

sea watch FOUNDATION



Bottlenose dolphins, Loch Spelve, July. Photo Paul Flackett.

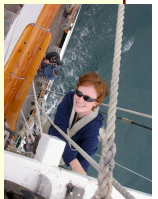
National Whale and dolphin Week 2006 Wet, windy but wonderful...

Many thanks to all those who braved some of the worst weather this summer to take part in National Whale and Dolphin Watch 2006. Results are still coming in, but despite the windy and wet weather, at least eight species have been recorded. Highlights include:

- Harbour porpoises around most of the British Isles, including the East Anglian and Kent coasts, but particularly off South-west England (where a group of ten was seen off Ilfracombe), West Wales and most Scottish coasts
- Small groups of bottlenose dolphins over a large part of the British Isles – besides the usual groups in North East Scotland, and West Wales, sightings have extended over to the west coast of Scotland, the North Welsh, Lancashire and Manx coasts in the northern Irish Sea, around the coasts of Devon and Cornwall east to Sussex, and in the Channel Islands
- A group of 12 white-beaked dolphins off Flamborough Head in North East England (Yorkshire)
- Groups of up to five Atlantic white-sided and white-beaked dolphins from Lybster Viewpoint and both white-sided and Risso's dolphins off Whaligoe Steps, Ulbster, Caithness, North East Scotland
- Small groups of common dolphins in the northern North Sea off the Caithness and Moray Firth coasts, NE Scotland, with larger groups further south in western Scotland, in the Irish Sea, west of the Pembrokeshire islands, and around the Isles of Scilly
- Minke whales were seen from the Isle of Man, in the Sound of Sleat, at Rubha Hunish and around the islands of Mull, Eigg, Rum and Skye in West Scotland, at St Cyrus Bay in South East Scotland, from Lybster Viewpoint and off Whaligoe Steps in North East Scotland, off Burwick in Orkney and off Out Skerries, east of Yell, and off Fladdabister in the Shetlands

Editorial

Welcome to the July 2006 edition of the Sea Watch Foundation News sheet! Although we are focusing on June and July, we thought we would give you a sneak preview of the results from August's National Whale and Dolphin Watch week, just so you can have a taster of the sightings that were on offer. We also have highlights from a Sea Watch survey at the start of June, on which Pia Anderwald and others were lucky enough to see humpback whales off Pembrokeshire... yes and I'm really kicking myself because I was invited to tag along but couldn't make it! Do keep sending me your summaries and photos, and drop me a line if you would like to contribute or receive the news sheet if you don't already. Best wishes and happy sea watching,



Lori

(lawsonhandley@mac.com)

Despite the weather, Bertram Bree reports a family being bowled over – literally - by the sight of bottlenose dolphins at a watch at Le Hurel slip at La Rocque in Jersey. They had arrived at the manned observation point and settled down to a game of cricket on the beach to pass the time when the dolphins stopped play!

Howard Loates reports that at one watch at the Sutons of Cromarty the cloud was so low he never even saw the water! There were some compensations, however, when about 50 whimbrel (about 6% of UK population) passed overhead while he was at Fort George. Since then, Fort George has witnessed groups of common dolphins and even two rare Sowerby's beaked whales.

Kevin Hepworth reports that on August 13 it was so windy you could hardly stand up at Torry Battery, and five bottlenose dolphins were the only species to be spotted that day. However, on the 19th of August he was cheered up by two white-beaks and two harbour porpoises, and a fly-by of skuas, manx, and sooty shearwaters, and storm petrels.

Early reports suggest that despite the inclement conditions, visitors were seen at most of the National Whale and Dolphin Watch manned sites, and the Sea Watch polo shirts and the new Sea Watch leaflets were well received.

Many co-ordinators were involved in interviews for local newspapers, television and radio, and Kevin Hepworth and Sarah Canning did a fantastic job in showing around Simon Barnes from The Times. All publicity of the event helps raise awareness of cetaceans around the British Isles as well as the charity. If you have kept cuttings, but haven't sent them in, Wendy Nocar and Clare Dickins would welcome copies to 40 Newbold Terrace East, Leamington Spa, CV32 4EY.

Please feedback your sightings and comments on the 2006 event to Hanna Nuuttila at New Quay. Planning for the 2007 event will start shortly and we would like to incorporate as many suggestions as possible, particularly with respect to a preferred date.

Wendy Nocar and Clare Dickins

Sea Watch Survey news

On a common dolphin survey carried out by Sea Watch on June 1st and 2nd, two humpback whales were encountered ca. 60 miles west of Ramsey Island over the Celtic Deep at 15:20 hrs on June 2nd. The survey, funded by the Countryside Council for Wales, was conducted aboard "Liberty" with Steve Lewis from Pembrokeshire Dive

Charters out of Neyland. One of the animals, which was thought to be a juvenile, was swimming slowly and approached the boat at times, often surfacing astern of the vessel. The other whale kept its distance and was never photographed. A group of common dolphins, which were bow-riding "Liberty" at the time of the encounter, left the vessel to play with the smaller one of the whales, swimming fast and jumping around it. The whale seemed to respond positively to the dolphins playing with it, and was seen rolling onto its back in the middle of the group, showing part of its flukes and white flippers. Humpback whales are scarce in the Irish Sea although there are usually one or two sightings per year. The last sighting was of three individuals in Cardigan Bay in July 2005.



