

National Whale and Dolphin Watch 21 - 29 June 2008

The 7th annual National Whale and Dolphin Watch, organised by the Sea Watch Foundation, took place between 21st and 29th of June 2008. Despite the bad weather in some parts of the UK, the Watch Week nevertheless produced some interesting results.

Sixty manned sites were advertised to the general public, but watches were carried out at more than 160 locations around the country. A total of 372 sightings of whales, dolphins and porpoises have been reported so far from the week's watching, comprising nine species and totalling 2,057 individual cetaceans observed. The bottlenose dolphin was the most frequently seen cetacean with 153 sightings, whilst harbour porpoises were reported 124 times during the week. The third most common cetacean species was the minke whale with 45 sightings. Other species spotted were Atlantic white-sided dolphin, white beaked dolphin, short-beaked common dolphin, Risso's dolphin, killer whale, and one humpback whale sighting. We also had several reports of unidentified cetacean species. This is the first time during the Event that bottlenose dolphin sightings have exceeded those of harbour porpoise. The results of different species sightings are summarized in Fig. 1.

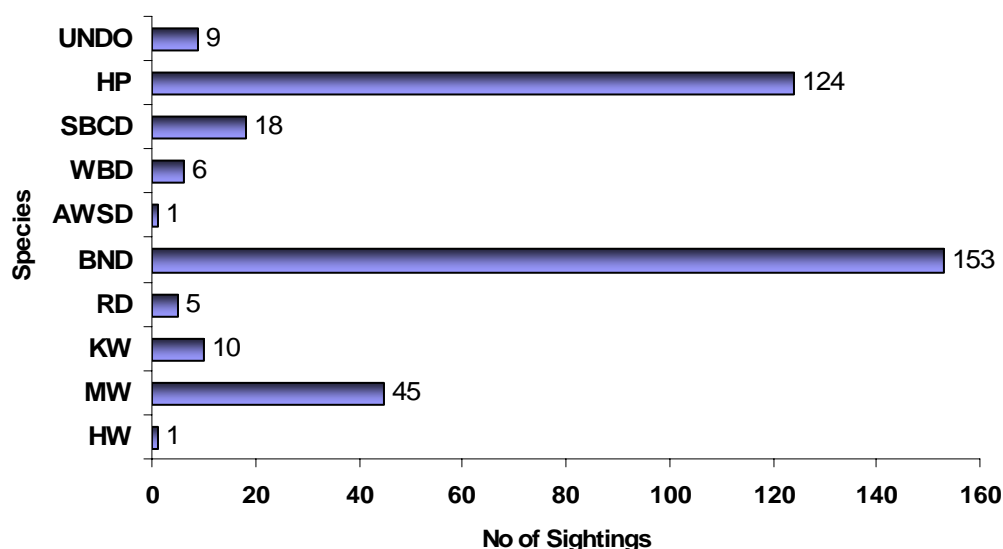


Fig. 1. Number of sightings per species. HW - humpback whale, MW - minke whale, KW - killer whale, RD - Risso's dolphin, BND - bottlenose dolphin, AWSD - Atlantic white-sided dolphin, WBD - white beaked dolphin, SBCD - short-beaked common dolphin, HP - harbour porpoise, UNDO - unknown dolphin species.

The region with the highest reported number of sightings was Wales with 102 sightings. North East Scotland (including North Grampian) had 78 sightings reported. Other regions with high numbers (20 or more sightings) of sightings were Orkney and North Scotland, South Grampian, North West Scotland and Outer Hebrides. North East Scotland had the highest number of different species

sighted, with six identified species seen during the week. The number of cetacean sightings per region is shown in Fig. 2.

