

The Cetacean Monitoring Unit

Sea Watch foundation



Killer whale, Fernando Ugarte/SWF

NATIONAL WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCH - AUGUST 13-21 2005

Newspaper clippings appeal!

As you will no doubt know by now, National whale and dolphin week is almost upon us. Not surprising then that Sea Watch Media Officers Clare Dickins and Wendy Mecar have been very busy recently spreading the word about National Whale and Dolphin Watch Week. They have had articles in the Times, Women's Weekly magazine, Caravan & Camping, the British Trust for

Ornithology magazine and Country Walking. Since it isn't possible for them to monitor all the publications themselves, Clare and Wendy would like to ask for your help in rounding up articles from regional publications. If you find any articles relating to NWDW in your local magazines or papers, please send clippings to Clare Dickins, 61 Guphill Avenue, Coventry CV5 8BA or send scanned images to Clare at clare.dickins1@bopenworld.com. Thanks in advance!!

Editorial

Welcome to the July 2005 edition of the Sea Watch news sheet! Despite the fairly non/existent summer in my (new) neck of the woods, it has been a very interesting one for sea watching! I was thrilled to receive a record number of contributions for this issue - they just kept coming and coming! So thank you to all of you for your sightings reports and apologies if this time I was a bit too overwhelmed to reply to each of you in turn! Not that I'm complaining - it's great - keep them coming! Just contact me at lorihandley@mac.com if you would like to be added to the News Sheet mailing list or to contribute to future issues.



Best wishes, Lori.

Lori Handley, editor

SEA WATCH TRAINING COURSES 2005

If you would like to learn more about whales, dolphins and porpoises and how to identify them, why not take part in one of the training courses run by the Sea Watch Foundation in conjunction with the Mammal Society. The courses are held at New Quay in Ceredigion, West Wales where there are resident bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises. There are still places available on the August 20-21 weekend course, and September 3-6 for the extended course. There may also be local training opportunities available in the south Moray Firth/Grampian region of Scotland. Further details can be found on the Sea Watch website (www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk) or by calling Sea Watch on 01865 717276. Bookings for the training courses are being taken by the Mammal Society (Tel: 020 7350 2200).

A tribute to Norman Hammond

It is with great sadness that I report the death of our regional co-ordinator for North-west England & South-west Scotland, Norman Hammond. Norman and his wife Florence were both tragically killed in a car crash on 11th June. Norman was a major figure in marine conservation in Cumbria and the Solway Firth region. Besides a lifetime devoted to increasing public awareness and appreciation of the marine environment in the region, he set up the Solway Firth Shark and Sea Mammal Survey, developing a large network of loyal observers that stretched all the way from Cheshire to Dumfries and Galloway including also the Isle of Man. He was a regular and important contributor to our News Sheets, and the number of sites watched around his extensive region made an immense contribution to past National Whale & Dolphin Watch Events. During these and other times of the year, his tireless efforts will be sorely missed. And on a personal note, Norman and Florence were the perfect hosts to me whenever I visited Cumbria and the Galloway coast, opening my eyes to some of the wonderful lookout spots they had, and always providing me with warmth and hospitality. We will miss them greatly. *Peter Evans*

Recent News

Sightings highlights for summer 2005

By Hanna Nuuttila, Sea Watch Foundation Sightings Officer

Humpback whales in Cardigan Bay

Three humpback whales were seen off Ynys Lochtyn, in Cardigan Bay on Saturday 16th July just after 1pm. They were spotted by local fishermen and by a passenger boat Ermol V during its regular two-hour trip from New Quay harbour. At first they were reported as minke whales but amazingly turned out to be humpback whales, when the unmistakable long pectoral fin was seen protruding out of the water and the animals fluked up majestically before diving. Kate Lewis, an MSc student from the University of Wales, Bangor, collaborating with Sea Watch, was the first person to identify the whales as humpbacks. Peter Garson, a passenger on the boat got a few photographs of one of the whales, confirming the identification. This area has also seen a sighting of a fin whale as well as unusually large numbers of minkes in the Pentland Firth.