Humpback whale, Pia Anderwald

Pia Anderwald

SIGHTINGS HIGHLIGHTS June and July 2006

It has been a mixed couple of months around the country, with some regions boasting amazing sightings (e.g. Cornwall, North Grampian), and others reporting some of the poorest for land-based watching in years, despite considerable effort (e.g. South Grampian). An article in the autumn issue of BBC Wildlife magazine reported a rise in orca sightings around Shetland this year, with 27 sightings so far this year compared to a total of 18 for the whole of 2005. While there have been a relative abundance of sightings in Shetland, with pods of up to 10 individuals seen, particularly in June, there have also been several sightings in other parts of the country. Orcas were seen three times off Westray, Orkney, in Brough and Thurso Bay off Sutherland, and between the Isles of Skye and Canna. There were also several orca sightings in England (off Seaham and Flamborough Head), Ireland (two sightings of 4-5 individuals off Counties Kerry and Antrim) and the Isle of Man (six sightings, from several sites around the island). It has been a good summer for regular minke whale sightings in Shetland and Orkney, Thurso (Caithness), Cromarty and North Grampian, and sightings in June were double that for May in the Inner Hebrides. Minkes were seen more sporadically in several other places around the

country, and the visitor to Winterton-on-Sea, Norfolk on 30th July, proved the highlight of the month for us East Anglians, even though we didn't see it ourselves!

Bottlenose dolphins have been conspicuous in their usual haunts off Newquay, in the Moray Firth and in Cornwall. Common dolphins have been seen in several locations including Thurso Bay, Moray Firth, Stoer Lighthouse, Inner Hebrides and off Lundy Island. There were several sightings of a pod of fifty Atlantic white-sided dolphins off Shetland between June 20th and 21st and again on 14th July off Sumburgh Head and Bressay. White-sided dolphins were also seen off Filey Brigg, eastern England in July. White-beaked dolphins were seen in several locations, including north east Skye, Shetland, and Girdleness (Aberdeen). Perhaps more unusual at this time is the number of white-beaked that have been seen off England's north east and eastern coasts. A pod of forty were seen in Whitby Harbour; ten were seen in the North Sea between Harwich and Ijmuiden; and eight were seen feeding in the bay at Seaton Sluice. There were also four separate sightings of white-beaked dolphins in Essex and Suffolk. On one particularly notable occasion, up to 20 white-beaked dolphins joined in a boat race off the Essex coast! Risso's dolphins were seen most frequently in northern Scotland (Shetland, Orkney, Dunnet Bay, Cape Wrath and in the Minch), but they were also seen off Cornwall and the Isle of Man. Harbour porpoises have been cropping up all around our coast line, but while there has been a spate of sightings in some areas (e.g. Moray Firth), sightings in other areas seem to be down on previous years (e.g. South Grampian). However, areas such as North west England and East Anglia, which are normally quiet for sightings have reported harbour porpoise during this period.

Rather unusual sightings have come in the shape of long-finned pilot whales off St Cyrus and in Montrose Bay (South Grampian), and there was a confirmed sperm whale sighting off St Austell, Cornwall, on 6th July. Two fin whales were seen off the Isle of Coll (Inner Hebrides) on 21st June, whilst Neil MacGregor was able to take some fantastic photos of one that was spotted in Rosemarkie Bay (Moray Firth) on 25th July (see below for evidence!). A fin whale was also seen off Craighleith Island, North Berwick on 18th July and there were several sightings around Ireland. As well as the very lucky humpback whale encounter mentioned by Pia above (no I'm not bitter, honest), a humpback was also seen in St Cyrus Bay on 18th July during the NORCET ferry survey, and off Dunquin, County Kerry in mid July.

Lori Handley and Joanne Clarke

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

From Deryk Shaw, Warden, Fair Isle Bird Observatory, and compiled by Joanne Clarke, SWF volunteer.

It has been a good summer for minke whales around Fair Isle but there have been few dolphins and just one pod of orca were seen. There were regular sightings of groups of up to thirteen minke whales around Fair Isle during the first half of June and they continued to be sighted throughout June elsewhere in Shetland - off Noss, Balta Isle and north-west of Burra. Killer whales were sighted around the Shetlands with groups of eight to ten seen off Grutness and Aithsetter. Fifteen white-beaked dolphins were sighted from ferries by the crews of Hascosay and the Norcet Ferry Survey. During the 20th and 21st of June, fifty Atlantic white-sided dolphins were sighted in the Keen of Hamar.

During early July, two white-beaked dolphins were regularly seen by the crew of the Hascosay and the Norcet Ferry Surveys. The group of fifty Atlantic white-sided dolphins were seen again south-east of Sumburgh Head and south-east of Bressay. Two killer whales were seen from Unst Ferry Terminal in early July, and later in July, eight were seen off Lamba Ness. During late July, fifteen harbour porpoises were sighted south of Fora Ness, and six Risso's dolphins were sighted off Lamba Ness.

Orkney

From Chris Booth, Regional coordinator for Orkney

A grand total of eight minke whales were spotted off Auskerry on 3rd July. Other than that, all sightings were of single animals. Lone minke whales were spotted off the West Mainland on 17th June, off Warness Eday on 27th June, 15th, 16th and 22nd July, off Auskerry on 7th July, and finally at Noup Head, Westray on 26th July.

