

sea watch FOUNDATION



Sei whale photographed off Wester Ross on 16th September by Nick Davies

New look website!

Check it out at <http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/>

The Sea Watch Foundation is very proud to announce our new website, created by Anna Winsom of Vision Internet. The new site has been completely re-designed, but has much additional material including:

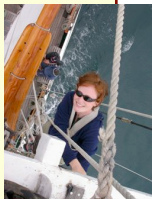
- a new more versatile online sightings form that hopefully people will find easy to fill in
- a much expanded section on species identification including photos, video clips and sound recordings
- cetacean distribution maps - general and monthly
- many more publications available as downloads
- various fact sheets on species, threats and regional cetacean faunas
- more details on volunteering, Masters & PhD projects
- reports on past National Whale & Dolphin Watch Events plus dates for next year

Plus you can now download the news sheets directly!

We hope you will also find it easier to navigate around. There are still some more things we want to add to the web site over the coming months. These include: thumbnails of sections of our marine photo library, further updated and enlarged fact sheets, and regional status summaries.

Editorial

Welcome to the September 2006 issue of the Sea Watch Foundation newsheet, covering August and September. In this issue we have a special report on this year's National Whale and Dolphin Watch week, and some very exciting sightings to report, including a rare sei whale off Wester Ross. The winter nights might be drawing in but there is still a lot happening round our coastline, so pull on your woolly hats and gloves, and please do keep those sightings coming in. Many thanks to all our contributors to this rather bumper issue! As always, your contributions to the news sheet are very welcome, so please send them (and photos!) to me at



lawsonhandley@mac.com.

Happy seawatching,
Lori



SIGHTINGS HIGHLIGHTS

August and September 2006

Sei whale sighted off North-west Scotland

A single sei whale was seen feeding three nautical miles West off Gob A 'Chuille, south of Greenstone point in Wester Ross, Highland on 16th of September. The 30 ft long animal was spotted by Nick Davies of Hebridean Whale Cruises onboard the vessel *Kerry*. The crew and passengers of the eight hour cruise observed this rarely seen cetacean for an hour. The animal was identified from photographs and is distinguished from fin or minke whales by the tall erect dorsal fin and lack of any white markings on the lower jaw or pectoral fins (see photo above).

Risso's dolphins seen by divers at St Abbs, SE Scotland

A group of four Risso's dolphins was seen by divers close to the coast off St Abbs Head, north of Berwick, South-east Scotland, on the morning of the 16th September. The animals were feeding on a school of small fish, undisturbed by the dive boat.

Pilot whales in Salcombe Estuary, Devon

At least 20, possibly up to 50, long-finned pilot whales were sighted 1.5 miles south of the mouth of the Salcombe Estuary on 15th September. The group was seen by anglers, who were fishing from a drifting boat as the pilot whales swam slowly by. They described the animals as jet black, almost as long as the 24' boat that they were fishing from, and travelling east. They were spread out to the seaward side in loose groups and in pairs over half to three quarters of a mile. The anglers were fishing for mackerel, but said they were also catching large, "rugby ball size" squid, which is known to form part of pilot whale diet.

Three northern bottlenose whales sighted in North-west Scotland

Three northern bottlenose whales were spotted from the MV *Sheerwater*, a ferry that runs between the Inner Hebrides. Ronnie Dyer, an experienced cetacean observer, reported the whales between Arisaig and the island of Eigg in the late afternoon of 28th August. The animals were seen on the surface of the sea and blowing for several minutes, giving all aboard the ferry a good view.

Beaked whales are one of the least-known families of large marine mammals and are normally found in offshore deep waters in the Atlantic, the Bering Sea or Norwegian Sea. Northern bottlenose whales are easily identifiable by their bulbous foreheads and can grow to eight metres in length.

Since this sighting, two northern bottlenose whales were stranded on 1st September, on the coast of Skegness; both of these died after rescue attempts. Another northern bottlenose whale was reported on 6th September from Sunderland, entangled in fishing gear but self-freed, and back on the west coast of Scotland, two were seen by SeaLife Surveys on 15th September in Loch Sunart.

Fin whales off Pembrokeshire – again!

Fin whales were sighted on a Sea Watch Foundation common dolphin survey off Neyland, Pembrokeshire, onboard the MV *Liberty of Bligh*. Four animals were sighted on the 22nd August and another two animals were seen on the 23rd. The animals on the first day were successfully photographed and do not seem to be the same animals as seen on last year's survey. More fin whales were reported to the media during the same week from the region.



(Photo Peter Evans)

Killer whales in the Bristol Channel

Four killer whales were sighted from the MV *Balmoral*, travelling between Ilfracombe and Lundy on the evening of 23rd August. The sighting was reported by an experienced observer, Chaynee Hodgetts, who was conducting a cetacean watch from the vessel. Four animals, including a young calf, approached the vessel and travelled south. This is the first sighting of killer whales reported in this part of the Bristol Channel since systematic recording begun in the 1970s. Although killer whales are rare in the region, they are sometimes seen off the southwestern tip of Cornwall and South Devon coasts.

Two Sowerby's beaked whales in the Moray Firth

A pair of Sowerby's beaked whales were seen in the inner Moray Firth from Fort George by Alan Airey on 22nd August. He reported them surfacing four times in perfect unison, and showing their beaks before disappearing from view.

There have been only a few records of live Sowerby's beaked whales in the UK. They tend to stay well away from shipping lanes and are usually only seen when washed up or stranded. The last live stranding occurred in West Wales in September 2004. Sowerby's beaked whales grow to around six metres in length, and have slender bodies with distinct narrow beaks, which in mature males have two flattened teeth protruding from the lower jaw.

595 sightings reported during the National Whale and Dolphin Watch 2006!

