



## **NEWS RELEASE – June 2006**

### **MARINE CHARITY ISSUES WHALE ALERT**

Some of the whales seen in waters around the Channel Islands last year are expected to return over the next few weeks – and people in the area are being asked to look out for them.

Marine conservation charity the Sea Watch Foundation is asking members of the public to scan the seas for whales and dolphins, such as minke whales, which were seen last summer off the coast of Guernsey.

Sea Watch is also interested in sightings of other whale species, dolphins and porpoises, which help the charity's research British marine mammals and how they are affected by rising sea temperatures, fishing activities and pollution.

Every year Sea Watch organises a one-week event – National Whale and Dolphin Watch – around the coast of the UK. People are encouraged to report sightings and join experienced dolphin-spotters in manned watches from beaches, cliff-tops and other look-out points.

During the 2005 Watch, as well as the minke whales, observers in the Channel Islands saw pods of up to 20 common dolphins, bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises.

The bottlenose dolphins have already been seen again this year, with a group of five recorded recently off La Coupe Point in Jersey.

However, Sea Watch's research director, Dr Peter Evans, says that his team are particularly keen to monitor numbers of minkes this year as there were fewer sightings than usual off the west coast of Scotland in 2005, but larger numbers in the Irish Sea. It would be interesting to determine if this is linked to sea temperature changes and the abundance of small fish on which they feed.

Dr Evans said: "Sightings of minke whales are more common from May to October when species such as herring, sand-eels and sprats on which they depend are concentrated in shallower coastal waters.

"We will be carefully monitoring reports over the next few weeks to see whether they return."

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).

Look out for details this year's Watch on the Sea Watch Foundation website [www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk](http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk) which includes a list of local co-ordinators and a species identification guide.

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](mailto: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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