Up to three harbour porpoise were seen regularly off Warness, Eday from 15th June to 25th July. There were three off the West Mainland on 17th June, two on 2nd July, and two to four on 25th and 26th July. Two porpoises were seen off Papa Westray on 26th July, and at Mull Head, East Mainland on 30th July.

Five white-beaked dolphins were present in Fersness Bay, Eday on 16th June. Six orcas were seen off the west side of Westray on 4th June, and a single male was present in the Green Holms area between 23rd and 28th June. Seven orcas were then seen in the Westray Firth on 29th June. Finally, between five and seven Risso's dolphins were seen off Mull Head, Papa Westray on 7th June, and five were sighted off Hoy on 26th June.

North Scotland

Compiled by Joanne Clarke, SWF volunteer

In early June there were regular sightings of minke whales and harbour porpoises from Thurso Bay, and there was also a single sighting of an orca. Also in June, two orcas were sighted from Brough, near Dunnet Head, four harbour porpoises were seen in Gills Bay, and one Risso's dolphin was seen in Dunnet Bay. Throughout July there were plenty of sightings at Thurso Bay, including one minke whale, six Atlantic white-sided dolphins, groups of up to six white-beaked dolphins, fifteen Risso's dolphins, and even fifteen common dolphins.

Northern Scotland: Moray Firth

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

The resident bottlenose dolphins have been seen almost daily at both Chanorny Point, Fort George and further into the Firth. A pod of nine common dolphins was also seen almost daily between North Kessock and Clacknaharry and further into the Beaully Firth, and apparently they have been seen breaching and occasionally mixing with bottlenose dolphins. Unfortunately I have only seen them at long range. Minke whales have been seen regularly around Cromarty. I have seen them lunge feeding from the South "Sutor" and the Ecoventures boat has observed up to 12 on one trip as well as the usual bottlenose dolphins. There has been a spate of sightings of harbour porpoise around Chanorny Point this month, and the highlight of the period must be the fin whale that was photographed in Rosemarkie Bay on 25th July- WOW!



Fin whale, Rosemarkie Bay, Neil MacGregor, <http://www.blackisledolphins.com/>

Grampian

From Pete MacDonald, regional coordinator for North Grampian

Sightings and watching were amazing in the month of June. Bottlenose dolphins, harbour porpoise and minke whales were all seen in various locations along our area. The bottlenose dolphins were in good numbers and over the month were seen every day bar seven. Cullen and Burghead were particularly good areas. Harbour porpoise were seen in small numbers as is their wont, but I feel sure that we have had far greater numbers here in the past. The minke whales are still here from May and continue to capture the hearts of all who see them. Down at Macduff and to the east, numbers as large as 15+ have been recorded. The media have taken this story on board, but forgot to go to Burghead, which is a real gem of a watch site. Over the month, sightings came in from there, of four to five minkes all feeding with porpoise and bottlenose in the area, with great rafts of birds just off the headland.

The good weather kept on coming during the first two weeks of July, then crashed all the way to winter-like, although, fortunately, sightings stayed fine despite the weather, with minke whales being seen all over the Firth. In Findochty, the bottlenose dolphins were seen less often after the third week of July, but there were reports of good numbers at Dundee. Still we cannot complain: the summer of 2006 may be on the wane, but what memories we will have over the winter.

South Grampian

From Kevin Hepworth, regional coordinator for South Grampian

Sadly, (and this is only my experience) I think that apart from the warm fortnight in July with some pretty unusual sightings (despite lots of effort I saw nothing to substantiate these either), this has been one of the worst summers I've known for land based watching in this region. This certainly isn't due to lack of effort since the land-based watch in Collieston on July 30th had 226 observers! The overall sightings have been enhanced (and the reality obscured?) though by the abundant ferry surveys we have run with Northlink Ferries, seven of which were carried out in June and five in July. I have hardly seen any porpoises this year, the Stonehaven boats have barely encountered white-beaked dolphins (once?). After only two negative trips in five years (circa 40 boat trips), I have had five negative ones (out of nine) in one season, and on only one occasion did I have more than just a glimpse of the animals. The lack of porpoise in July can probably be largely explained by the lack of feed, as sandeels were present at the start of June with seabirds bringing in ample supplies, but then during July, they switched and it was mainly pipefish being brought in. Consequently, the July

boat trips encountered hundreds of half grown dead puffin, guillemot and razorbill chicks floating around the surface of the sea. Consistent with this, there have been no strandings of porpoise during the summer, suggesting they are elsewhere.

West Sutherland

Andy Summers, Sutherland Highland Ranger.

It has been a reasonably quiet few months here. The highlight of the period was a report of approximately 250 common dolphins moving rapidly northwards from Stoer lighthouse on 21st July during the hot weather. The day before, 30 were seen around the same area. The only other confirmed dolphin species was a Risso's dolphin at Cape Wrath on the 1st June.

There were the usual reports of porpoises through June and July including an adult with a calf on 5th July at Clachtoll. Larger numbers were seen further north with twelve near Durness on 15th June and another twelve on 23rd July.