Large numbers of minke whales and a humpback whale in Orkney

A count of 28 minke whales together with one humpback whale was made by Sea Watch regional co-ordinators Kevin Hepworth and Peter Macdonald between the Orkney mainland and Copinsay, during a survey trip from Aberdeen to Orkney on Saturday 2nd July. Other observers along the north coast of Scotland have also reported unusually large numbers of minkes in the Pentland Firth in late June and July, along with regular sightings of orcas. At Lybster, observer Colin Bird has observed up to 17 orcas recently, and witnessed attacks by orcas upon seals there.

Beluga whale in Orkney

On Friday 15th July, a beluga or white whale was spotted from a plane east of Westray in Orkney. Ian Muir, a vet who saw it, described it as pure white, about 15-20 feet long, and surfacing five or six times fairly rapidly. The last beluga to be seen in the UK was eight years ago at Unst, Shetland in August 1997.

Common dolphins, Risso's dolphins and minke whales in the Celtic Deep

During monthly Sea Watch surveys since May, common dolphins have been widespread in groups generally numbering between 5 and 40 animals in the Celtic Deep, west of Pembrokeshire. Risso's dolphins and minke whales have also been seen in small numbers, whilst harbour porpoise have been regular mainly around the islands of Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm and near the Smalls. Basking sharks were seen mainly in May, and Sunfish in June and July. A possible humpback (breaching in the distance) was also seen in the area on 22nd June.

Northern bottlenose whales off South Devon

Two northern bottlenose whales were sighted by Lisa Glass on 29th June from a small aircraft, landing at Newquay's St Mawgan over the Cornish sea. The whales were pale pinkish brown in colour, very large and long with a prominent forehead and dolphin shaped face. The pair consisted of an adult of seven metres long and a juvenile, 75-80% of the adult's size. They were swimming close together near the surface of the water and seemed to be moving quite slowly.

Please send your sightings to Hanna at: hanna.nuuttila@seawatchfoundation.org.uk

Regional Roundup May to July 2005

Orkney Islands

From Chris Booth, regional coordinator for Orkney and North Scotland

Minke whale 2 off Rora Head, Hoy on 22nd May, one in Hoy Sound 25th June, 1 that was entangled in creel ropes north of Rousay on 1st July was successfully released, 1 off Deerness on 6th July.

Beluga There was a probable sighting of one on 15th July from an aircraft east of Sanday.

Harbour porpoise Fewer sightings than usual. 2 off Deerness on 10th May, a female and calf near Hoxa Head, South Ronaldsay on 17th June, 1 Hoy Sound 25th June and 2 north of Auskerry 5th July

Striped dolphin Rare in Orkney waters. 1 seen west of Shapinsay on 11th July

Orca 7-10 off Mull Head Deerness on 21st May, minimum of 6 west of South Ronaldsay on 11th June, 7 off Green Holms 4th July, 2 off St John's Head 23rd July and 5 off North Ronaldsay 26th July.

Pilot whale 1 in Scapa Flow on 30th July

Risso's dolphin 7-10 Scapa Flow on 12th May, 2-3 off the West Mainland 25th June and 5 off Mull Head, Papa Westray on 26th and 28th July.

In addition, a 24 hour survey was carried out from Orkney Ferry between Aberdeen and Orkney on 3-4th July. Nineteen minke whale sightings (15 adults and 4 juveniles) were reported off Orkney as well as 6 harbour porpoise sightings and a breaching, blowing humpback whale. Five bottlenose dolphins (5 adults and a juvenile) were seen slow swimming off North-East Scotland and three minke whales were spotted, including one lunge feeding. Six harbour porpoise sightings were recorded and three common dolphins were seen swimming fast. Last but not least two basking sharks were seen - one off Orkney and one off NE Scotland. Not a bad head count for 24 hours - don't you think?