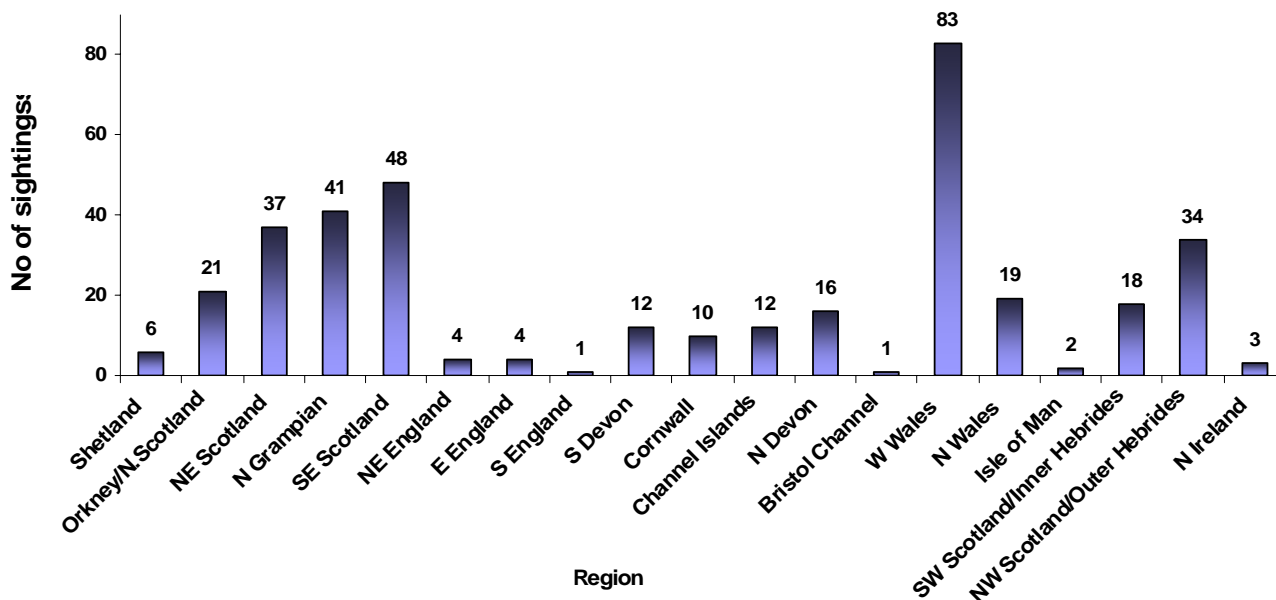


Fig. 2. Number of sightings per region during the NWDW 2008

Some of the key locations around UK where observers and regional coordinators were very active reporting their sightings included: Thurso Bay, Caithness; North Ronaldsay and Pentland Firth in Orkney; South Sutor, Fort George, and Chanonry Point in the Moray Firth; Findochty, Sandend Bay, Portknockie, and Troup Head in North Grampian; Aberdeen Harbour, Bullers of Buchan, Balmedie, and St. Cyrus in South Grampian; Berry Head in South Devon; Penzance in Cornwall; Capstone Point in North Devon; Mwnt, New Quay Harbour, and Aberystwyth Harbour in West Wales; South Stack and Freshwater Bay in Anglesey; Tobermory Lighthouse on the Isle of Mull; and Rum Sound in the Inner Hebrides.

The results were comparable to previous years with harbour porpoises being the most widely distributed around the British coasts, ranging from Orkney to the Channel Islands, with concentrations mainly on the east coast of Scotland, in Wales, and in the south-west of England.

On the east coast, bottlenose dolphins were reported only from north-east Scotland, but otherwise occurred from North Wales to the Channel Islands. The Moray Firth and southern Cardigan Bay were the most common locations to see the species, but there were scattered sightings in SW and Southern England.

Short-beaked common dolphins were observed mostly off the north-west and north-east coasts of Scotland rather than in their more regular haunts of south-west England and west Wales. The northerly shift in sightings of this largely warm temperate species, with records becoming regular in the North Sea, is thought to reflect the higher sea surface temperatures observed around the British Isles in recent years.

Minke whale sightings were observed in both the north and south-west of Scotland with the major concentration (30% sightings) in the north-west of Scotland and Outer Hebrides.

Atlantic white-sided dolphins were seen mainly off the east coast of Scotland between Aberdeen and Stonehaven. Risso's dolphin sightings ranged from Orkney to Anglesey in North Wales. There were no records from their usual haunts in the Hebrides and the Isle of Man. 90% of killer whale sightings were reported from Orkney and Shetland. The rarest sighting was that of a humpback whale in Catfirth, Shetland.

Notable sightings from this year's watch include:

- A Risso's dolphin spotted in the River Clyde, close to the centre of Glasgow;
- A group of c. 100 short beaked common dolphins in the Sound of Sleat, Inner Hebrides;
- Groups of 18-40 short beaked common dolphins in Caithness and the Moray Firth (North-east Scotland);
- Groups of 30-35 killer whales in offshore waters north-east of Shetland;
- A humpback whale in Catfirth, Shetland

Sightings distribution maps below give a fuller picture of what was seen around the UK. These include a map of all sightings (Fig. 3), and then species maps for bottlenose dolphin (Fig. 4), harbour porpoise (Fig.5), and minke whale (Fig. 6). The remaining species are included in the 'Other Species' map (Fig. 7).