Only a few minke whales were seen over this period. Four were sighted by a lucky boatman between Achmelvich and Clachtoll on 27th June, and individuals were seen on 1st and 2nd July from Achmelvich shore, and again on 28th July at Stoer lighthouse.

Finally four orcas were seen on 20th June, and a single by a rather scared kayaker on 6th July!

West and South West Scotland (Hebrides)

From Laura Mandleberg, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust Sightings Officer

This report briefly summarises the sightings that HWDT have received from members of the public in June and July. Sightings in this report include both those from land and from sea (yachts, ferries etc).

Sightings of cetaceans and basking sharks have continued to rise throughout June as the feeding season gets into full swing and as more and more people are out and about around the coasts watching wildlife; minke whale reports have doubled since last month, with the majority of sightings being reported around the west coast of Mull and in the Mallaig and Small Isles area. Whales have been sighted further afield including off the north-west coast of Skye up Lower Loch Fyne.

June was a good month for basking shark sightings, with many reports locally off the west coast of Mull and many anecdotal reports suggesting high numbers of sharks elsewhere, in particular around the Coll and Tiree coasts. Sighting reports of common dolphin rose sharply in June across the west coast. This increase in sightings seems to coincide with the seasonal mackerel runs, which bring shoals of this pelagic fish species to our coasts. Bottlenose dolphins have been regular visitors throughout June and have mainly been seen in small groups of 2-4 individuals. Most reports of bottlenose dolphins have been around the Mull coast, with the remaining few from the Kintyre peninsula and around the Skye coast.

There was one sighting of two orcas in June, reported from a yacht in between Skye and Canna, and one report of four Risso's dolphins seen by Summer Queen cruises who operate out of Ullapool.

July 2006 was a great month for public sightings with basking sharks and harbour porpoise being the most commonly sighted species, spotted all over the Hebrides. The basking shark sightings appear to be going from strength to strength with several hundred recorded off the Cairns of Coll by HWDT research vessel Silurian at the beginning of July.

The minke whale numbers seem to be higher than this time last year which is encouraging news since mid-way through last July sightings reports rapidly dropped all over the west coast. Despite the steady influx of sightings, HWDT did unfortunately receive two reports of minke whale strandings this month, both near the Isle of Skye.

There have also been many reports of the more unusual species in and around the Hebrides with two Risso's dolphin sightings, one from a Sea Life Surveys boat near the tip of the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, and another off the Isle of Rhum. Atlantic white-sided dolphins were spotted in the deeper waters of the Sea of Hebrides and we had three confirmed killer whale sightings this month.

Bottlenose dolphin numbers were very healthy, as can be seen from the fantastic photographs taken from Loch Spelve, and we've even had them make another appearance in Tobermory bay! This made for a great start to our Bottlenose dolphin project with people calling our hotline from all over the west coast from Muasdale Holiday Park in the South, where Bottlenose dolphins are regular visitors, to tourists off the Isle of Skye reporting a group playing around their yacht.



Bottlenose dolphins, Paul Flackett

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

There were only two sightings reported for June for the north east coast of England. The first sighting was not until the 20th June, when three bottlenose dolphins were seen heading north close into the coast off the Whitburn Observatory near South Shields. On the 26th June two orcas were seen just three quarters of a mile offshore at Seaham.

July produced a few more sightings, starting with a porpoise with calf very close in to the reef at Cresswell on the 9th. On the 17th, two bottlenose dolphins were seen heading north off Cresswell in a rough sea. Later that week, on the 20th, six to eight white-beaked dolphins were feeding in the bay at Seaton Sluice for at least two hours in the evening, much to the delight of a few onlookers walking along the coast! A pelagic trip with the local bird club saw five porpoise a couple of miles east off Tynemouth in perfect conditions on the 21st. Another pelagic trip the following week (on the 28th), again with perfect conditions, had a minke whale feeding near a good number of gannets and guillemots eight miles off Blyth, then a mile further inshore two porpoise were seen, again with seabirds in close proximity. This was followed by a sighting of a juvenile minke whale travelling towards Blyth, 4.4 miles offshore. Finally, two porpoises seen foraging off the reef at Cresswell on the 29th was the last sighting for July.

North West England**From Dave McGrath, Sustainability Education Officer at Solaris Centre, Blackpool**

On the 8th June, a single harbour porpoise was seen feeding on the high tide 200m off the sea wall at the North Shore Boating Pool, Blackpool. There was also one sighting of bottlenose dolphins in June from Workington Pier.

Eastern England: Tees Mouth to River Nene Mouth**From Robin Petch and Kris Simpson, regional coordinators for North Yorkshire, East Yorkshire and Lincolnshire**

Cetacean sightings in this area are usually limited to a few harbour porpoises, although we know white-beaked dolphins and minke whales in particular are there to be seen by the keen observer. Porpoises are particularly frequent around Spurn Point and Flamborough Head but can be seen all along the coast and throughout the Humber. However, since staff of The Deep saw porpoises six days in a row during events there at Easter, even these seem to have been scarce with no casual sightings reported to us. Interestingly, however, Rare Bird Alert Pagers have submitted sightings of six orcas off Flamborough Head on 2nd July as well as six white-beaked dolphins and six Atlantic white-sided dolphins off Filey Brigg. Further sightings from Filey included two white-beaked dolphin sightings and four sightings of minke whale. Boat trips out of Whitby also saw white-beaked dolphins on two occasions and another minke whale. We surmise that the late spawning of sand eels, currently present in some numbers, is bringing cetaceans in closer.