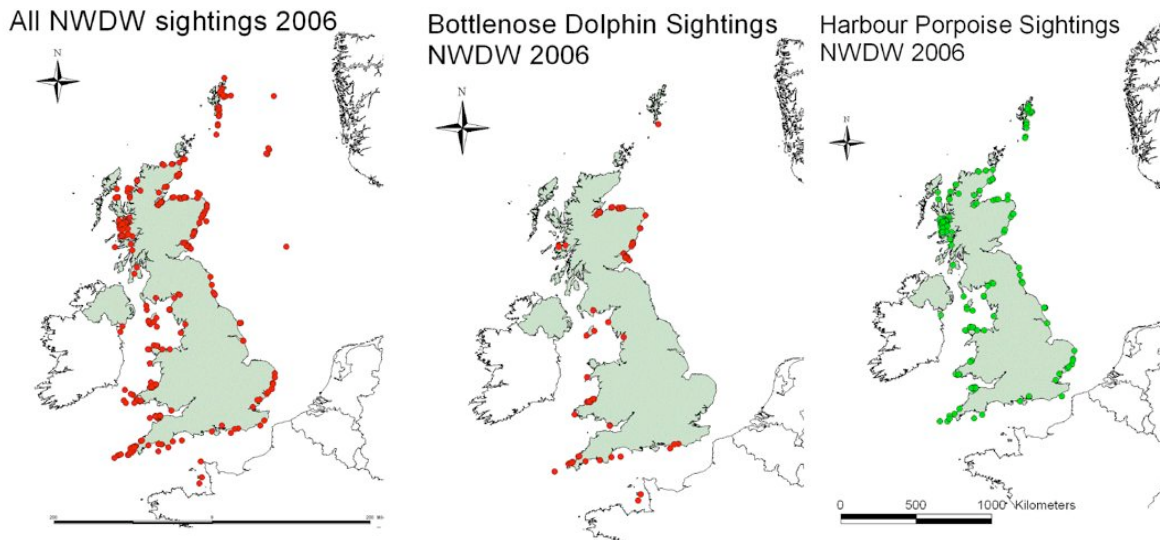
The National Whale & Dolphin Watch this year took place between 12th and 20th August. Despite the dismal weather in most parts of the UK, Watch Week turned out to be a great success. Almost 600 sightings were received during the week.

Seventy-seven manned sites were advertised to the general public, but watches were carried out in nearly two hundred locations around the country. Sightings comprised nine species (in descending order of number of sightings): harbour porpoise (334 sightings), bottlenose dolphin (140), minke whale (39), short-beaked common dolphin (21), Atlantic white-sided dolphin (16), Risso's dolphin (13), white-beaked dolphin (9), killer whale (2), and humpback whale (1). There were also some sightings of large whale species, probably either fin or sei whale.

The results were comparable to previous years: harbour porpoises were widely distributed around the British coasts, with concentrations mainly in the north and west; bottlenose dolphins were also widely distributed, but scarce in Eastern or South-east England. Short-beaked common dolphins, on the other hand, occurred not only in their normal haunts of South-west England, West Wales, and West Scotland, but also off the north coast of Scotland, and along the east coast south to the Moray Firth. For the second summer running, minke whales were scarce off the west coast of Scotland but were common on the east coast, particularly in the Moray Firth; they were also present in small numbers in the Irish Sea off South to South-west England. Atlantic white-sided dolphins were seen mainly off North Scotland, and white-beaked dolphins in the North Sea mainly off North and North-east Scotland. As in recent years, Risso's dolphins were recorded in the northern North Sea off North and North-east Scotland, as well as within their usual range along the west coasts of Britain. The rarest sighting was of a humpback whale between the Channel Islands and France.



Catriona Morrison and other observers
(St Abbs Head watch site)



Notable sightings from this year's watch include:

- Harbour porpoise hotspot confirmed near Ilfracombe, North Devon
- Dolphin species spotted in Blackwater estuary, Essex
- Large groups of harbour porpoise off Cresswell, Northumberland
- Common dolphins in inshore Cardigan Bay
- Killer whales off the Mull of Galloway
- Abundance of harbour porpoises in Cumbria and Yorkshire
- A humpback whale near Alderney, Channel Islands.

Sea Watch would like to thank all the regional coordinators, local organisations, manned site organizers, volunteers and each and every single person who contacted and reported their sightings. A detailed report of this and other years' watches will be available on the website soon.

Note for your diaries! Next year's NWDW week will take place between June 23rd and July 1st.



Marina Swanson and observers at
Lybster Watch Site

REGIONAL NEWS

August - September 2006 (excluding NWDW week)

By Hanna Nuutilla, Sea Watch Sightings Officer

SCOTLAND

Starting in northern Scotland and Shetland, there were several sightings of white-beaked and Atlantic white-sided dolphins, as well as groups of Risso's dolphins and harbour porpoises from observers on the NORCET ferry surveys. Risso's, white-beaked dolphins and minke whales were reported off Shetland, along with up to 300 white-sided dolphins south of Unst. Harbour porpoise, common dolphins, Atlantic white-sided dolphins and Risso's dolphins were all reported in northern Scotland.

In the north-east, as per usual, Lybster viewpoint and East Cliff have provided a number of cetacean records including regular sightings of harbour porpoise, several encounters of white-beaked dolphins, one of white-sided and a possible group of common dolphins. During the summer a watch at Lybster can guarantee a cetacean sighting but towards the end of the period there were more and more watches when nothing was seen. Two minke whales were spotted at Whalgie in early September and another whale was seen off Duncansby Head, Caithness, on the 28th.

We also received regular reports from the Inner Moray Firth, and indeed most times a watch at Fort George yields a result! Bottlenose dolphins were sighted most days during August but the highlight of the season were two Sowerby's beaked whales sighted on the 22nd August, just after the NWDW. Another exciting sighting at Fort George was of a group of common dolphins seen travelling in Rosemarkie Bay the following day. As autumn approached, more and more harbour porpoises were seen in the area. There have also been regular sightings of bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise from Chanonry Point, as well as minke whales with a calf sighted out of Cromarty.

The NORCET ferry surveys have sighted a few bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise off Peterhead and Buchan Ness, and a minke whale was seen at Balmedie on the 18th September. Another minke whale was sighted off Burghead on the 28th September. An unusual sighting of a killer whale was reportedly seen at a beach east of Logie Head, near Cullen, on the 23rd September, although this remains unconfirmed.

Sightings were reported from NORCET ferry surveys; bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise were sighted off Aberdeen on a regular basis. Three orcas were seen off Johnshaven on the 29th August and two unidentified large whales were also seen at Johnshaven on 4th September. Another orca was sighted at Lunan Bay in mid September.

Regular sightings of bottlenose dolphins have been reported in the Tay Estuary during August and September, and Risso's dolphins were seen by divers at St Abbs Head on 16th September. Rare Bird Alert reported two minke whales at St Abbs Head in early September, although these were not confirmed.

Moving west, minke whales remained scarce throughout the region during August, but with a few sightings in September. In the south-west, minke whale was seen by a fisherman on 14th September off the mouth of Loch Ryan, Ayrshire. There was a sad report of two bottlenose dolphins, mother and calf, seen in distress at Drummore and Clayshant on 15th September, but found dead on the following Monday near Clayshant. Several porpoises were sighted off Portpatrick end of August during a SWF Training course in Portpatrick. After the course, enthusiastic observers have reported many sightings of porpoises at Corsewall Point, Southernness Point, and Balcarry Point during the month of September.

In the Inner Hebrides there was an unusual sighting of three northern bottlenose whales sighted from the MV Sheerwater on the 28th August between the island of Eigg and Arisaig. There were also several sightings of common dolphins and harbour porpoise seen from the Loch Nevis ferry and from Mallaig during September, as well as two minke whales sighted on the 9th September near Mallaig harbour.

