. The second unusual sighting was of a white-beaked dolphin by an experienced cetacean researcher and observer. For Manx waters this is a rare species.

To view all sightings for 2006, go to the new Manx Whale + Dolphin Watch website at www.mwdw.net, where you can keep abreast of the rapidly expanding sightings reports. This new site represents a local commitment to improving the effectiveness of the Sea Watch Foundation's presence in the Isle of Man. It was launched on the 20th of May 2006 in collaboration with Sea Watch Foundation and The Manx Wildlife Trust, and aims to bring a local perspective to cetacean monitoring and recording in Manx waters, and to encourage local participation and a real sense of local ownership in these issues. The web-site provides feedback to the public through access to the 'Recent Sightings' page, which gives an overview of local sightings reports prior to their dispatch to the Sea Watch Foundation, where the sightings will undergo the normal scrutiny before acceptance into the Sea Watch Foundation national database. The web-site includes a 'Local Species' section where users can download an A4 ID guide of the eight regular species normally seen in the Irish Sea. The web-site's primary function is to encourage and facilitate the reporting of cetacean sightings by everyone and provide feedback on those sightings. Since the inception of the Manx Whale + Dolphin Watch on 20th May, local sightings reports have increased ten-fold, and sightings to mid-June already exceed last year's entire sighting record. With the busy season yet to come, we are anticipating a substantial increase in local awareness, participation and sightings reports.

Republic of Ireland

Compiled by Saana Isojunno, SWF Volunteer

Of 148 sightings in April-May, most frequently reported species were harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin and minke whale. Harbour porpoises were generally seen in small groups of 1-5, but also observed feeding in larger groups of 8-10 associated with seabirds as in Killiney Bay, Dublin and Portmuck, Antrim. A probable harbour porpoise was reported inland in River Barrow, five miles upriver from New Ross. Bottlenose dolphins were sighted 36 times all around the Irish coast. One of the most spectacular bottlenose sightings was in Ventry Bay, Kerry, on 22nd and 25th May where 20 individuals displayed a full behavioural repertoire. The number of minke whale sightings (33) has increased dramatically from previous months. Minkes were found mainly off southern Ireland where especially Sleah Head, Co. Kerry and the coast of West Cork stand out in sighting numbers. Common dolphin sightings were also biased to the south. Common dolphins were spotted nine times, in numbers ranging up to 50 animals in the St. George's Channel. Nearly all sightings (8) of Risso's dolphins came from eastern Ireland around the Wicklow area, with seven individuals being spotted in Cudaff, Donegal only once.

Comprehensive analysis of all Irish cetacean sightings is available through the IWDG website www.iwdg.ie, which provides on line access and interrogation of over 8,000 validated sightings.



Sea Watch Foundation's project "Encouraging Public Participation in Cetacean Monitoring" is supported by Heritage Lottery Fund as well as Defra's Environmental Action Fund. Furthermore, Sea Watch is also supported by BG International, Dong Efterforskning og Produktion and Atlantic Petroleum, and the Countryside Council for Wales.

Further details on all our activities can be found on the Sea Watch Foundation website (www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk), by e-mailing <info@seawatchfoundation.org.uk> or by calling Sea Watch on 01545 561227.