Eastern England: Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk**From Mark Iley, Biodiversity Project Officer, Essex Wildlife Trust**

Unusually, there have been four separate sightings of white-beaked dolphins in this region, the most significant of which involved a school of 20 animals. They were seen just east of the North and South Galloper Sandbanks, several miles off the coast of Essex during a boat race. The dolphins visited all the boats and the largest animal, estimated at 3m, rode the bow wave for 15 minutes on its side, looking up at the boat. In 25 years of sailing the North Sea, the respondent said it is the first time they have seen any dolphins. Other sightings were at Aldeburgh, Suffolk, River Orwell opposite Pinmill and the Colne Estuary. There were six reported sightings of harbour porpoises, mainly of individuals but occasionally in pairs. These were at Stone Sailing Club, Thirslet Split on the Blackwater estuary, Frinton (dead) and Goldhanger Creek. Finally, a single bottlenose dolphin was seen off Hole Haven creek, Canvey Island, over several weeks.

By Lori Handley

The major highlight for this region during June and July was the sighting of a minke whale off Winterton-On-Sea, Norfolk at 10.30 am on the 30th July by Terry Townsend. Minke sightings are rare indeed in this area, but it was great timing to give us something to get the public excited about during National Whales and Dolphin Watch week. Terry also spotted two harbour porpoise off Gorleston-on-Sea an hour later that day. Four harbour porpoises were also seen at Gorleston-On-Sea on 25th June. Finally, Sophy McCully spotted a harbour porpoise off Lowestoft on 26th June.

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

June and July have been very quiet for sightings, but a bottlenose dolphin has remained in the area of Hole Haven, Canvey Island for several weeks over these two months (see above), and a seal was spotted in Millwall Dock, Isle of Dogs, in July

Southern England: Kent**From David Walker, Dungeness Bird Observatory**

During June, harbour porpoise were seen on 16 days, with a maximum group size of four on the 8th. Porpoises were seen on 21 days in July, and group size peaked on the 21st with six individuals. One bottlenose dolphin was seen on the 30th July. Jonathan Bramley reports that the regional group had another successful training day, with trainers Alex Carlisle (ORCA's recorder) and members of the Kent Mammal Group, on 17th June at Wye.

Southern England: Sussex**From Stephen Savage, regional coordinator for Sussex**

June and July have been good months, both for sightings and education/awareness events in Sussex. We have received several anecdotal reports with not enough information to include, such as uncertain date, time, etc. However, individuals and pairs of bottlenose dolphins were seen at Brighton, Hastings, Shoreham and Sovereign Harbour (Eastbourne) during June. A common seal was also seen off Hove beach, heading east towards Brighton, where it was visible for 30 minutes before heading out to sea. Similar numbers of bottlenose dolphins were seen in July, but this time, sightings were concentrated off Littlehampton (on four out of five occasions). Two bottlenose dolphins were also seen off St Leonard's on Sea on 18th July. A dead harbour porpoise was washed ashore in Normans Bay, Eastbourne on 24th July.

The funding we received from Veritas DCG (mentioned in the last edition) was put to good use during June and July. We took part in the local Adur World Oceans Day Event and, with the funding, we provided a varied exhibit. This included the Sea Watch Foundation display stand, my life-sized inflatable bottlenose dolphin, museum artifacts (with newly produced interpretive display materials), and photos and info about Sussex sightings. We also provided an art-based species distribution map activity for children. For this, we provided a series of drawings of whales and dolphins which could be coloured, cut out and then added to a large map in the correct location – building up a distribution map during the day.

We were also invited to the official opening of the Shoreham Beach Local Nature Reserve to which I have been invited into the management group that will run it (not specifically for Sea Watch but as biologist and marine educator). Private houses back onto almost the entire length of the nature reserve overlooking the sea, and I am hoping to encourage long term cetacean monitoring as part of the reserve's activities. We also took part in our local Spring Watch event linked to the popular TV series of the same name. We provided a display, including the inflatable dolphin and information tailored to the spring theme – including seasons of the sea. Over 8000 people attended this event, a very good turn out for an event in its first year, which obviously benefited from the TV based publicity.

The funding also allowed us to visit ten junior schools during June and July, focusing on a variety of themes. With some schools, we focused on the biology and ecology of cetaceans, including class based activities to experience identification skills. With others, the theme centred around adaptation to habitats, food chains, and even healthy eating was brought in to explain why dolphins eat fish whole.

South West England: Devon**From Gavin Black**

June and July in Devon have come in fits and starts, with short periods of high activity followed by long periods of waiting. There have been consistent and regular sightings of porpoise along the North Devon coast from Hartland to Combe Martin and from Lundy Island. On the south coast, however, only one sighting was made of porpoises and this was from Berry Head on 29th July. Hopefully, this marks the beginning of a spate of sightings like earlier on in the year!

On dive trips to Lundy, I was lucky enough to see several small groups of common dolphins on 3rd and 4th June about halfway between Lundy and the mainland. Sightings of common dolphins in this area continued over the following week or so.

