



## UK Sightings Network News

October 2012

### Sightings Summary

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### Editorial

*As we all know, there is rarely a time when there is nothing to see in UK waters. More often than not it's just a question of getting the right weather conditions for observers to get out and for the animals to actually be visible! I want to thank everyone single person who went out, got cold (and possibly wet) to record data this month. It's not just about the sightings, the effort data is valuable as well. So whether you saw something or not, thank you all!! To find out what was seen, read on!*

*October wasn't just busy in the field, the end of the month brought a flurry of meetings and events which kept Sea Watch staff and volunteers on their toes. It's been a busy month but a successful one. The perfect end to a great summer season!*

Danielle Gibas, Sightings Officer

### Photo of the month



This great shot of a humpback whale taken by SWF Regional Coordinator and Chairman of the board of trustees, Robin Petch, off Whitby, N. Yorks on 20th October. Well done Robin!

*To have your photo featured in the section, please send it to [danielle.gibas@seawatchfoundation.org.uk](mailto:danielle.gibas@seawatchfoundation.org.uk)*

### Dates for your diary

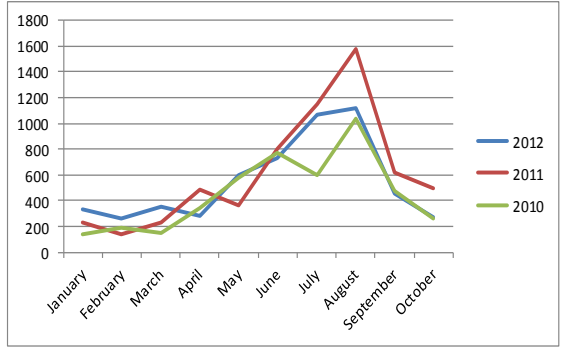
**Closing date for 2013  
internships applications  
31st January 2013**

**National Whale and Dolphin  
Watch**

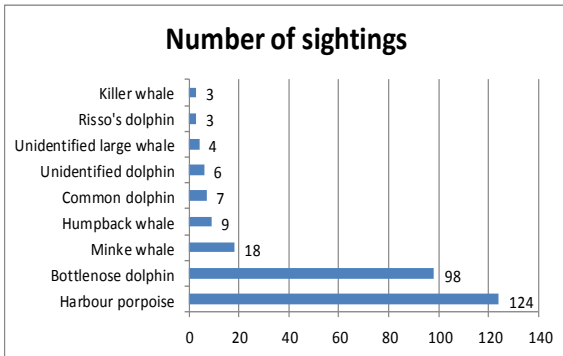
**27th July—4th August 2013**

## Sightings Summary

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Number of sightings per month for 2010, 2011 and 2012.



Number of sightings per species in UK waters during October 2012

Harbour porpoise sightings reflected the UK wide coastal distribution of this species, with 124 sightings spread all around the British coast. As to be expected, areas with higher effort coverage such as Cardigan Bay, Moray Firth and Scarborough displayed higher numbers of sightings.

The resident bottlenose dolphins of the Moray Firth and Cardigan Bay were regularly reported throughout October. These sightings constituted the bulk of the 98 reports for this species this month. Other reports, including a group of 100 animals, came from the Isle of Man and North Wales, indicating the beginning of the winter northward movement of the Cardigan Bay population.

In Ireland, Co. Antrim, Co. Clare, Co. Donegal, and Co. Louth were all witness to bottlenose dolphin. Cornwall and the Channel Islands also had one report each of this species. Finally, in addition to Moray Firth sightings, the rest of Scotland had its share of bottlenose dolphins, with reports from Aberdeen and Arbroath in Aberdeenshire and one report from the Hebrides. The most unusual bottlenose sightings took place in North-East England with 70 animals reported off Sea Houses Northumberland. ([see news item](#)).

Eighteen sightings of minke whales were reported, predominantly from North East Scotland and North Yorkshire. There were also a few reports from the Isle of Man and off Co. Clare and Co. Cork in Ireland.