From the Ullapool to Stornoway ferry, we have received several reports of sightings of common dolphins, harbour porpoise, minke whales, bottlenose dolphins and white beaked dolphins. The most exciting record came from the 23rd when a group of around a hundred dolphins was sighted south of the Eye Peninsula, with possibly three different species seen simultaneously: common dolphins, white-beaked dolphins, and even striped dolphin! Another unusual sighting, of a single sei whale, was reported from the Hebridean Whale Cruises off Gob A'Chuaille, South of Greenstone Point, Wester Ross on the 16th September.

ENGLAND

Starting in the east, with a sad report, when two northern bottlenose whales were stranded on the Lincolnshire coast at the end of August, and despite rescue attempts, both died on a beach near Skegness on the 1st September.

Rare Bird Alert reported a minke whale at Burniston, North Yorkshire on 2nd of September. In Norfolk, the Gorleston NCI reported several sightings of harbour porpoise in August, and porpoises were also sighted in late August off Woodbridge Haven, near Orford Ness. Rare Bird Alert also reported porpoises in Winterton, at Horsey Gap, Trimmingham and Landguard Nature Reserve during September. The Dunwich Sea Watch Centre in Suffolk, which opened in August, has been very successful and the staff there have conducted several hours of watches during August and September, but unfortunately no sightings have been reported outside the NWDW so far! Lowestoft lifeboat have been busy and reported several porpoise sightings during September. Several harbour porpoises have been sighted in the River Blackwater, Essex and we have also received a couple of possible dolphin sightings from the area. Porpoises have

also been seen at River Crouch at South Fambridge. There was one reported sighting of a harbour porpoise off Margate, Kent from the Thames Young Fish Survey during September.

In the south of England, two bottlenose dolphins were spotted from the end of Hastings Pier in Sussex at the end of August, and there was a possible second sighting between Portsmouth and Ryde on the 1st September. A pair of harbour porpoise was sighted in Yarmouth harbour, Isle of Wight, at the beginning of August. There was only one sighting of harbour porpoise reported from Dorset via Rare Bird Alert, seen from Portland Bill on 5th September. I would also like to mention an unusual sighting of a group of white-beaked dolphins in Lyme Bay from the 5th of July, which missed our July issue.

There were not many sightings from South Devon during this period, with only one harbour porpoise spotted during August from Berry Head. However an exciting sighting came on 15th September when a large pod of 20-50 long-finned pilot whales were seen south of the Salcombe Estuary.

In Cornwall, the University of Exeter, with the Isles of Scilly Steamship group, are starting to undertake fortnightly surveys between Penzance and St Marys, and are reporting sightings via the SeaQuest mailing group. They have seen several harbour porpoises and groups of common dolphins in their recent surveys. An interesting sighting of possible white-beaked dolphins was reported from Gwennap Head in early August. Bottlenose dolphins were seen at Perranporth and Rumps Point in August, and at Hayle, St Ives, Riviera Towans, Godrevy and Porthminster in September. A rare sighting of a single killer whale was reported at Gwithian, North Cornwall in the beginning of September.

Harbour porpoise continue to be sighted at Ilfracombe from Capstone Point and Tunnels Beaches during the month of September. A group of five bottlenose dolphins were spotted off Dyer's Lookout towards Damehole Point, near Hartland in North Devon, on 9th September.

A harbour porpoise was reported on the Merseyside Bird Blog off Formby Point on the 9th September, and a bottlenose dolphin was reported via Rare Bird Alert off Workington Harbour, Cumbria. A rare sighting of a probable minke whale was reported from Blackpool, seen from South Promenade, about 1.5 miles offshore on the 25th September.

WALES, THE ISLE OF MAN, and THE CHANNEL ISLANDS

Bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise have been sighted very regularly during August and September off several sections of the Welsh coast, and Risso's dolphins have also been seen on several occasions, particularly around Bardsey Island. A successful SWF training course was held in August in New Quay, and the trainees managed to spot a few groups of harbour porpoise from the Old Coast Guard Lookout point. A mixed species sighting was reported from Cardigan Island, as a group of ten bottlenose dolphins were sighted, together with a pair of porpoises at end of August. Off Pembrokeshire, SWF surveys in the Celtic Deep found good numbers of common dolphins (though groups were not as large as the previous year at this time). Porpoises were also common, and fin whales were sighted offshore (see above news item).

Minke and fin whales were both seen off the coast of the Isle of Man, where porpoises were regular, and small numbers of Risso's dolphin and bottlenose dolphin were sighted. Bottlenose dolphins were seen in Jersey on a regular basis during August and September, while a minke whale was seen off Alderney and a pod of long-finned pilot whales reported off the coast of Brittany.

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

REGIONAL ROUNDUP

Shetland and North Scotland

Compiled by Hanna Nuuttila, SWF Sightings Officer

Observers on NORCET surveys from Aberdeen to Lerwick, Shetland, reported several sightings of white-beaked and Atlantic white-sided dolphins, as well as groups of Risso's dolphins and harbour porpoises from the ferry. Risso's dolphins have been sighted several times from Fair Isle Bird Observatory. The Shetland Sea Mammal Group reported sightings of white-sided dolphins in Scalloway Harbour, and a group of up to 300 individuals south of Unst towards the end of August. White-beaked dolphins were sighted off Sumburgh Head, and Risso's and minke whales were seen in Mousa Sound in early September.

At Gills Bay, Caithness, in North Scotland, there have been regular harbour porpoise sightings from early August onwards, although numbers seem to have been less than in previous years. Other cetaceans sighted include common dolphins and Atlantic white-sided dolphins. Risso's dolphins were seen in Thurso Bay in early August.

Northern Scotland: Moray Firth

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

More rarities in the Moray Firth

Following the recent high numbers of minke whales reported in the Moray Firth, August produced another bonanza with more exotic sightings. Along with common dolphins, Sowerby's beaked whale, basking shark and ocean sunfish have all been seen in the area.

Sarah Pern on the Ecoventures boat operating out of Cromarty, recorded 40 common dolphins off the South Sutor of Cromarty on 23rd August, and some 20 animals were seen off Fort George on the same day. Common dolphins are occasionally seen in the North Sea but rarely in the Inner Moray Firth, with the last known record being July 2003.

Two Sowerby's beaked whales were reported by Alan Airey off Fort George on the evening of 22nd August. They are normally encountered in deep water of over 1,000 ft but have been recorded in the Moray Firth of a few occasions, generally as strandings.