North East Scotland

From Iain Macdonald, regional co-ordinator for North-East Scotland (Nigg-Duncansby Head)

Some of the best sightings were on the north coast of Scotland just round the corner from Nigg-Duncansby Head. I believe that killer whale have been occasional and Minke whale sightings frequent along the north coast this summer. Caithness has been particularly good this summer with over 10 species of cetacean reported if beaked whale sp. is included as a species. On the west coast I saw 5 species in a single day then drove over to the east coast and added a sixth species to the daily total. Harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphins were regularly recorded, with a notable number of records of the latter from Caithness. Minke whale records appear to be down on last year, but this is balanced by a sizeable number of reports from towards the immediate south and north. Of the more rarely recorded species, Risso's dolphins were recorded in small numbers off Lybster in Caithness, together with sightings of common dolphins in July. These sightings may represent a change in movements of both species. Approximately 170 common dolphins off Strathsteven, Sutherland on 11 July 2005 was a high count for the Moray Firth. The most notable sighting was a possible beaked whale seen off the Caithness coast in July.

A good species day in July!

On 05 July 2005 I travelled from my home in Golspie on the east of Sutherland to Stoer Head on the west coast of Sutherland to check for cetaceans and seabirds in the Minch. Although the return journey trip is about a 4 hour drive it has been worth it on a number of occasions (and not worth it on a number of other occasions). Despite a force 3 wind at Stoer Head, sighting conditions were good and within 10 minutes of arriving at 13:30 a harbour porpoise was found. Another 4 porpoise were found a couple of minutes later. After about 40 minutes a large group of 60 common dolphins was spotted in the distance off Ross-shire and a few minutes later a minke whale was seen relatively close inshore at about 2 km from the lighthouse. These were quickly followed by distant views of a large group of approximately 30 Risso's dolphins heading north up the Minch. Closer to shore and visible at the same time as the Risso's dolphins, but still a good way out, was a group of 20 dolphins. Despite the unidentified dolphins breaching, I couldn't identify them since they did not show their heads and were against a very bright backdrop. The general impression of shape and size did not resemble Risso's and was most similar to white-beaked. They remained unidentified.

Just before 14:00 I noticed that the common dolphins originally seen off Ross-shire had over the course of 45 minutes headed several kilometres north towards Sutherland and had spread out over a front more than a kilometre wide. The dolphins appeared to be heading on a "collision course" towards a small group of 8 white-beaked dolphins which appeared in the same field of view about 1.5km closer to the lighthouse. The common dolphins changed their course to the west then turned again north-east back towards the white-beaked dolphins, but this time in a tight group. Although the reason for the common dolphins bunching together can only be speculated, it might have been due to the presence of the much heftier white-beaked dolphins. After the two species crossed paths, without any visible signs of aggression, the common dolphins spread out again, splitting into two groups. They were last seen at 15:28 having travelled quite a few kilometres from their original position. The white beaked dolphins headed in a different direction at a slower pace.

The number of species seen off Stoer Head had reached 5, not including the unidentifiable dolphins. Twice on previous occasions I had seen 5 cetacean species in a day off Stoer Head and I had wondered if I could add bottle-

nose dolphin to the list and make it 6 from land on a single day. However the thought of driving back to the east coast and then down towards Ross-shire where bottlenose dolphins are more regular put me off the idea on both previous occasions. On one of the days I did add an otter to the list of 5 since there was a regular otter close to where I live and it was on the route home. Although every bit as worth seeing as a cetacean, an otter was not a sixth cetacean species and afterwards I did wonder if I ought to have tried for number six.

Perhaps it was my having a few days earlier just finished reading a book by Sandy Komito on his 1998 attempt to see as many species of birds as he could in north America in one year, or perhaps it was because I wasn't as tired as usual and up for a bit of fun, but this year I decided to try to add bottlenose dolphin to the list of 5. After all I might not see 5 species in a single day again so I might as well try for a personal record of 6. Having arrived home I decided to take a chance and head for Nigg in Ross-shire despite a number of recent blank visits. Once at Nigg in the late evening the much thought about 6th species appeared in the shape of a single bottlenose dolphin, followed a few minutes later by another four bottlenose dolphins.