[Click maps for larger images](#)

## Sightings Summary (continued)



Sightings of common dolphin, humpback whale, killer whale and Risso's dolphin in UK waters during October 2012. [Click map for large image.](#)

Whitby, North Yorkshire provided us with seven reports of humpback whales in October ([see news item](#)). October is rapidly becoming the best month for whale-watching in this area with schools of fish attracting large whales such as minke, humpback and even last year's probably sei whale! Other reports of humpbacks came from Co. Kerry in Ireland and an unconfirmed sighting was recorded off Belhaven Beach, Dunbar, East Lothian.

All seven sightings of common dolphins took place in waters adjacent to the Celtic deep off Southern Ireland and Cornwall with the exception of a single sighting of a group of over 150 animals in Loch Broom, Highland ([see news item](#)). Common dolphins are regular visitors to the Southern Irish Sea especially at this time of year were they can aggregate in "superpods" of thousands of animals.

Risso's dolphins made their first appearance in the Irish Sea this autumn with sightings from both the Isle of Man and North Wales this month ([see news item](#)). There was also a sighting of this species just north of Peterhead, Aberdeenshire ([see news item](#)).

Killer whales were seen exclusively in Scotland in October. Single sightings was reported from the Hebrides, Caithness, Moray, and Shetland Isles respectively. The most spectacular of these took place in Ronas Voe, Shetland where 50 orcas were reported. For photos from Shetland Wildlife [here](#).

*If you have any sightings to report, it's not too late to send them to [sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk](mailto:sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk). All sightings data are valuable and we'd be really interested of any cetaceans that you have spotted recently. If you like to find out more about how to become involved in cetacean monitoring in your area, why not contact your regional coordinator (contact details on the Sea Watch website) or ask our Danielle, SWF Sightings Officer.*

## Sea Watch News

### We had a Whale of a time...



Almost 6,000 visitors from across Europe landed on Brighton's shores on 27th and 28th October for Whale Fest 2012. Organised by Brighton based, Planet Whale, the world's largest celebration of wild whales and dolphins was a huge success, more than doubling visitors to the annual event. A combination of workshops and lectures were on offer as well as a number of attractions which included 35 life size whales and dolphins, virtual whale watching trips, a try dive tank and, of course the Sea Watch Foundation stand!



## Sea Watch News

### We had a whale of time... (continued)

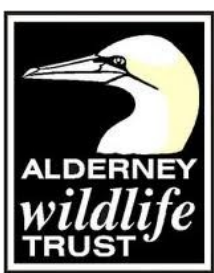
The event gave the Sea Watch team (Chiara, Georgina, Wendy, Robin and Kris) the chance to spend two days catching up with cetacean enthusiasts from all around the world. The SWF stand attracted a lot of attention, particularly the 'Face in a Hole' board! A few people even tried the UK cetacean I.D. quiz, and impressed with their I.D. skills. For anyone who found the quiz tricky, our Yorkshire regional coordinator Robin Petch was on hand with his scheduled 'Cetacean I.D. Workshop' which ran on both days, and was very successful, despite clashing with the big names - Mark Carwardine and Bill Oddie. Regional coordinators from Sussex, Stephen Savage and Kate Green, joined the team for the day on Sunday, and were able to offer local knowledge of cetacean sightings in the area, and encourage local people to get involved. Overall, we felt that Whale Fest was a massive success and we hope to see you all again next year!

More information at [www.whale-fest.com](http://www.whale-fest.com)

### End of season for the New Quay Office

The 26<sup>th</sup> October brought the 2012 field season to a close at the New Quay Sea Watch Office. There have been many highlights this season: outstanding encounters with large groups of bottlenose dolphins in Cardigan Bay, a well-deserved minke whale sighting off Anglesey, and a sunny National Whale and Dolphin Watch in New Quay to name but a few. For Sea Watch staff, the most memorable aspect of the season will, as always, be the hard work and laughter contributed by our team of volunteers. Without their help in the field in and in the office, we just couldn't have achieved all that we have this year. Thanks guys and we wish you all the very best of luck in the future!!!

### Training course in the Channel Islands with Alderney Wildlife Trust



The weekend of the 27<sup>th</sup> October was a weekend of "firsts" for Danielle, SWF Sightings Officer. First time in a Trislander Plane, first visit to the Channel Islands, first sight of a sea state seven (or was it eight??). Arriving on Alderney, the northernmost of the Channel Islands, on Friday 26<sup>th</sup>, Danielle was just in time to join the last day of the Inter-Island Conference. This is an annual meeting between representatives from all of the Channel Islands. Various topics are covered and this year's agenda included marine mammal and seabird monitoring.

