



## **NEWS RELEASE – June 2006**

### **KEEP WATCH FOR RETURN OF RARE WHALES**

Marine scientists are scanning Welsh waters to see if rare whales spotted last summer return to the area this year.

The group of six fin whales – the second largest creatures on Earth – was recorded off the coast of Pembrokeshire during last year's National Whale and Dolphin Watch week. Many other sightings of bottlenose and common dolphins were made during the week from the Welsh coastline, underlining the importance of the area for marine wildlife.

Now members of the public are being urged to take part in the 2006 National Whale and Dolphin Watch from August 12-20.

Anyone can join in by sending their sightings of whales, dolphins and porpoises to the Sea Watch Foundation, a marine conservation charity conducting research in Wales.

Sea Watch uses information gathered during the week to monitor numbers of the 28 marine mammal species known to visit British waters. It also studies the effects of rising sea temperatures fishing activities, disturbance and marine pollution.

Wales offers some of the best dolphin-watching hotspots in Britain, particularly Cardigan Bay, the Llyn Peninsula, and north coast of Anglesey. In Cardigan Bay, bottlenose dolphins were recorded every day during last year's National Whale and Dolphin Watch.

Many were seen even in the harbour at New Quay, close to the headquarters of Sea Watch Foundation Cymru in New Quay. From here, teams of researchers and volunteers work throughout the year to collect and co-ordinate sightings of whales, dolphins and porpoises, as well as data from underwater acoustic devices in the Bay.

Hanna Nuuttila, Sea Watch Foundation's sightings officer, said: "In the last four years, National Whale and Dolphin Watch has produced 2,337 sightings of over 12,000 marine mammals. The event raises public awareness of these animals but also has a scientific function, enabling us to create a yearly snapshot of their distribution in the UK and indicating any changes that might be taking place."

Some of the best look-out points on the Welsh coast will be manned by experienced observers during the National Whale and Dolphin Watch, and members of the public are welcome to join them there or to send in their own independent sightings.

Times, dates and details of manned sites will be published shortly on the Sea Watch website [www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk](http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk) where you can also find a guide to identifying whale and dolphin species.

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)

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).

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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