Having seen 6 species from land in a day has now made me wonder how many are possible? The 6 species seen were probably the most frequently recorded species off the Sutherland and Ross-shire coasts. However Caithness has recently been producing lots of interesting sightings and it is only between 40 minutes and 100 minutes drive from Golspie. This summer killer whales have been seen a number of times, a fin whale sighting was recently reported and then there are the elusive white-sided dolphins. A rarity such as a beluga (reported this summer off Orkney) or a beaked whale (possibly seen off Caithness this summer) would take the theoretical total into double figures. If I ever manage to see 6 species in a day again I might just think of a late dash up to Caithness, just in case.

From David Thomas, sightings from the passenger ferry "Pentland Venture", crossing Pentland Firth between John O' Groats and Burwick, Orkney.



This has been an exceptional summer for orca sightings. Seven sightings were recorded, of 5 to 20 animals off John O'Groats, Stroma and Burwick. On July 1st 20 orca were seen east of Stroma rounding up grey seals and feeding on them. Young orca calves were given dead seals to play/practice on. They have also been spotted off Wick and out west of Thurso so possibly the same pod moving around a large territory. There have been fewer minke sightings (nine) with only a fraction of the sightings seen this time last year (2004). A dead minke, seen on the 18 June had its head and fins eaten away so we assumed some Orcas had killed it. We also had very few porpoise sightings. Probably the least ever and no sightings with more than 2 animals. On 22 July four common dolphins were seen bowriding the ferry for a couple of minutes.

Grampian

From Peter MacDonald regional co-ordinator for North Grampian

May: A grand month for cetacean watching, with the days getting longer and calmer seas. Various land and sea based watches were undertaken with good results of encounters with bottlenose dolphins and small numbers of harbour Porpoise. The dolphins were very active in the third week of the month with 30-40 animals recorded travelling and feeding close to shore. With the yellow on the broom, and the hundreds of sea birds flying overhead, the act of watching from the shore was a joy.

June: Put simply just a fantastic month for watching cetaceans along our part of the Moray Firth, with sightings of bottlenose dolphins, (we only missed 4 days in the month), harbour Porpoise, 15+ minke whale and 2 basking shark (Gemini Explorer survey). And a sighting of 2 orca off Cullen bay. During the month FMFD undertook a few galas and events the highlight being going out on the Gemini Explorer on the longest day of the year, in a fantastic

sunset and moon rise off Sandend. Also the encounter on board the Hascosay out of Kirkwall when we encountered 24 minke whales and a humpback whale.

July: First two weeks in the month sightings of BNDs aplenty seen from Gemini Explorer and common dolphin groups of 12+ and even larger seen on a daily basis, further to the east minke whales were being seen, from the shore, sadly one whale struck by a speed boat, and the return of the squid boats. The Moray Firth had a real heat wave at the start of the third week, hills up side down and villages looking like New York caused by coastal heat haze. Trips to see the Queen Mary 2nd and a rare view of 6 Risso's dolphins completed a fine month. Sadly the weather caved in, despite a few sightings of bottlenose dolphins and a minke whale in Cullen bay the encounters have dipped.

South West Scotland and Inner Hebrides

From Sarah Barry, Sightings officer, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust

Minke Whale Numbers of minke whales increased throughout May and we started receiving sightings from areas to the South of the West coast such as Staffa, Gometra, Islay and Jura and even one near the entrance of Oban Harbour. June saw a huge increase in minke whale sightings. These sightings becoming increasingly more widespread throughout the month, from 50 miles North East of Cape Wrath as far down as South of Colonsay. One whale appeared right up Loch Greshornish, which is a Loch further up Loch Snizort on the North coast of Skye. Quite a few whales were reported around Skye, although these appeared to be travelling and not actively lunge feeding. The majority of reports were by far around the coast of Mull. One whale was observed breaching in the Sound of Mull just off Calve Island in Tobermory Bay. We have never experienced a minke whale this far up the Sound before so for this animal to breach upto 20 times was a huge highlight for passengers on the Oban to Coll ferry. A week earlier a minke was sighted off the same ferry breaching at the entrance to the Sound of Mull off Ardnamurchan Point.