A flurry of sightings of bottlenose dolphins indicate a brief visit to North Devon on 17th and 18th July. They were seen off Welcombe Mouth in Hartland, Bideford Bay, and round to Combe Martin. There were possibly two groups in the area unless they were traveling very quickly! These have been the only sightings of bottlenose dolphins off Devon in this period, which is quite unusual and a little worrying.

Although watches are being carried out, there have been few sightings from East Devon. Having said that, there were a couple of unconfirmed reports of small groups of pilot whales in mid June to early July, seen only a couple of miles offshore from Lyme Regis. Added to this, there was a sighting of "dolphins" in early June about 3-4 miles south of Lyme Regis.

White-beaked dolphins were spotted eight nm SE of Berry Head on 25th June, just a short distance from a possible minke whale, seen about half an hour earlier.

We hope to find out if there is any regular cetacean activity going on in the middle of Lyme Bay, soon, when we pick up a T-POD (passive acoustic detector) that has been sitting just off the seabed recording any click trains and other noises for the past two months. I'll let you know the results as soon as I can.

South West England: Cornwall

From Dan Jarvis, Cornwall Wildlife Trust

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June and July have really outdone themselves for sightings this year with a huge number of reports coming in to the Cornwall Wildlife Trust's recording scheme 'Seaquest Southwest', comprising seven species – one of them being a sperm whale!

Porpoises have been recorded frequently in their usual haunts around the Land's End peninsula, but also at St Ives, Falmouth, the Lizard area, and out near Wolf Rock between Land's End and the Isles of Scilly.

Bottlenose dolphin pods have been very conspicuous, putting in frequent appearances in St Ives Bay until 23rd July when a boat drove straight through the middle of the pod (containing a very young calf). One dolphin responded by following the boat for a short distance, slapping the water with its tail apparently as a sign of aggression, before the whole group moved directly out of the bay rather than across it as they usually do. As I write this, the first sighting of them back in St Ives Bay has been reported only today – presumably the frequent harassment incidents they encounter with water users forces them away from their favoured areas. However, it must be noted that harassment reports have decreased so far this summer compared with last year. Other sightings of this and other pods of dolphins have come from Land's End, Sennen, the North Cliffs, Porthtowan, St Agnes, Perranporth, Newquay, and Port Isaac on the North Cornish coast, and Porthcurno and Penzance on the south side of the county.

A few scattered common dolphin sightings have been recorded from Pendeen, Land's End, Wolf Rock and Mount's Bay, with a sighting of a particularly large pod of around 100 off Lizard Point on 19th July. Bude is the only other location where this species was seen during this period.

Risso's dolphins have been recorded twice this time around, with a sighting at Porth Nanven, and then a very unusual sighting of around 100 individuals almost 40 miles south of Falmouth in mid-June. Other pods of dolphins that were not identified were seen around most of the county, from Padstow, Porthtowan and St Ives and around to Land's End and Kennack Sands. As with Risso's dolphins, two reports of pilot whales have been received, one a few miles north of St Ives Bay and the other near Land's End (popular place this month!).

A few minke whale sightings have also been logged during this period, at Lizard Point and the nearby Manacles reef, as well as the Runnelstone and off the Isles of Scilly.

The final confirmed species sighted this month was a sperm whale, an extremely rare occurrence in this part of the country. It was seen by a reliable observer on board a fishing vessel not far off St Austell on 6th July as it surfaced close to the boat. A dead sperm whale was also spotted some way up the English Channel not long before this sighting was reported, so they are around in the area! Unidentified whale species were seen at Portloe, St Austell, Kennack Sands, and the Runnelstone.

That strange summer visitor, the sunfish, has been very abundant this year, I myself have been fortunate enough to have seen them on numerous occasions, including several during the frequent ferry surveys to the Isles of Scilly, that I am assisting with for Ruth Leoney of the University of Exeter in Cornwall. Other than between Penzance and the Isles of Scilly (the ferry survey route), sunfish have also been seen at Crackington Haven, Boscastle, Port Gaverne, Portreath, Godrevy, St Ives, Pendeen, Porthleven, Lizard Point, Coverack, the Manacles, Falmouth and Looe.

The truly massive number of basking shark reports that have been recorded in June and July could overshadow all of the above! Large numbers of around 40 or more have been seen around the coast stretching between Sennen and Falmouth on a few occasions. The following (very long!) list of sighting locations will give readers a good idea of how many sharks there are around here this year: Port Issac, Trevose Head, Harlyn Bay, Padstow, Newquay, Portreath, Godrevy, St Ives, Gurnard's Head, Sennen, Land's End, off the Isles of Scilly, Gwennap Head, Porthcurno, Penberth Cove, Lamorna, Newlyn, Penzance, Perranuthnoe, Praa Sands, Mullion, Lizard Point, Coverack, Cadgwith, Helford estuary, Falmouth, St Mawes, Portholland, Mevagissey, St Austell, Fowey, Looe and Whitsand Bay! After a noticeable decline in sightings last year, it looks as if the baskers have made a little more than a comeback in South West waters, which can only be good news for conservationists and ecotourism operators.