Gwyn Tanner of Avoch Dolphin Cruise boat saw a one metre-long ocean sunfish off Avoch on 22nd August. Sunfish feed on fish and jellyfish and often lie on the surface on their side apparently basking. This is another deep ocean species but is regularly sighted around the South-west coast of Britain, often in some numbers, and recently has been sighted regularly throughout the Irish Sea and even off the Scottish coasts

A basking shark was seen off Chanonry Point on 20th August. These animals can reach a length of 10 metres and weigh up to 7 tons - the length and weight of a London bus. They are exclusively plankton feeders, swimming slowly with their enormous mouths wide open and filtering out the gathered plankton. They were fished commercially off the West coast of Scotland mainly for oil from their liver, but fins and meat were also used. They are now protected in British inshore waters.

An increase in food supply brought about by warmer waters has almost certainly drawn these animals to our waters. This may be another indication of global warming, and we will perhaps see more exotics visiting us in the future. With the approach of autumn, it is anticipated that there will be a reduction in sightings in the Inner Moray Firth as our harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphins move further afield for the winter and spring.

South Grampian

From Kevin Hepworth, regional coordinator for South Grampian

In keeping with previous years, August had a greater variety of cetaceans observed, but sightings again dropped off compared with May and June, due to shorter evenings, more people being away on vacation, and the fact that the bottlenose dolphins tend to be much less frequent at the key watch site at Torry Battery (Aberdeen).

August Highlights (and lowlights)

- Successfully ran eight NORCET (Sea Watch Foundation, Aberdeen University & East Grampian Coastal Partnership) Northlink ferry based surveys, with a decrease in numbers of minke whales and white-beaked dolphins, but still a few Risso's dolphin sightings.
- Finalisation of locations, text and photos for the SWF Grampian regional cetacean leaflet
- Only a couple of Sea Watch surveys from Stonehaven due to strong S/SE prevailing winds
- National Whale and Dolphin Watch Week was a bit of a damp squib due to torrential rain and high winds. We had only a few sightings, but, still, harbour porpoise, minke whale, white-beaked dolphin, bottlenose dolphin and Risso's dolphin were all reported. Of the two manned sites at Torry and Balmedie, there were only two Sea Watch representatives at each, and no members of the public, which was a real shame. The Torry one was understandable as it was almost impossible to stand up in the ferocious north wind and driving rain, but the Balmedie one a week later was glorious after the haa had burnt off. This event was also part of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan Marine Awareness Day at Balmedie Country Park. The WDSCS blue whale was present along with SWF, SNH, EGCP, Aberdeenshire Ranger Service, and BDMLR. The land-based SWF survey encountered harbour porpoise and white-beaked dolphins.



Bottlenose dolphins, Kevin Hepworth

We received 68 sightings reports in August. For the second month running, a total of six species were reported in our region, with the highlight once again being Risso's dolphins, with five encounters of between one and six animals. The pod of six, which were seen off Balmedie during a NORCET ferry survey, surfaced alongside the ferry and was visible underwater in near perfect conditions. The other highlight was a report of three orcas heading north past Johnshaven

on the 29th July. The number of reported white-beaked dolphins was significantly down, with only three reports, although this is expected to rise when all the data come in. These were generally off Cruden Bay and Peterhead, with hardly any sightings from Stonehaven, which is usually a stronghold for these animals in August. Bottlenose dolphin numbers were high, however, with 30 reports, mostly from Stonehaven to Dundee, with 35 off Johnshaven on the 28th August and 20 in St Cyrus Bay on the 13th August being the largest counts. Harbour porpoise numbers increased slightly compared with July, but were mostly of singles or pairs of animals and from Montrose or Peterhead areas. Minke whales were reported in St Cyrus Bay on the 20th August (either three reports of single animals or the same one three times), and on at least twelve occasions during August, when at least one was present feeding close inshore at Cruden Bay.

After poor weather in August, the weather improved dramatically in September as did sightings, with the reappearance of bottlenose dolphins at Aberdeen Harbour at the end of the month.



Harbour porpoise, Kevin Hepworth

September Highlights (and lowlights)

- Successfully ran two NORCET (Sea Watch Foundation, Aberdeen University & East Grampian Coastal Partnership) Northlink Ferry Based surveys despite the daylight reduction with a predicted decrease in numbers of sightings. Hopefully, the data will be analysed over the winter and some interesting findings will come from this.
- Ran several Sea Watch surveys from Stonehaven, but unfortunately, no East Grampian Coastal Partnership surveys were possible from Cruden Bay.
- The second dead Risso's dolphin of the summer stranded at Montrose on 25th September. It was badly decomposed and the tail flukes had been cut off.
- On 13th September, what was initially reported as a horse drowning just a couple of metres from the shore in Lunan Bay was subsequently revised to be a large black and white cow in trouble on the beach. However, once the rescue services arrived, it transpired the animal had actually been a male orca feeding in the surf line on salmon.
- Increased observations of harbour porpoises.

A total of 62 sightings were reported in September. For the third consecutive month, six species were again reported in our region, if the possible pilot whales is included, with the highlight once again being an orca (or cow!) at Lunan Bay on the 12th & 17th September, and the continued presence of Risso's dolphins, with a single animal off Peterhead at the start of the month. An additional Risso's dolphin was washed up dead at Montrose on the 23rd September and a possible Risso's was seen in the vicinity of a group of bottlenose dolphins off Aberdeen on the 30th September, although only the back was visible, and the animal was seen just once, so it could possibly have been an extremely light bottlenose dolphin with an exceptional number of lesions and rake marks. The other highlight was the reappearance off Aberdeen of a group of bottlenose dolphins, which had been recorded further south for much of the summer. Two unidentified whales were also reported on the 4th September heading south past Johnshaven, and two minke whales were encountered during a pelagic trip off Peterhead/Fraserburgh on the 17th September, with the third minke sighting reported 150 miles north-east of Dundee. This month saw a comparative influx of harbour porpoises compared to previous months, which is usual at this time of year, and whilst there were none of the normally large aggregations, groups of three, four and six were reported from Stonehaven in the second half of the month, and six were sighted off Aberdeen Beach on the 29th September. The only other sighting outside of these two areas was a single porpoise off Fishtown of Usan on the 22nd September.

Of the 32 bottlenose dolphin sightings, 23 came from Stonehaven, with notable groups on the 12th September (12), 24th September (12) and 27th September (20). Additional reports were from St Cyrus (25 on the 9th September), Johnshaven (6 on the 12th September), Montrose (10 on the 17th September), and the reappearance of the group off Aberdeen on the 23rd September (15 animals, with three small calves).

West Sutherland

Andy Summers, Sutherland Highland Ranger

After a quiet summer, there were many more sightings of porpoises through the second half of August and September. The highest single number was seven on the 25th September at Stoer Lighthouse. However it was not until the second half of September that things livened up. A flat calm day on the 18th September saw the sea "boil" in places with small fish. That day, minke whales were seen at Culkein Stoer, Tarbet and Clachtoll by many people. At least three were observed at the same time at Clachtoll. The following weekend was just as good with at least two minke whales, and possibly many more, seen on the 25th, 26th, and 27th of September feeding in area around Clachtoll.