The second week in June we began receiving sightings of concentrations of up to 15 minke in the same area around Staffa and Colonsay off the West coast of Mull. In the final week in June large numbers of whales (10 - 15) were being sighted close into the West coast of Mull again, right up Loch Na Keal lunge feeding. An occasional whale is sighted in this area but it unusual to have so many feeding this far up the loch. The land based safaris also reported sightings of these whales. The activity died down again around the 20th of July (time of going to press) although bad weather prevented operators from getting out. Fingers crossed the whales stick to the same kind of area and the rest of the season will continue to produce good sightings.

A report of at least 10 minke whales lunge feeding at the mouth of the Harbour at Portree on the 11th of July. Elsewhere, throughout July the whales were widespread (from Loch Fyne, to Jura, to Stornaway on Lewis) and have not been reported to be actively lunge feeding.

Harbour Porpoise Once the tourists started to arrive, so too did the sightings of porpoises. Sightings of these animals cover the whole of the Hebrides throughout the summer months. Concentrations appear to be around the Small Isles and around the Argyll and Bute area.

Bottlenose Dolphin Early May until the last week in June produced only a handful of bottlenose sightings around the coast of Mull. With each sighting not being consistent in group size makes it particularly difficult to work out any population movement. A group of dolphins appeared to move around the Mull shore between the last week of June until going to press. The group again varied a great deal in size. Some reports being of only 3 individuals and some being up to 15. Three individuals delighted passengers and tourists of Tobermory on the 4th of July by coming right into the harbour and playing for 2 hours. On the 20th of July a group 6 came into Tobermory bay, this time they only hung around for about 15 minutes, but enough to cause a stir along the Main Street. July has so far given us a great variety of bottlenose sightings with no obvious pattern as to their movements. They have been reported on a few occasions around Skye in varying sized groups, around the coast of Mull, Barra and out to North Uist. The season, so far is showing that there appears to be a few different groups of these dolphins residing along the West Coast. A solitary individual was sighted up West Loch Tarbert on the 26th of July. It appeared to be milling around, not doing anything in particular.

Common Dolphin A group of around 40 dolphins appeared North East of Coll and hung around playing with boats and fishing for over a week the first half of June. Towards the end of June and throughout July Common Dolphins were being sighted in varying groups sizes in many different location around the West Coast from the North Minch down to the Garvellachs.

A group of around 50 animals were sighted in 2 groups on the 22nd of July. One of these groups of around 25 individuals had an unusually large amount of calves, It would appear the group contained 50/50 adults and calves. Some individuals were particularly small and two were noticed to not have fully formed dorsal fins. The sea was too choppy and the animals too distant to notice any foetal folds. Both groups were highly intent on feeding. One group came across to the boat to bowride, but this only lasted for a few seconds and then they were off feeding

again, concentrating in tight knit groups. The following day a group of 4 adults and 2 juveniles were sighted in the Islay sound.

Orca A sighting on the East coast of Lewis 11th of May and Ardnamurchan Point 15th of May can be confirmed as the resident family of the West coast and included Floppy fin and Kinky (both adult males) and Lulu and Nicola (both adult females). The sighting of this family off Ardnamurchan Point went on for nearly 2 hours with the whole group playing around Sea Life Surveys whale watching vessel Alpha Beta. 3 sightings over the past few months were of solitary bulls that are usual nomadic visitors throughout the summer months.

Risso's Dolphin The 5 sightings HWDT received of this species between May to July were all from waters further North and out towards the Outer Hebrides. However on the 11th of July 20 large adults, all with a large amount of scarring on their bodies were sighted out towards Stanton banks (West of Colonsay).

