



## ***CETACEANS OF SOUTHERN ENGLAND***

This region encompasses the entire coastline stretching from Dorset to East Sussex, and including the Isle of Wight, and counties of Hampshire and West Sussex. Cetacean (whale, dolphin and porpoise) species diversity and abundance in this region is low. However, the species most frequently sighted nearshore (within 60 km of the coastline) are the harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphin. These species are associated with shallow continental seas as found within the English Channel. Further offshore, short-beaked common dolphins and long-finned pilot whales are regularly sighted.

The best locations for cetacean sightings are prominent headlands and enclosed bays such as Selsey Bill (W. Sussex), Beachy Head (E. Sussex), Durlston Head and Portland Bill (Dorset). The seasonal distribution and occurrence of cetacean species in the region are described below.

### ***CETACEAN SPECIES REGULARLY SIGHTED IN THE REGION***

#### **Long-finned pilot whale**

*Globicephala melas*

Deep water species recorded mainly more than 10 km from the coast. It is a seasonal offshore visitor mainly observed between November and January.

Sightings in the Western English Channel occur throughout the year, but with largest numbers between May and October. An easterly movement into the region appears to occur around October, the species remaining in those waters until December or January, but with a secondary peak in numbers during April



**Bottlenose dolphin**

#### **Harbour porpoise**

*Phocoena phocoena*

Although sightings of the harbour porpoise are rare, the species can be found in small numbers in nearshore waters in April and between the months of August and October.

*Tursiops truncatus*

Although observed throughout the English Channel, numbers are apparently small and may reflect the movements of only a few groups. It is nevertheless the most frequently observed cetacean in nearshore waters, though rarely in groups exceeding ten individuals. Sightings occur in all months of the year but with distinct peaks between September and April, particularly around December-January and March-April around Durlston Head (Dorset). Elsewhere, it has been seen around Hengistbury Head and St Catherine's Point, Isle of Wight whilst further along the coast, most sightings come from near the towns of Littlehampton (W. Sussex), Shoreham, Brighton and Eastbourne (E. Sussex). Peak numbers and frequency of sightings here occur between April and August, but with some variation between years.



**Short-beaked common dolphin**

*Delphinus delphis*

Deep water species. It is a casual offshore visitor mainly recorded between August and December, although small numbers have been observed in the vicinity of Durlston Head and Poole Bay (Dorset) between October and January.

**Other cetacean species less frequently recorded in the region include:** Humpback whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*, White-beaked dolphin *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*, Atlantic white-sided dolphin *Lagenorhynchus acutus*, Risso's dolphin *Grampus griseus*, and Killer whale *Orcinus orca*.

## REGIONAL MAP

### Sightings Hotspots

- 1) Portland Bill (Dorset)
- 2) Durlston Head (Dorset)
- 3) Hengistbury Head (Hampshire)
- 4) The Needles (Isle of Wight)
- 5) Brighstone Bay (Isle of Wight)
- 6) St. Catherine's Point (Isle of Wight)
- 7) Bembridge (Isle of Wight)
- 8) Selsy Bill (W. Sussex)
- 9) Brighton (E. Sussex)
- 10) Beachy Head (E. Sussex)
- 11) Fairlight (E. Sussex)
- 12) Dungeness (Kent)



Portland Bill, Dorset



The Needles, Isle of Wight



East Sussex Coast



## ***THREATS TO CETACEAN SPECIES***

Cetaceans face three main pressures in the region from human activities. The first of these is conflicts with fisheries, either competition for a common food resource or accidental capture in fishing gear. Small cetaceans in particular are under threat from trawl and set nets widely used throughout the region, although quantitative information on cetacean by-catch in this area is largely unavailable.

Habitat degradation by pollutants such as PCBs is also a threat. Contaminant levels in the Channel are high compared with other sea areas of the UK. These contaminants impair reproduction and affect the immune system of the animal reducing its ability to fight off bacterial or viral infections, which may result in premature death.

Recreational activities such as high speed vessels operating out of resort areas such as Southampton, Poole, and Chichester harbours (Hampshire) pose direct threats of physical damage from collisions. Another threat is by high and low frequency noise disturbance generated by vessels, for example engine noise or seismic activity. Frequencies may overlap with those used by cetaceans, resulting in negative responses such as vessel avoidance or increased dive time.



## ***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.