Other news

It has been quiet for rescues lately, although two basking sharks were reported entrapped in lobster pot ropes on separate occasions. The first occurred on 28th June when one was seen near Kennack Sands. The new British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org) RIB 'Josh' was deployed, but the shark was unfortunately not found, although it was reported to have freed itself. There were around 40 other sharks in the area at the same time, which also made the task more difficult. The second report came from Boscastle during late July, and again BDMLR attended and this time located the shark, which was in fact not in any trouble at all and left to continue feeding.

Things have also been quiet for the Strandings Network (www.cwtstrandings.org), with a few dead seals and a handful of cetaceans being recorded by the dedicated volunteers. The Seaquest Southwest newsletter has recently been released and can be viewed online (as well as a couple of back-issues) at the following link: <http://www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/downloads/seaquest/index.php>. The newsletter gives an informative insight into what has been happening with the sightings and strandings projects run by Devon and Cornwall Wildlife Trusts and is well worth a read.

The National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn1.html) is very busy with visitors, now that it is the main holiday weeks. No more pups have been rescued and brought in since my last article, and the Animal Care Team have been working hard, bringing the last remaining seals up to a good weight to be released very soon.

In response to concerns about people feeding wild seals in harbours in the county, the Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) have sent out posters to various places around the coast warning people of the dangers of interacting with wild seals and the long term problems that arise from making them accustomed to humans. However, this was obviously not sufficient warning for one man who, after four attempts, finally managed to get himself nipped by an adult male in Newquay harbour!

As mentioned in my last article, at the beginning of June a charity auction for BDMLR was organised by Jenny Haley, Michelle Spillane-Smith and other Medics from Newquay College, raising a brilliant £1200 for that charity – great work everyone! This was then followed by the National Trust's Sun, Sea and Surf Festival at Godrevy, which was attended by BDMLR, CWT and CSG, as well as other stalls and events going on during the weekend. On the Sunday, we were also treated to a great sighting of a bottlenose dolphin pod as they passed by on their way towards St Ives.

From the beginning of August, the Wildlife Trust is running marine awareness events throughout Cornwall, including wildlife boat trips with Elemental Tours and Orca Seafaris, a dolphin rescue demonstration by BDMLR, and a talk on grey seal pups by the Cornwall Seal Group amongst many other fun and exciting activities for everyone to get involved in.

Emergency numbers:

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

People are warned to not 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 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

Compiled by Sea Watch Foundation volunteers: Tom Duerden, Julie Davies and Joanne Clarke

Land based watches off New Quay Pier

June began with plenty of sightings recorded; the calm seas enabled almost 20 sightings of bottlenose dolphins and several Atlantic grey seals. Out of a possible 61 days, good conditions permitted 42 days of land based surveys carried out from New Quay pier. A combined total of 177 bottlenose dolphins, 21 Atlantic grey seals, and two harbour porpoises were sighted (note that some of these will be of the same individuals). Although the majority of bottlenose dolphins sightings were solitary, they have been recorded in pods of 7 to 10 individuals, feeding and socialising. It is encouraging to see calves beginning to appear in mid July within the pods. There was one instance of two grey seals in close proximity together and the rest were individual sightings. The two harbour porpoise sightings were also of lone individuals. Although not officially recorded on the 26th July, one sunfish was sighted from the pier – the only marine species to be spotted on that day.

SWF Boat surveys from New Quay and Aberystwyth

June started off with a photo ID trip aboard the Celine, which departed from Aberystwyth. Five groups of bottlenose dolphins were encountered, the largest being a group of 13 individuals including eight adults, four juveniles and one calf, which were sighted about six miles northwest of Aberystwyth.

The Sea Watch Foundation training course took place in the second week of June with the attendance of 13 fisheries scientists from CEFAS (Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science). The training course involved several line-transect boat trips aboard the Sulaire and Dunbar Castle II. During the first boat trip there was an exciting encounter with a group of 10 bottlenose dolphins about two miles north of Aberporth, including eight adults, one calf and a newborn. The group was very active at the surface, leaping out of the water and bow riding. Three smaller groups of 2-3 bottlenose dolphins were also sighted in the same area, getting the course off to an excellent start. The next line transect proved to be even more successful with four groups of bottlenose dolphins over the course of the day. The first encounter included nine adults socialising about four miles north east of Ynys Lochtyn. The second group included eight adults and two calves which were seen bow riding and leaping, about four miles north of Aberporth. There were also seven separate sightings of harbour porpoise, including three groups of two individuals and four solitary animals very close to the coast of Aberporth. The highlight of the day came when an unusual visitor to Cardigan Bay was spotted from the Sulaire and later approached the Dunbar Castle II in a curious manner about 1.5 miles north of Ynys Lochtyn. It was a juvenile minke whale, which idled at the surface for a short period of time before diving and disappearing from sight.

Line transects were also carried out on Dunbar Castle II on the 16th and 27th June. On the 16th of June, there was an encounter with a group of 12 bottlenose dolphins including ten adults and two calves which were feeding about ten miles north east of Cardigan. On the 27th of June, a group of seven bottlenose dolphins including five adults, one juvenile and one calf, were encountered about two miles north east of New Quay.

The month finished off with another photo ID trip aboard the Celine on the 29th of June. A group of seven bottlenose dolphins, including four adults, one juvenile, one calf and one newborn, were seen swimming slowly and resting about six miles west of Barmouth.