Pilot Whale A Solitary individual came in 5 metres from the pier in West Loch Tarbet, South of North Harris. The whale appeared to come in for a few hours and then disappeared, only to return again a few days later. Some reports were that the animal had an injury on its tail stock but this could not be confirmed. The animal disappeared but returned two weeks later for several hours with the last sighting on the 21st of May. A group of 6 Pilot Whales were accompanied by at least 4 bottlenose dolphins in West Loch Tarbet of the Mull of Kintyre, towards the end of June. These whales were sighted over 2 days in the same area. This is highly unusual for these whales to come so close in to shore. The dolphins did not appear to approach closer than 100 m to any of the whales and kept close within their group.

Sperm Whale On the 11th of April an adult male Sperm whale was been sighted within the North Minch. The huge toothed cetacean was sighted on a few occasions by fishermen up until the 21st of May. Researchers involved with HWDT's work heard the animal through a hydrophone from a SMRU research vessel off the North end of Lewis on the 26th of May. A report from Summer Queen cruises based at Ullapool of a large bull Sperm whale inside Horse Island at the mouth of Loch Broom on the 23rd of July. The animal appeared to be quite busy, possibly feeding, travelling around the same area and occasionally expelling a large amount of bubble underneath the surface. They are deep feeding and residing creatures so it is unusual that this species would spend such time closer in to shore. He appeared again in the same area to entertain residents and tourists on the 28th and 29th of July.

Other Species

11/07/05 Sighting of a Blue Shark just North of Rhum

15/07/05 Sunfish sighted just out from Ullapool.

21/07/05 Sunfish North East of Mull (a few miles south of Ardnamurchan Point)

24/07/05 Sunfish SE of Ardnamurchan Point.

North-west Scotland

From Ian Birks, regional co-ordinator for NW Scotland

As most readers will be aware the current report period, May, June and July have produced the least sightings, especially in the latter part, that I have experienced in my recording since 1989. The season had got off to a good start and we had received a reasonable level of sightings that could be confirmed.

May saw harbour porpoise sightings from shore at Loch Gairloch on 2, 4, 14, 19, 22, 25 and 28th, with most days giving sightings at sea, if brief, in the harbour porpoise project carried out by the Gairloch Marine Life Centre. These sightings are part of the continuous database project operated initially by me and now by Ian French and give us a good base line for concern regarding the present situation. It should be added that it has been again a wet and windy summer, reducing the ease of sightings and also the inclination to go and look! The Centre or myself had minke encounters on at least seven occasions and the Centre also recorded long finned pilot whales.

In *June* the sightings of harbour porpoises fell away instead of increasing and although we had occasional sightings of new born calves in Gairloch, nothing like the regular daily experience of two or three calves of previous years. Scattered sightings continued with the Centre, but from shore it was a very disappointing time. Minke whales were encountered on two occasions by the Centre. Four encounters with common dolphins right into Gairloch during the month, seen from the Centre's cruises and shore and an increasing and unusual number of basking shark encounters. There was also a sighting by the Centre of a large ocean sunfish - very impressive pictures!

July gave only eight days of harbour porpoise encounters from shore, but again most days from the Centre's cruises. The problem was again that of poor weather meaning that on several days it was unreasonable to leave harbour. Four encounters of minke whales were recorded by the Centre one, a seven metre male, being found dead, with a possible history of fishing gear entanglement. Ian French was able to obtain samples for later analysis. Several encounters with Common Dolphins again and also Risso's Dolphins by Stoer Head. On the 27th I travelled from Ullapool to Stornoway and back in the day by ferry for a spotting trip. The total was four Common Dolphins from the entrance to Little Loch Broom to Loch Broom itself both ways, no other cetaceans in almost perfect

conditions. Basking sharks continued to increase in frequency and numbers with three at once in Loch Gairloch and five at Mellon Udrigle. Several days where ocean sunfish were seen right to the head of the Loch by the Centre

What is most serious is that we are having reports of a massive failure to rear young among the auks, particularly puffins. The trip to Stornoway and back was almost devoid of seabirds except around trawlers discharging by-catch and then unusual birds such as Leach's and storm petrels. On the 31st after a report of rafts of birds and fifteen or so cetaceans seen from land off NE Skye, Ann and I took the yacht over and covered all the normal feeding banks for this time of year. In a total of over thirty miles, we saw harbour porpoises at the entrance to Loch Gairloch, ten in one group in the morning, then nothing until our return to the loch. No rafts of birds at all, no other cetaceans. Only two guillemot juveniles for the whole journey.