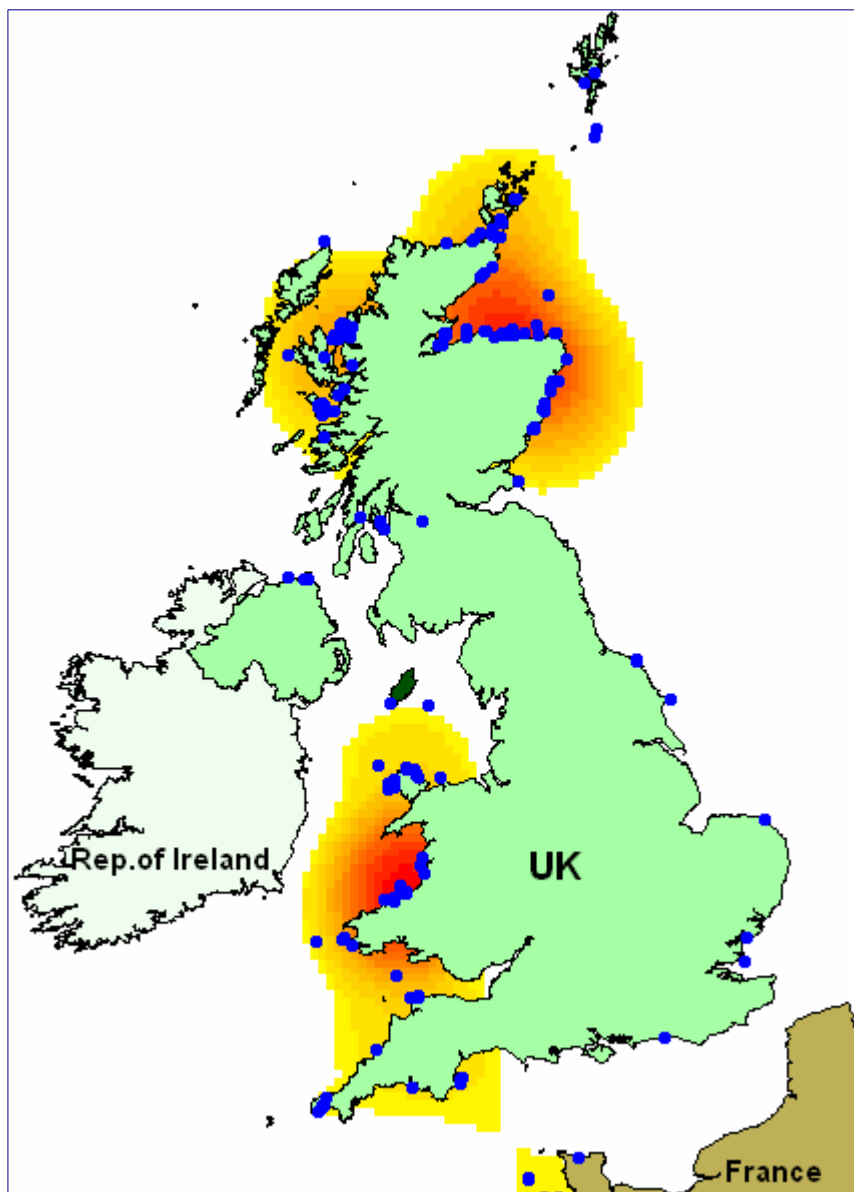


Fig. 3. Map showing the distribution of all cetacean sightings in the UK during NWDW 2008. Red-orange-yellow coloration shows areas with higher probability to sight cetaceans. The darker the colour, the higher the probability