West and South West Scotland (Hebrides)**From Laura Mandleberg, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust Sightings Officer**

Sightings of minke whales for August have been disappointingly low once again. Similar to last summer, minke whale sightings have dropped considerably in number compared to the early part of the summer.

Surveys on the HWDT research vessel, Silurian, throughout the Hebrides have struggled to record them in any quantity, and casual sightings reported from up and down the West coast by members of the public have been few in number, providing no clues as to where our whales have gone to. Since the minke whales are normally moving into our waters to feed at this time of year, their absence is almost certainly due to a lack of food. Perhaps the sandeels have been in short supply again, much like last year (note from Peter Evans: at this stage of the season, it is more likely to be the absence of sprat that is responsible).

Sightings of common dolphin have also been low in August compared with last year; in fact, local whale-watch boats didn't see any common dolphins during the month. Common dolphin, move into our area during the summer months to feed, although sightings usually peak in June or early July. Common dolphins tend to be feeding on mackerel or herring at this time of year so perhaps 2006 is proving to be not just a bad year for smaller fish but also for larger ones too.

Conversely, there seems to be no shortage of basking sharks as many sightings of this huge planktivorous fish continue to be reported around the West coast.

Bottlenose dolphin sightings have also been numerous this month in particular areas, with nine separate sightings reported to our freephone bottlenose dolphin hotline. These sightings are valuable and are contributing to a Scottish research project to study the distribution, population structure and movement patterns of this species. In addition to these sightings, bottlenose dolphin reports were sent into us from the Sound of Mull, around the Small Isles, Sound of Iona, and Kilbrannan Sound. Risso's dolphins were sighted twice by two boat operators - Summer Queen cruises who operate just north of Ullapool, and SeaLife Surveys who are based around Mull. Perhaps the most exciting report of all from them was of two killer whales spotted near the Treshnish Isles by SeaLife Surveys. This was a surprise sighting since the boat had in fact stopped to watch harbour porpoises, and had no indication that there were any killer whales in the vicinity, when all of a sudden two killer whales appeared out of nowhere and attacked the porpoise just metres in front of the boat! Much to the surprise of all the passengers and crew on board the vessel, they had in fact just witnessed one of very few observations of killer whales 'attacking' harbour porpoise in the Hebrides.

There were some interesting sightings for September. HWDT research vessel, Silurian, after two very quiet trips during the first half of September, had a busy final monitoring trip to round off the season. Common dolphins, bottlenose dolphins, minke whales and basking sharks were seen all in the same day, when surveying in excellent conditions out towards Barra! This was shortly followed by more common dolphins found feeding on the way back from Barra towards Skye, and another group of bottlenose dolphins near Arisaig. This mini-burst of sightings comes long overdue after a pretty disappointing summer of survey work throughout the Hebrides.

Two northern bottlenose whales were seen by local whale-watch operator, SeaLife Surveys on 15th September. The whales were seen in Loch Sunart, and were heading back out to sea towards Ardnamurchan Point. This is the second sighting of the species in the space of a month. Three bottlenose whales were also seen further north at the end of August from MV Sheerwater, between Arisaig and the Isle of Eigg. Northern bottlenose whales spend the majority of their lives in deep-water habitats in the North Atlantic, although during most summers, particularly in August, the species is reported from the deeper waters around the Isle of Skye..

The bottlenose dolphin sighting hotline went very quiet in September. Perhaps the drop in visitor numbers at this time of year may partly explain this. However, one report finally came through on the 14th of September of a large group of about 20-25 dolphins spotted off the Mull of Kintyre. As usual, we went through our normal procedure of telephoning the research team on board Silurian and the Aberdeen University crew on the RIB, to see if anybody was close enough to be able to respond. Unfortunately, neither vessel was anywhere near the Kintyre Peninsula, throwing out the window the chance of getting any photo-ID work done! The RIB decided it was worth heading down that way, but didn't arrive there until the next day. They were very fortunate to find the group of dolphins just round the corner in Kilbrannan Sound. Some very exciting news has since come back from the team - they recognized many of the dorsal fins from individuals seen a month earlier in the Sound of Mull!

North East England**From Andy Tait, regional coordinator for North East England (Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and Durham)**

One minke whale, possibly the same animal, was seen off Hartlepool and Marsden in early August. Harbour porpoise were seen throughout the National Whale and Dolphin Watch week at Tynemouth, Craster, Lizard Point, King Edward's Bay, Cresswell and Marsden Bay. All but the Tynemouth sighting (of two animals) were of single individuals. During a very calm evening on the 30th August, five porpoise were seen travelling north very close inshore off the beach at Bamburgh Castle. The last sighting for the month, during the early morning of the 31st, was of a single porpoise feeding offshore in Marsden Bay.

Despite the poor weather, a pelagic cruise organised by the Northumberland Mammal Group on 3rd September, was a great success. Up to 40 porpoise were seen in groups of up to eight individuals around the Farne Islands. On the 9th, a second pelagic trip, this time from North Shields with the Northumberland and North Tyne Bird Club, observed a porpoise feeding just off the piers on the way out of the harbour and a juvenile minke whale lunge feeding three miles

off Blyth on the return journey! On the 10th September a porpoise was seen feeding on the tideline just off the Tyne Piers and a minke whale was spotted about two kilometres offshore feeding while surrounded by a large group of gulls. Other minke sightings included one off the Tyne Piers by the lifeboat crew and another feeding in Marsden Bay on the 12th.

Eastern England: Tees Mouth to River Nene Mouth

From Robin Petch and Kris Simpson, regional coordinators for North Yorkshire, East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire

August and September have been interesting months. As well as the usual fare of a few casual sightings of harbour porpoises, there has been an exciting increase in sightings but also some sad events.

August began well with a further sighting of white-beaked dolphins at Whitby on the 3rd, and a whale (possibly minke) spotted from the Spurn Head bird hide, heading north on the 8th. At least two minke whales were also seen around Whitby at the same time, no doubt taking advantage of the huge schools of sandeels and herring being reported throughout this period.

Poor weather during the first weekend of NWDW week made sightings all but impossible, but a watch at Spurn on 17th August revealed porpoises feeding off the Head, and porpoises were seen all day at Flamborough on the 20th, as well as a group of dolphins well offshore to the north. Thanks to Keith Turton, the Noakes' and everyone else who joined us. Brian Clarkson of Whitby Coastal Cruises began reporting sightings from his area at this time, and sightings of harbour porpoises and minke whales have continued into September. On three amazing evenings from 28th September, there were multiple minke sightings along with what appears to have been a humpback whale! Brian is also chasing up a report of orca early in August from an angling boat. Needless to say, Brian and I have plans for the future!

