



NEWS RELEASE

NORTH-EAST ON WHALE AND DOLPHIN ALERT

Whale and dolphin-watchers on the north-east coast will be scanning the seas this summer for marine mammals – and they are looking for members of the public to help them.

In recent months, reports of killer whales near the mouth of the Tyne and porpoises close to South Shields and Hartlepool have been logged by the Sea Watch Foundation, a marine conservation charity and research organisation based in Oxford.

They are hoping for more sightings during their annual National Whale and Dolphin Watch, which takes place this year from August 12-20. Last year's Watch produced additional sightings of bottlenose dolphins in Tynemouth Bay and Amble, Northumberland.

Anyone who is near the coast during National Whale and Dolphin Watch can take part in the event. They can join experienced observers at key look-out points on cliff-tops and harbours, or make their own observations and send them to Sea Watch.

Dr Peter Evans, Sea Watch's research director, has studied whales and dolphins for 30 years and advises the government on their conservation. He said: "In recent years, there has been a worrying increase in the number of harbour porpoises being washed ashore in the north-east, with signs of having been accidentally caught in fishing gear. On a happier note, bottlenose dolphins have started to turn up annually around Tynemouth, possibly part of the expanding Moray Firth population."



Sea Watch uses the information gathered during the National Whale and Dolphin Watch to aid its research into marine mammal numbers and the effects of rising sea temperatures, fishing activities and pollution. Last year's event produced 576 sightings, including a group of six fin whales – the largest group ever seen in British waters

Times, dates and details of local co-ordinators will be published shortly on the Sea Watch website www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk where you can also find a guide to identifying whale and dolphin species.

National Whale and Dolphin Watch is sponsored by British Gas, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR PICTURES PLEASE CONTACT:

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