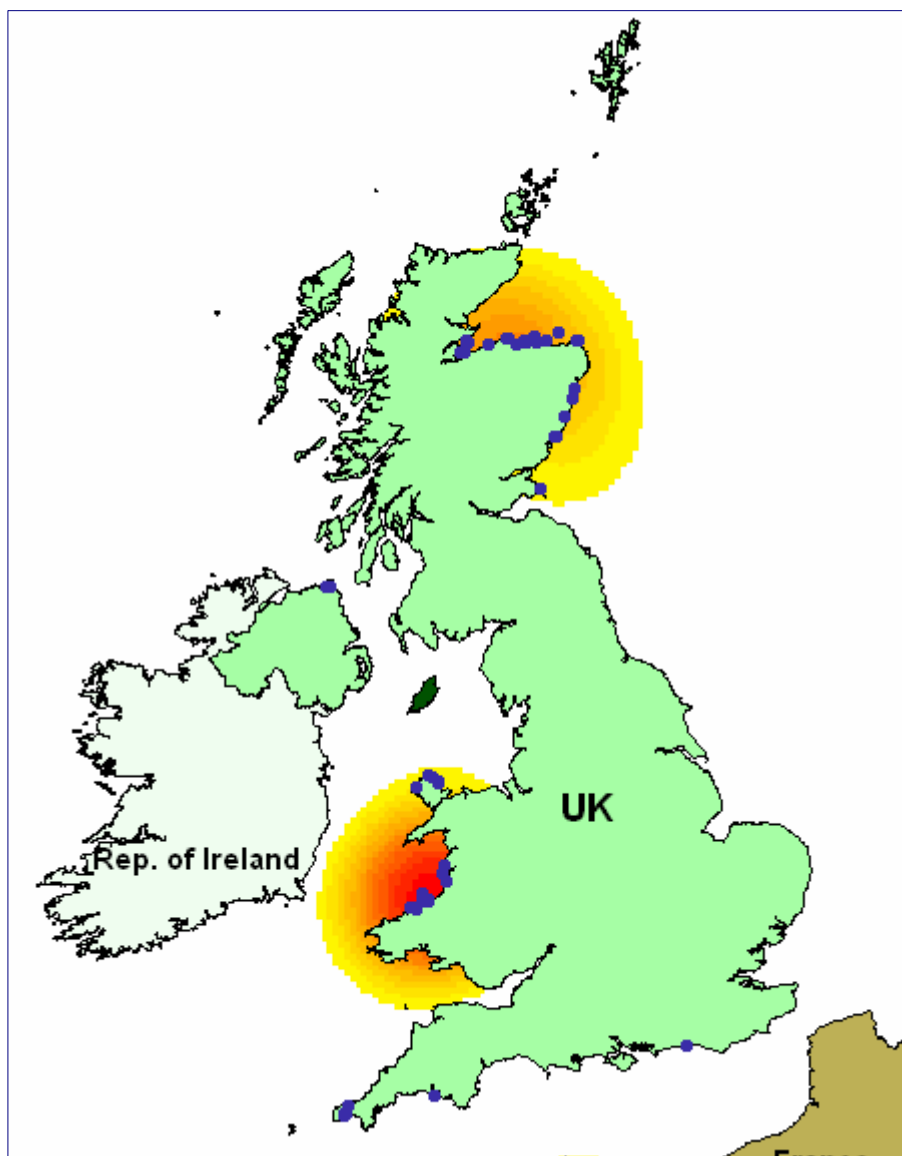


Fig. 4. Map showing bottlenose dolphin sightings during NWDW 2008. Red-orange-yellow coloration shows areas with higher probability to sight these species. The darker the colour, the higher the probability