Sadly there have been a number of strandings too. We attended two dead porpoises, at New Holland and Easington, in the first half of August, and then on 1st September, two northern bottlenose whales stranded at Skegness and, despite valiant efforts by BDMLR and an initially successful refloat of one, they died on the beach. A young humpback whale then sadly stranded and died at the North Sea Ferry terminal in Hull on 22nd September. At least one large whale, apparently a minke, also died after becoming entangled in pots off Whitby.

Thanks as ever to The Deep for their support, and to our new watchers. We look forward with interest, as well as some concern. Will this apparent increase in activity continue?

Eastern England: Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk

From Mark Iley, Biodiversity Project Officer, Essex Biodiversity Project

During this period, we received ten reports of cetaceans via our survey card scheme. The majority of reported sightings have been around the River Colne and Bradwell areas. In total, 23 harbour porpoises were recorded, usually in groups numbering between two and eight rather than individuals. There were two sightings of white-beaked dolphins, totalling four animals, with one individual staying over an hour at the Pyfleet Creek entrance of the River Colne.

Eastern England: Thames Estuary

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

During August, seven seals (three common, two grey and two unknown species) were spotted in the Estuary around the Woolwich Ferry and Greenwich, and upstream near the Houses of Parliament and the National Film Theatre. Five harbour porpoises were sighted during the month from both sides of the estuary, at Gravesend and Canvey Island. A bottlenose dolphin was also seen from the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge, Essex.

During September, fourteen seal sightings were sent in (eight common, four grey and two unknown species), mainly seen from Greenwich, Cliffe Fort and Canvey Island, but also upstream as far as Teddington. Six harbour porpoise sightings (single animals and a couple of sightings of 3-4 animals) were sent in from the Estuary at Cliffe Fort, Lower Hope and Canvey Island, but a porpoise was also seen between Hammersmith Bridge and Chiswick Pier.

Southern England: Kent

From David Walker, Dungeness Bird Observatory

Harbour porpoise were seen on 25 days in August, usually in groups of up to three individuals, but with five on 27th and 30th. In September, they were seen on 22 days, usually in groups of up to four individuals, but with nine on 13th and six on 30th.

From Jonathan Bramley, regional coordinator for North and East Kent (Thames River mouth – Margate-Dungeness)

A morning watch from Dungeness on the 17th August (as part of the NWDW week) recorded three sightings of harbour porpoise, the first animal being seen within five minutes.

Sadly, the bottlenose dolphin which has been regularly seen at Folkestone this summer is being harassed by watercraft users. Kent Police have recently had to issue a statement warning that they will prosecute offenders if this continues.

A boat survey carried out by the Kent Mammal Group on the 28th September found common seals hauled out along the North Kent coast in a number of places within the Medway/Swale estuaries.

As part of the environmental impact assessment for wind farm developments, the Sea Mammal Research Unit has completed a second round of tagging of common seals hauled out in North-east Kent, on the Margate Sands. Results from this work are eagerly awaited. Finally, a dead harbour porpoise was washed up in Westgate Bay, Isle of Thanet on the 11th August.

Southern England: Sussex

From Stephen Savage, regional coordinator for Sussex

It has been another exciting couple of months in Sussex despite only a few sightings as we are right at the end of our usual sighting period. Two bottlenose dolphins were spotted near Brighton Marina on 5th August and it is possible that these were the same two dolphins seen in the same location on the 13th August during NWDW. On 15th August a bottlenose dolphin was observed at Worthing, and there was another sighting off Selsey Bill. A bottlenose dolphin was also observed off Littlehampton on 21st August, and two bottlenose dolphins were seen off Hastings Pier on the 24th August. During NWDW we manned a public site at the Brighton Marina. Although no sightings occurred on the day, we did receive the above three sightings through the usual network of watchers in Sussex. We also talked to many members of the public and it was very helpful to have a supply of the new leaflets to give out. We also gave out literature to all the leisure fishermen (although there were fewer than normal because of the weather). I also ran a watch at the new Shoreham Beach Nature reserve, and staff from Sussex Wildlife Trust also watched from Brighton during the week.

On the 3rd August, a harbour porpoise became stranded on mud flats beside Chichester Harbour. The porpoise was rescued by BDMLR and moved to a temporary pool constructed on the shore. The porpoise, nicknamed Perky, was considered okay to be released later in the day, and Perky soon swam out into deeper water. On 14th August, a seal pup was washed up near Eastbourne. It was thin and in need of care, and was moved to the RSPCA Malladams Centre to eventually be released. An adult grey seal had been seen the previous week near Newhaven, but this animal seemed fit and healthy. A common seal pup was seen at Worthing on the 19th September with two adults nearby. The pup eventually came ashore and it was found to have an injured flipper. The pup was also taken to the RSPCA Malladams Centre at Hastings for treatment and eventual release. We do have a small resident group of common seals near Chichester and it may have been from this group. The adults seemed unconcerned that the pup was captured and removed from the beach. Seals have little parental care, compared with dolphins. The seals are suckled for a few weeks and left to fend for themselves.

As part of the Veritas DCG funded education programme (mentioned in the last issue), we ran a children's summer holiday course for whale and dolphin enthusiasts at the Booth Natural History Museum in Brighton. The venue was chosen because of the whale and dolphin artefacts, including a skeleton of a killer whale washed up on local Hove beach in 1936. Activities provided during the course included a look at dolphin anatomy, and comparisons were made with fish and other mammal skeletons in the museum. A measuring activity helped create an idea of the sizes of different species. The children also did some species identification activities and as the third session took place during NWDW, we plotted the sightings so far, taken from the SWF website, onto a map. This was followed by a food chain activity. In the last session we did a mock dolphin rescue using the life-sized inflatable dolphin. The children used the knowledge gained in earlier sessions to plan their rescue and realise how the dolphin's aquatic adaptations work against it when it is stranded. Each of the eleven children who attended received a certificate at the end of the course (see photo).



Steve Savage (the grown up!) pictured with the children who took part in the summer holiday course at Booth Natural History Museum

A one-day course was also run as part of the Sussex Wildlife Trust's adult education programme. We even managed to get a mention on the local TV news programme in the "what's on this weekend" section. The course provided an overview of UK whales and dolphins and the work of the Sea Watch Foundation. We discussed their biology, adaptations and behaviours. There was also an element of species identification and a discussion of benign research techniques. Not surprisingly, half the course focused upon the English Channel, particularly Sussex. This included an overview of our work in Sussex since 1991.

South West England: Devon
From Gavin Black

August and September in Devon provided regular sightings of cetaceans, particularly of harbour porpoises from the north coast of the county. Occasional groups of between 10 and 20 porpoises were spotted by David Jenkins and Chris and Sharron Blackmore from Hartland Point, and further east at Combe Martin. More typical sightings of individuals, pairs and small groups up to a maximum of eight were encountered regularly on the north coast. Interestingly, we also received a couple of records of porpoise from the south coast during August. We rarely receive porpoise records from this stretch especially in the summer, yet sightings of individual porpoises occurred off Berry Head, Brixham on the 7th August and off Beer Head in East Devon, as one surfaced next to a dinghy on the 9th August.