The following day was dedicated to a Sea Watch Cetacean Identification course which was open to the public. Danielle started the morning by giving lectures introducing the Sightings Network and cetacean data collection. At midday, everyone headed out to a view point to conduct a very wind-swept land-watch. After an hour of doggedly scanning the waves for the sight of a dorsal fin, the group called off the land-watch headed back indoors for a cup of tea and ID-quiz. Despite the lack of sightings, the course served its purpose. The attendees will be able to confidently collect effort data both from land and at sea and have a good basic knowledge of cetacean identification. We look forward to hearing of their sightings!!

We'd like to thank the Alderney WT for their invitation and hope that this course will be first step to developing a comprehensive monitoring network around the island.





## Sea Watch News (continued)

### Field work success for Bangor University Marine Mammal Module

Every year in October, Sea Watch staff, Daphna Feingold and Danielle Gibas join SWF Director, Peter Evans in North Wales to deliver the *Marine Mammal Module* to students at Bangor University. The module comprises a series of lectures on various aspects of marine mammal biology (conservation, data collection and analyses, cetacean ID etc.) which are followed by a weekend of field work. For this year's field work, students were split into two groups. One group joined Lauren Hughes, SWF Regional Coordinator and Jan Hiddink, Senior Lecturer at the School of Ocean Sciences on land watch at Point Lynas, Anglesey. The second group surveyed the north coast of Anglesey onboard R.V. Prince Madog with Danielle and Peter. Unbeknownst to all, this was to be the most successful field work ever to take place during a marine mammal module.

Point Lynas did not disappoint and the land-watch team was treated to the sight of porpoises foraging throughout their land-watch on both days of the weekend. This was not unexpected, Point Lynas is notorious for providing good views of porpoises at high tide. The vessel based surveys were where the surprise lay. Not only were bottlenose dolphins spotted in groups of 40 and 45 individuals respectively on Saturday and Sunday, but the Sunday Prince Madog team were also witness to a group of four Risso's dolphins quietly travelling along the North Coast of Anglesey. The first sighting of this species off Anglesey this year. Three species in two days! How's that for an introduction to cetacean surveying?

### Sea Watch Foundation at ASCOBANS



On 22<sup>nd</sup>- 24<sup>th</sup> October, Peter Evans, SWF Director joined government representatives from eight countries as well as representatives of international organizations such as the European Commission, the International Whaling Commission (IWC), the OSPAR Commission, the sister Agreement in the Mediterranean (ACCOBAMS) and the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) in Brighton, to decide future priorities to better protect small whales, porpoises and dolphins under the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS). The meeting agreed a number of measures to protect these marine mammals in European waters.

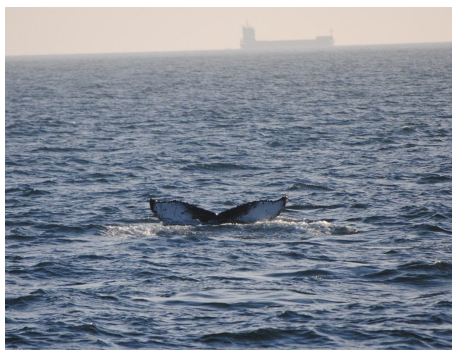
A new Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat aims to intensify research and conservation efforts in this heavily used sea area shared by Denmark, Germany and Sweden. Activities such as fishing, marine construction, extraction of resources and shipping can be a threat to harbour porpoises. Experts expect that the plan will help not only to understand better the scope of the threats but also to address them effectively. To this end, governments, the private sector, IGOs and NGOs are joining forces with the aim of reducing threats, particularly bycatch in fishing nets, supporting research and monitoring as well as safeguarding suitable habitats for the harbour porpoise and its prey species

## Sea Watch News (continued)

### Sea Watch Foundation at ASCOBANS (continued)

In addition, participants agreed on priorities for research and conservation actions in the western part of the ASCOBANS Area, which comprises the Irish Sea and the European North Atlantic. A large diversity of whale and dolphin species, as well as the harbour porpoise, roam these waters. However, knowledge of their abundance and distribution as well as the magnitude of different threats remains scarce. Member States in the region therefore agreed to collaborate closely towards enhancing data collection in order to close these knowledge gaps.

