



CETACEANS OF NORTH-WEST ENGLAND & THE ISLE OF MAN

The waters of the north-west England coast are not as important for cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) as some other regions, being shallow (less than 50 m depth) and relatively uniform in depth. However, further west in the Irish Sea, such as around the Isle of Man, and in the North Channel, the waters are deeper (reaching 150-200 m in places) and there is a much higher density and greater diversity of species.

Since 1980, twelve species have been recorded in the nearshore waters (within 60 km of the coast) of the region. Three of these species (10% of the UK cetacean fauna) are present in most months of the year, whilst a further three (minke whale, fin whale and Risso's dolphin) occur annually as seasonal visitors.

CETACEAN SPECIES FREQUENTLY SIGHTED IN THE REGION:

Harbour porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

Harbour porpoises are mainly sighted in small numbers around the Isle of Man, especially in coastal waters around south (e.g. Calf of Man) and west. They can also be seen in Morecambe Bay, the Solway Firth, near Maryport, and around St. Bees Head (Cumbria). Most sightings occur between July and September.



Short-beaked common dolphin *Delphinus delphis*

The common dolphin is an offshore species found in the northern Irish Sea mainly in the central and western parts, particularly around the south-west of the Isle of Man, the North Channel west of the Mull of Galloway, and eastwards into the Solway Firth. Most sightings of the species occur between June and November.

Bottlenose dolphin

Tursiops truncatus

Small numbers of bottlenose dolphins have been recorded around the Isle of Man, off Heysham (Lancashire), in the Solway Firth, and Morecambe Bay. Sightings mainly occur between July and September.



Other cetacean species recorded in the region include: Minke whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*, Fin whale *Balaenoptera physalus*, Sei whale *Balaenoptera borealis*, Sperm whale *Physeter macrocephalus*, Northern bottlenose whale *Hyperoodon ampullatus*, White-beaked dolphin *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*, Striped dolphin *Stenella coeruleoalba*, Risso's dolphin *Grampus griseus* and the Long-finned pilot whale *Globicephala melas*.



REGIONAL MAP

Sightings Hotspots:

- 1) Mull of Galloway (Dumfries & Galloway)
- 2) Ardwell (Dumfries & Galloway)
- 3) Burrow Head (Dumfries & Galloway)
- 4) Southernness Point (Dumfries & Galloway)
- 5) St Bees Head (Cumbria)
- 6) Point of Ayre (Isle of Man)
- 7) Dalby Point (Isle of Man)
- 8) Port St Mary / Calf of Man (Isle of Man)
- 9) Walney Is. (Cumbria)



St Bees Head. Cumbria



Port St Mary (Isle of Man)



Calf of Man (Isle of Man)

THREATS TO CETACEANS:

Present day threats facing cetacean species include conflicts with fisheries, either from competition for food or accidental capture in fishing gear. Local examples are the capture of small numbers of porpoises and dolphins in drift, seine and trammel nets used in the Dee, Ribble, Lune and Kent Estuaries. Quantitative information on local accidental catch does not exist, however.

Another threat is habitat degradation, mainly by pollution from various contaminants. Marine mammals that have been sampled from Liverpool Bay have the highest levels of PCB's, mercury and lead in the British Isles.

Physical damage may result from collisions with high-speed recreational vessels operating around resort areas.

Another threat is high and low frequency noise disturbance such as from vessel traffic or seismic exploration activities. Sound frequencies may overlap with those used by cetaceans and thus may result in negative responses such as vessel avoidance or increased dive times.



THE FUTURE FOR CETACEANS

A code of conduct for boat users has been produced (Sea Watch Foundation, 1992) and distributed to sailing clubs and marinas.

ASCOBANS (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas) is an international agreement between countries bordering the North and Baltic Seas, with the aim of promoting the conservation of small cetaceans. It was ratified by the UK in 1993. Participating states agree to cooperate on issues including national legislation and research into, for example, cetacean population sizes and the effects of fishing.