



NEWS RELEASE – June 2006

PUBLIC ASKED TO LOOK OUT FOR MARRA AND HIS MATES

People in the north-west and the Isle of Man are being asked to watch out for bottlenose dolphins such as Marra – the dolphin marooned in Maryport harbour – during National Whale and Dolphin Watch week this summer.

The Watch takes place from August 12-20, when members of the public can send in their sightings of dolphins, whales and porpoises to the Sea Watch Foundation, a marine conservation charity and research organisation.

Sea Watch's research director, Dr Peter Evans, said: "People are often amazed to learn that 28 species of marine mammals have been seen in British waters. The Maryport dolphin attracted a good deal of publicity in Cumbria last winter, and reminded people of the fact that the waters of the northern Irish Sea are frequented regularly by bottlenose dolphins.

"However, we don't yet know whether these are from the well-known Cardigan Bay population or form a separate population of their own."

He added: "The northern Irish Sea is richer in species of whale and dolphin than people think. Bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises are recorded regularly off the Cumbrian coast, and there are also many reports of other species such as minke whales and Risso's dolphins from the Isle off Man."

For example a minke whale was spotted in March of this year close to Douglas Head and 11 reports of minkes were sent in by observers on the Isle of Man during last year's National Whale and Dolphin Watch. Risso's dolphins are seen regularly off the coast of the Isle of Man.

Anyone can take part in the 2006 Watch if they are near the coast during that week, either by joining experienced observers at key look-out points or simply by recording their own sightings and sending them in.

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, over-fishing and pollution. Last year's event produced 576 sightings, including a group of six fin whales off the Welsh coast – the largest group ever seen in British coastal 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).

Sea Watch is also running a series of training workshops for people interested in learning how to identify whale and dolphin species. These take place in June, July, August and September with support from the Countryside Council for Wales – details from Sea Watch Cymru on 01545 561227 or e-mail info@seawatchfoundation.org.uk

Note to editors: An adult minke whale grows to around 28 feet long and weighs 7.5 tons. Minkes are the prime target of the Norwegian whaling industry, which is expected to kill around 1,000 of the animals in 2006. The International Whaling Commission banned commercial whaling in 1986 but Norway does not accept the ban and recently expanded its whaling grounds, allowing fisheries to kill an increased number of minkes - 1,052 - in 2006.

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