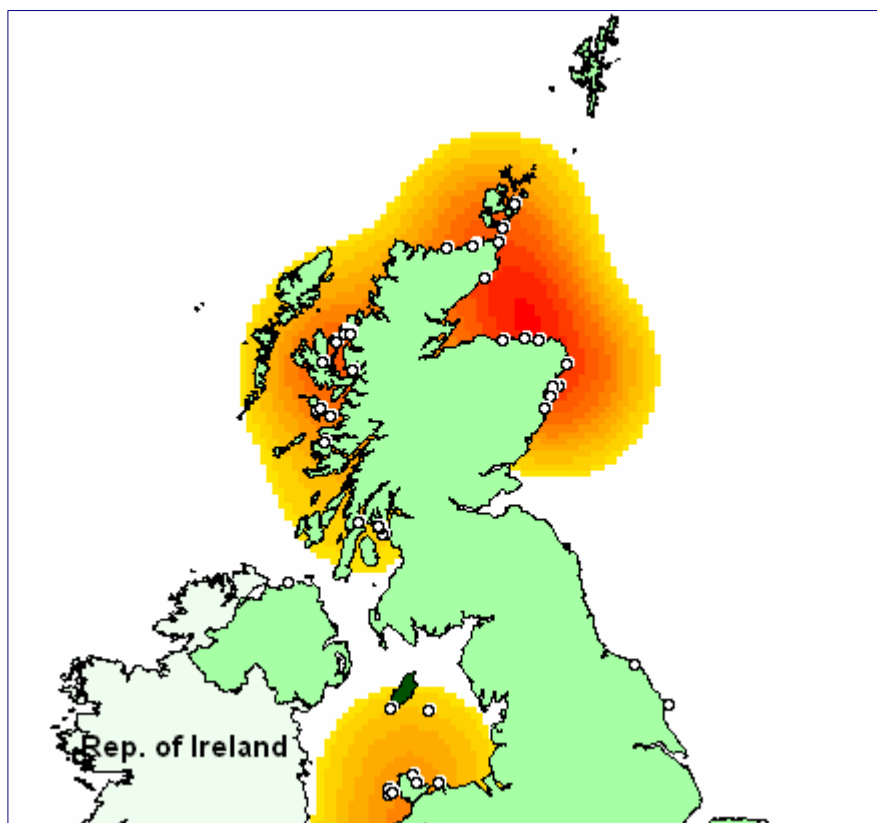


Fig. 5. Map showing harbour porpoise sightings during NWDW 2008. Red-orange-yellow coloration shows areas with higher probability to sight these species. The darker the colour, the higher the probability

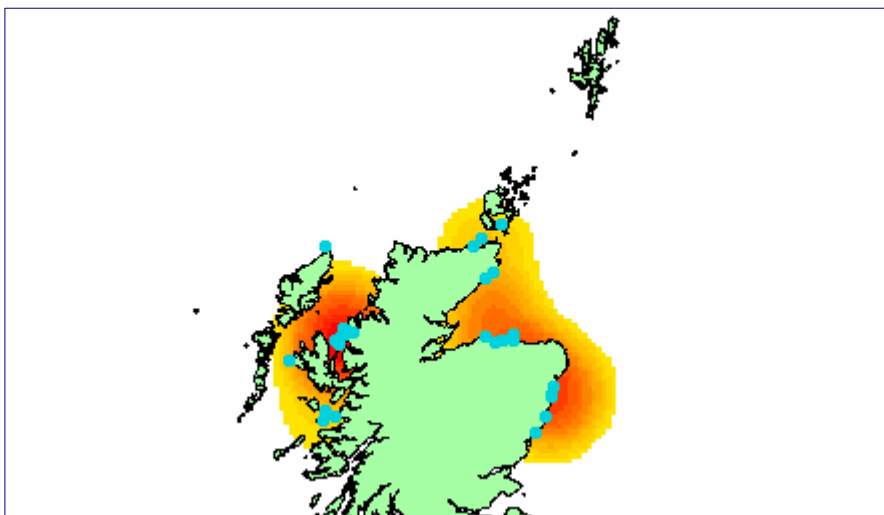


Fig. 6. Map showing minke whale sightings during the NWDW 2008. Red-orange-yellow coloration shows areas with higher probability to sight these species. The darker the colour, the higher the probability

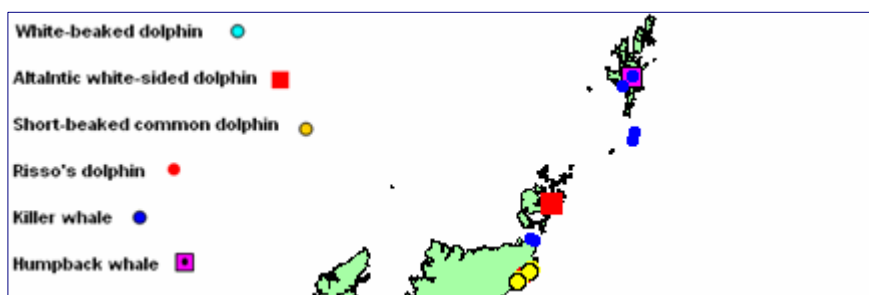


Fig. 6. Map showing sightings of the other six cetacean species reported during NWDW 2008

Sea Watch would like to acknowledge our main sponsor, the BG Group, for making the National Whale and Dolphin Watch possible, and both Wendy Nekar and Clare Dickens for their sterling work with the media in the run-up to the event. Tragically Clare was killed in a hill walking accident just before NWDW, and we would like to pay tribute to her amazing effort over recent years.

We also thank all of you who supported us and took part in the event: the regional coordinators, local organisations, manned site organizers, volunteers, and each and every single person who contacted and reported their watch results. Whether or not you were successful in sighting animals, your information and efforts helped make the National Whale and Dolphin Watch a great success.

*Edita Magileviciute
Sightings Officer*