Unfortunately, the bottlenose dolphins did not reappear and stay along this stretch of coast as they did last year. There was only one sighting, at Welcombe Mouth in early August after the brief stay they seemed to have in mid July. This was true of the south coast too. Bottlenose dolphins were spotted only once during these months here. This sighting was made during the National Whale and Dolphin Watch Week just south of Gara Point near Plymouth.

Common dolphins seemed to be seen sporadically throughout the period especially off the north coast, in Bideford Bay and around Lundy Island. Groups of up to 40 were seen during August in this area, a pair coming close into shore at Croyde on 17th August, and larger groups on the east side of Lundy on the 4th and 30th of August. Only one sighting of common dolphins was made on the south coast in August and September. A group of six was seen feeding off Pudcombe Cove, near the mouth of the Dart River, about 200m from shore on the 7th August.

Anglers from Salcombe had an amazing encounter with a huge group of possibly more than 50 long-finned pilot whales on 15th August. They were about 1.5 miles south of the estuary when this large group slowly swam past them as they fished. The whole group was spread out over one-half to three-quarters of a mile south of the observers, many swimming in pairs at a steady pace due east. A few of the pilot whales briefly investigated the drifting boat, coming within 15ft. The anglers mentioned that they were catching mackerel and large squid, something they've not pulled up on a line before!

Four dead stranded cetaceans were recorded in this period; three from the north coast (one unidentified dolphin and two harbour porpoise) and one from the south coast. The animal on the south coast unfortunately could not be recovered, and two of the three strandings on the north coast were not suitable for autopsy. The final animal, a neonatal porpoise recovered from Croyde on 14th August, was sent for post-mortem. It seems that it had not eaten for some time and starved, probably as a result of becoming separated from its mother.

South West England: Cornwall

From Dan Jarvis, Cornwall Wildlife Trust (sightings information reproduced with permission of Cornwall Wildlife Trust www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/).

Starting with the smallest as usual, harbour porpoises have been concentrated to the west of Cornwall with records coming in from Land's End, Cape Cornwall, Pendeen, Carn Glouce and Godrevy, plus some sightings between Land's End and the Isles of Scilly made by a survey team from the Combined Universities in Cornwall on board the Isles of Scilly Steamship Company ferry 'Scillonian III'. A group of approximately five, including a calf, were also seen by research team members close inshore, while at the Scillies, off the islands of St Agnes and Gugh.

Our other regulars, the bottlenose dolphins, have been hanging around the north coast a lot again during this period with sightings from Wolf Rock off Land's End, various locations in and around St Ives Bay, as well as Perranporth, Newquay, Padstow and near Boscastle, with a couple of late appearances in Mount's Bay too. The usual pod normally consists of eight individuals including the calves, but during the early days of September up to twelve were seen while the pod spent a few days around the St Ives area, usually in smaller scattered groups rather than one big pod, which made for some very interesting observations as they tracked up and down the bay.

Moving on to the offshore species, common dolphins were seen a few times, again mainly in the west where they were seen off Land's End, Wolf Rock, and the Isles of Scilly (again by the survey team), Pendeen and Coverack. The pods were mostly small in size, however. A suspected orca was spotted at Gwithian, near Hayle, by a surfer who observed something black and white with a tall fin breach close to him... Not for the faint of heart if you are out in the water and saw one of these! A single Risso's dolphin was seen off Tater-Du lighthouse during August, while a lone minke whale was seen off the Isles of Scilly around the same time.

Several sightings have been made of unidentified dolphin pods around Polzeath, Pentire Point, Newquay Bay and Bude. Some of these could be of our bottlenose dolphin pod, which was around the Padstow – Polzeath area at the same time that these sightings were recorded, and also consisted of a similar number of animals.

Other interesting species to have been seen included ocean sunfish and basking sharks, both of which have now virtually disappeared for this year. Sunfish were sighted around Land's End, Porthgwarra, Pendeen, St Ives, Godrevy, Newquay and near Padstow and Polzeath. Meanwhile, basking shark numbers dropped considerably between July and August, but several observations were made of single or small numbers of them throughout August and into early September from Port Isaac, St Ives, Zennor, Pendeen, Land's End, Gwennap Head, Porthcurno, Lamorna, and Rame Head.

On a final note, there were two unusual reports of 'baby' leatherback turtles seen off the North Cornwall coast in August, which prompted much speculation as to why they were here and where they had come from. However, upon investigation, it turned out that one animal was a sunfish and the other could not be positively identified as a turtle!

News.

As with last time, only a handful of dead cetaceans and seals have come ashore around the county and been recorded by Marine Strandings Network volunteers (www.cwtstrandings.org). However, of special note were two striped dolphins during September, and a leatherback turtle in the same month. British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org) has again had a couple more quiet months, but now that the grey seal pup rescue season has begun, a few incidents have been attended during October involving pups.

As summer has come to an end, the National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn1.html) has been having fewer human visitors recently, but visitors of another sort are now keeping the team busy as a few grey seal pups have now been rescued and brought in for rehabilitation, the first of which arrived at the beginning of September. Staff are now getting ready for a busy winter bringing these pups back to full health before releasing them back to the wild.

Now that it is the breeding season for the grey seal population in Cornwall, the Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) has been keeping count of how many pups are born in the main study area and also photo-identifying the mothers – one of whom, known as 'Ghost', has successfully pupped in the area annually for the last three years, and has now once again returned for her fourth year! Both of them continue to do well at present.

The third Cornwall Marine Educators' newsletter has recently been released, and a website may be online at some point in the near future. Watch this space for further developments on this exciting new initiative!

Events.

Obviously in August the Sea Watch Foundation's National Whale and Dolphin Watch was held, and the great news is that many more sightings were reported in Cornwall this year by comparison to last year! The most frequently recorded species were porpoises and bottlenose dolphins, but also common dolphins and a Risso's dolphin, plus a minke whale.

CWT's Marine Strandings Network will be holding their annual volunteers forum in November, with guest speakers from the Natural History Museum and Institute of Zoology to deliver lectures on the cetacean strandings project and its future.

BDMLR also have their annual National Coordinators' meeting coming up soon with many items up for discussion that could change how the organisation operates and responsibilities within the area of marine conservation. At present, though, the exciting news is that new rescue trailers and other vital equipment is being delivered to various parts of Britain to further boost the efficiency of those regions. As this happens, the boundaries of a few areas have been changed to increase the number of coordinators and assistant coordinators to provide improved coverage of the entire coastline.