July saw three photo ID trips aboard the Celine and six line transects with photo ID trips aboard the Dunbar Castle II. The first Celine trip, with her customary departure from Aberystwyth, began with calm seas and a fortuitous encounter with six bottlenose dolphins (four adults and two juveniles) only after half an hour of sailing. This set a reasonable precedent for the day's sightings although conditions worsened. The last bottlenose dolphin photo ID encounter was cut short due to high winds; however, it was pleasing to experience the pod of eight containing five adults, two juveniles and one calf. The second Celine departure for the month had mainly Atlantic grey seal sightings and one harbour porpoise seen feeding as the boat returned to Aberystwyth. Celine's last voyage for the month bestowed more sightings than the previous (the day before in fact), with 17 sightings, however, none of which were of the elusive bottlenose dolphin. The sea state remained calm all day and it was promising to see an abundance of porpoises, which were seen predominantly feeding and on several occasions in pairs.

Onboard the Dunbar Castle II, the trips out were varied in their success of encounters and sightings. Although the line transects determine the path of the boat, it usually follows a similar direction that navigates through areas of Cardigan Bay often frequented by pods of bottlenose dolphins. There were a total of 23 bottlenose dolphin encounters for the month, and the majority were of groups of two or more. There were two excellent encounters on the 5th July and the 27th July – the former with 16 (11 adults, three juveniles, one calf and one new born), two miles north of Aberporth, and the latter with 15 animals, three miles west of Lemas Head. Both of these trips had excellent sighting conditions, and the 5th was also a success for harbour porpoises with nine sightings. The excursion carried out on the 1st July presented a good day of encounters. A pod of eight bottlenose dolphins were the highlight, one mile north west of Pen-y-Badell, with an additional six harbour porpoises spread over three sightings. The trips out were of varying duration due to the weather conditions, which ranged from poor to excellent. The sightings on the 12th and 15th reflected this, with only four (2x2 bottlenose dolphins and 2x1 Atlantic grey seal) and three (1x2 bottlenose dolphins, one Atlantic grey seal and one harbour porpoise), respectively, on trips which lasted no longer than four hours.

The most exciting report for this period was of humpback whales in early June – see Pia's piece for more information.

Isle of Man

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

On the 5th of June, the new web based reporting scheme of the Manx Whale & Dolphin Watch went live, allowing on-line reporting of cetacean sightings from around the Isle of Man. The local response has been astounding and in June and July, over 70 observers reported 913 cetaceans! 115 reports and 500 cetacean sightings were filed for June, and 101 reports comprising 413 cetaceans during July.

All sightings are scrutinised in the normal way prior to inclusion in the local database, after which they are submitted to Hanna Nuutilla and Pia Anderwald for inclusion into the Sea Watch Foundation Database. A synopsis of each confirmed report is summarised on the 'Local Sightings' page of the Manx Whale & Dolphin Watch web site. This easy to use reporting system has allowed locals and visitors alike to record any casual sightings as well as those sightings derived from Effort-based Watches. There are now eight people undertaking Effort-based Watches around the Island. Both the number of sightings and the number of people engaged in Effort-based Watches have increased by a factor of eight since the start of this new local initiative. Species reported in June and July include: killer whales, minke whales, bottlenose dolphins, Risso's dolphins, white-beaked dolphins, common dolphins, and harbour porpoises. Numbers, times and locations can be seen on the website, www.mwdw.net. Using the 'species' filter allows everyone to view the range of recent sightings by individual species.

Channel Islands

Compiled by Joanne Clarke, SWF volunteer

Harbour porpoises and bottlenose dolphins were regularly seen around the Channel Islands throughout June, with groups of up to eighteen seen off Rozel (Jersey) towards St. Catherines Breakwater, and groups of up to thirty seen off Sark, and twenty-four off Herm. Common dolphins were also sighted in June, with groups of fifteen seen one mile north of north east Minquiers, and twenty seen eight miles west of Hanois, Guernsey. In July, one orca was sighted off Beaufort Bay, Jersey, fifteen bottlenose dolphins were sighted from La Coupe, Jersey, and twenty were seen off main Ecreviere Bank.

Northern Ireland & Republic of Ireland

Compiled by Joanne Clarke, SWF volunteer

June was a busy month off Ireland, with frequent sightings of bottlenose dolphins in practically every county, and harbour porpoises sighted almost daily. Common dolphins were also seen in Counties Sligo, Donegal, and Wexford. Minke whales were seen in Cork, Kerry, Antrim, Donegal, and Waterford, and Risso's dolphins were seen in Wicklow, Antrim, Wexford, Cork, Donegal, Mayo and Galway. There were also a few sightings of fin whales in Sands Cove, Ardfield, Co. Cork, and orcas in Portmuck, Co. Antrim.

During July, bottlenose dolphins were sighted in most counties throughout the month, and there was also a steady stream of harbour porpoise sightings. In addition, there were sightings of fin whales off Co. Cork, and minke whales off

Counties Cork and Kerry. A humpback whale was seen in Dunquin, Co. Kerry in mid July. Risso's dolphins were seen off Slea Head in Kerry, and five orcas were sighted off Caherdaniel, Co. Kerry on the 2nd of July.

Finally, basking sharks were seen all over the country throughout June and July.

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.