## Sightings News



Humpback whale— Robin Petch

### Cetacean activity in Whitby, North Yorkshire

The week of the 15<sup>th</sup> October provided some excellent cetacean spotting on the east coast of England. Robin Petch (Sea Watch Regional Coordinator and Trustee) not only saw minke whales when sailing onboard Specksionneer but has also witnessed the, now yearly, appearance of humpback whales off Whitby.

Robin explains:

*“On the 18th October, there were two animals, one was a juvenile and another large whale with a big blow was seen in the distance. I believe Chris got some video footage so we hope to be able to identify these animals. They may be the same two which overwintered in the North Sea and were frequently seen off Scotland. Maybe our 2010 humpback has returned?”*

*Three days later we saw a single humpback again. It was feeding, coming up head first, water streaming from its mouth and we even heard the jaws clack shut a couple of times! It buzzed the boat a number of times from all angles! Unfortunately, on our afternoon trip, we had to cut the encounter short when a really thick fog came in from nowhere. On the same trip, we also had a porpoise “bow ride”, 3 tail prints port side, one starboard side then on the surface briefly before darting off and surging to starboard. What a day!”*

### Common dolphins in Loch Broom, Highland

On 21<sup>st</sup>, Noel Hawkins of Summer Queen in Ullapool, Highland reported a group of 150 common dolphins in Loch Broom.

Noel said: *“I have encountered large pods such as this further out at sea and at the Summer Islands many times but I have never seen a pod of this size so far in the loch close to the shore.”*



Common dolphin— Noel Hawkins



## Sightings News (continued)

### Common dolphins in Loch Broom, Highland (continued)

*“It is also strange as it is very late in the year for them. The pod contained large adults and a number of juveniles and appeared to be hunting fish up and down the loch. We observed them for a few hours as did many members of the public who could see the animals from the main road and banks of Loch Broom, and the animals showed no sign of distress or abnormal activity.”*

Common dolphins are mainly observed in the Sea of Hebrides and the southern part of the Minch but have been increasingly observed into the northern part of Minch. Although this species is present year-round in UK waters, peak numbers in terms of sighting rates and group sizes occur in June and July off Western Scotland so as Noel pointed out this sighting is certainly out of the ordinary.

### Bottlenose dolphins off Sea Houses, Northumberland

An unexpected sighting of bottlenose dolphins was reported on 22<sup>nd</sup> October by Alan Leatham of Ocean Explorer, Farne Islands. The Ocean Explorer crew encountered a group of 70 dolphins approximately 400 meters off Sea Houses harbour in Northumberland on



Bottlenose dolphin—Alan Leatham, Ocean Explorer

early an morning trip.

The group, which included juveniles and calves, were spread over a large area close to shore and were heading south. Two hours later, they were reported again off Craster, Northumberland approximately ten miles south of the initial sighting.

Bottlenose dolphins occur regularly on the east coast of Scotland. Hotspots such as the Moray Firth and Aberdeen provide wildlife enthusiasts with a fairly reliable source of land-based sightings of these animals. Although bottlenose have been seen further south, this sighting is very unusual both in its location (south and close to land) and the sheer size of the group. It's impossible to say whether this is a one-off or a sign of things come, what it does demonstrate is the necessity to keep reporting those sightings!

### Risso's dolphins off Peterhead

Regional Coordinator, Kevin Hepworth was lucky enough to spot four Risso's dolphins just north of Peterhead on 29<sup>th</sup> October. Risso's dolphins are rare in the North Sea but the number of sightings of this species increases in the winter months (December, January) off East Scotland. If you are in the area, look out for the distinctive sight of the Risso's square head, tall dark fin and body covered with grey pencil scratches and of course, if you see anything, let us know!!!



**Harbour porpoise sightings in UK waters in October 2012**







Minke whale sightings in UK waters in October 2012



Common dolphin, Risso's dolphin, killer whale and humpback whale sightings in UK waters in October