Emergency numbers:

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

People are warned not to 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 the 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, Sea Watch Foundation Sightings Officer**

In South-west Wales, harbour porpoises were sighted a few times from a longboat off Wiseman's Bridge in Saundersfoot and bottlenose dolphins were reported from Broad Haven in August and off Pwll Hir, Pembrokeshire in early September. Dolphins were also sighted near Newport Bay (Pembrokeshire), Trwyn y Bwa, and Fishguard breakwater in early September. Harbour porpoise were sighted off Abereddy and Fishguard breakwater, together with dolphins on the 6th September. A group of three bottlenose dolphins were spotted off Port Sychan, near Fishguard, and two Risso's dolphins were sighted from the same spot, travelling towards Fishguard on the 30th August. Several sightings of Risso's and bottlenose dolphins and even an unidentified large whale have been reported from Strumble Head, as well as the usual harbour porpoise. Sea Watch surveys for common dolphins were conducted in the Celtic Deep west of Pembrokeshire in both August (22nd–23rd) and September (25th–26th). During the August survey, there were 27 sightings (totalling 40 indivs) of porpoises, 12 sightings (totalling 119 indivs) of common dolphins, and 3 sightings (totalling 8 indivs) of fin whales. During the September survey, there were 4 sightings (totalling 8 indivs) of porpoises, 13 sightings (totalling 108 indivs.) of common dolphins, and three sightings (of three indivs) of minke whale.

Bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise have been sighted regularly over the two months from New Quay Pier, and during Sea Watch surveys of the Cardigan Bay SAC from New Quay and Aberystwyth. In the beginning of August, a SWF training course was held in New Quay and the trainees managed to spot a few groups of harbour porpoise from

the Old Coast Guard Lookout point. A mixed species sighting was reported from Cardigan Island as a group of ten bottlenose dolphins were sighted together with a pair of porpoises at the end of August. There were also frequent sightings of harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphins off Aberporth headland and Penbryn Beach during August and September, and dolphins were seen off Ynys Lochtyn and Cardigan Island on 4th September.

Three Risso's dolphins were seen off the north coast of Llyn Peninsula on 5th August, and more Risso's were seen near Tudweiliog later in the month. Harbour porpoises were sighted off Puffin Island and along the north Anglesey coast during mid August, and groups of bottlenose dolphins were sighted in Caernarfon Bay (near Trefor and Porth Colman) between 15th and 20th August, near Criccieth and Mochras Point on the 23rd August, and at Rhosneigr, west Anglesey on the 26th August. Risso's dolphins have also been seen off Point Lynas, Anglesey, and near Amlwch. Rare Bird Alert reported sightings of a harbour porpoise in Cemaes Bay in early September and a large group of 36 Risso's dolphins off Bardsey Island on the 19th September, and more sightings of Risso's at Porth Ysgaden and Point Lynas, Bull Bay and Cemlyn Bay in Anglesey later on in September.

North West England

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

During the NWDW, there were two harbour porpoises seen feeding about 800m off North Pier, Blackpool at 12.50 hrs on 16th August, then at 17.15 hrs they, or different ones, were at Starr Gate. Poor weather and heavy seas reduced our chances of more sightings, however.

Isle of Man

From John Galpin, regional coordinator for the Isle of Man, and Manx Whale & Dolphin Watch

In the run-up to the NWDW, all available effort was directed to publicizing and promoting the event. We travelled the Island, leafleting every shop, Local Government Offices, Harbour Masters, chandlers, yacht clubs, Fisherman's Association, lifeboats, fish shops, angling shops, outdoor centres and Newsagents. If it had a shop window and a connection to the sea, however tenuous, it got the posters. Together with copies of Local Species ID charts (available as downloads on the website) was a leaflet inviting the public to join the week's watch activities, including manned watches along the south and west coasts.

In Douglas, the capital, I gave an illustrated talk and video presentation on 'Whales and Dolphins you can see around Mann this summer'. It was the third outing for this talk, and was attended by around 75 persons, a few of whom came for a second shot as they wanted to hear it again! We had multiple radio interviews with both Manx stations and a great piece in the newspapers including a cartoon.

The Island was ready, the scene set and traps were baited; we just needed a calm, quiet week. The target species was the minke whale, a regular surface feeder on the masses of herring around these shores from July to September; sometimes in late August you can see up to 20 minkes across the sea in a frenzy of feeding that can last all day.

Basically, the wind started to blow really strongly on the 6th and continued until it exhausted itself on the 22nd, when it merely faltered, and gave us a few days tranquillity. The NWDW manned watches were really popular, and nearly 200 people turned up at the various watches, despite the high winds. We saw nothing, but most people seemed to have enjoyed themselves. As we all know, it's like that sometimes, maybe next year will be better – hey ho.

Between the 4th and 22nd August, we had only seven minke sightings from shore, but with a lull in the wind, a further 20 sightings in the next four days, some for many hours. The minkes stayed on the west coast, feeding on herring until the last west coast sighting on the 8th of September. Thereafter, the herring went to spawn, as they do each year, moving to their spawning grounds to the east of the Island. As predicted, the minkes followed them, and ever since, all minke sightings have been off the east coast.

There have been six fin whale sightings this year, which seems to be about our annual figure. On the 24th of August, watching from our farm at Dalby on the west coast we were treated to a wonderful evening of four minkes and two fin whales, all within a mile of the shore. The fin whales stayed around for over an hour, along with the minkes, which were often seen to feed at the surface. The sheer enormity of the fin whales and their huge blows, so close to the coast, was breath-taking, a sight none of us will ever forget.

For a full list of sightings, please see the 'Recent Sightings' section of the Manx Whale + Dolphin Watch website, www.mwdw.net.

Channel Islands

Compiled by Hanna Nuuttila

Bottlenose dolphins were sighted in Jersey quite regularly during August, from Grouville Bay and off Gorey. During September, the dolphins were seen between Ecrehous and Gorey, and again off Gorey Pier. A minke whale was spotted west of Alderney, six miles north of Jersey on 6th August. A group of 8-9 long-finned pilot whales was sighted off the coast of Brittany on the 18th September.

Northern Ireland & Republic of Ireland**Compiled by Lori Handley** (All records are validated and available on www.iwdg.ie)

There were sixty common dolphin sightings off Ireland during this period. Pods of approximately three hundred individuals were seen on 27th August off Skellig Island, Co. Kerry and off Sleah Head, Co. Kerry on 12th September. Twenty-eight sightings of bottlenose dolphins were recorded, with an average group size of nine individuals. Harbour porpoises were seen fairly regularly, with a total of ninety sightings. Most notably, thirty-five porpoise were seen from Light House Island, near Mew, Co. Down on 15th September, and forty-five from the same location two days later. There were six sightings of fin whales and forty-five minke whale sightings from around the country.

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.