From speaking with Peter Evans it seems this extraordinarily low sightings regime is general on the North West coast and may be associated with a lack of small fish such as sand eels or sprat, which has been attributed to widespread breeding failure amongst several seabird species in parts of Scotland. I have submitted a request to the Marine Laboratory at Torry, Aberdeen, in the hope that Dr Peter Wright may be able to give a broader, but detailed view of the fish stock situation.

West Sutherland

From Andy Summers

- 1 May 1 minke whale at Clachtoll
- 2nd May 6 bottlenose dolphin at Handa
- 3 May single bottlenose dolphin at Achmelvich
- 10th May basking shark at Kylesku
- 12th May 2 porpoises at Chleit Island off Lochinver
- 21st May 1 basking Shark at Clachtoll
- 22nd May 1 minke whale at Achmelvich
- 23rd May 1 basking shark at Eisg Brachaidh, near Inverpolly
- 23rd May 1 basking shark at Tarbet near Handa island
- 23rd May 2 Rissos dolphin at Handa Island.
- 24th May 1 basking shark at Loch Drumbeg
- 24th May 3 bottlenose dolphins at Clachtoll
- 25th May 3 bottlenose dolphin including a smaller juvenile
- 25th May 3 white-beaked dolphin
- 3rd June 1 minke whale at Handa
- 3rd June 1 basking shark at Handa
- 4th June 2 minke whale at Clachtoll
- 4th June 2 minke whale at Oldshoremore
- 5th June reports of 1 pilot whale at Achmelvich
- 11th June 1 minke whale – north side of Handa
- 15th June Risso dolphins in Sound of Handa
- 16th June 1 orca at Stoer Lighthouse
- 16th June 1 common dolphin at Stoer Lighthouse
- 18th June 1 basking shark at Clachtoll
- 18th June 1 basking shark at Stoer Lighthouse
- 18th June 1 dolphin & young at Achnacarnin
- 18th June 3 dolphins (not Bottlenose) at Achnacarnin
- 28th June 30+ dolphins at Clachtoll
- 30th June 4-5 dolphins at Scouriemore
- 5th July 1 basking shark, south of Soay Island
- 6th July plankton bloom at Loch Broom & Achmelvich
- 7th July 40-50 white-sided dolphins. Seen form Clachtoll -heading north very fast to Butt of Lewis
- 10th July 1 bottlenose dolphin at Stoer Lighthouse
- 15th July baby/embryo pilot whale at Altanabradhan beach
- 27th July 1 basking shark at Stoer Lighthouse
- 27th July 1 minke whale at Stoer Lighthouse
- 27th July 1 sperm whale from 'Summer Queen' boat (Summer Isles)
- 27th July 1 sperm whale at Cul na Craig
- 30th July 2 basking sharks at Stoer Lighthouse

South east Scotland

From Kevin Hepworth, regional co-ordinator for South Grampian.

The Aberdeenshire coastline has once again been dominated by the large number of sightings reported of bottlenose dolphins which have been seen regularly feeding, leaping, surfing, bowriding at the mouth of Aberdeen Harbour although reports have also been received from Stonehaven, Montrose and St Cyrus. The Summer weather has meant that bottlenose dolphins were reported on 46 occasions in May and on 63 occasions in June although not all data has yet been received for this latter month. Group sizes ranged from 1-3 animals to 50+, although 6-8 appears to be the average. Groups of 15 were reported from Torry Battery on the 15th May, 21st May and 5th June with 30-40 at Montrose on the 11th June, 12th June and 50+ on the 26th June, 20+ at St Cyrus on the 18th June, 25 in Stonehaven Bay on the 23rd June and 30+ on the 26th June near Johnshaven. Sightings from the Montrose environs have occurred daily.

Uncharacteristically, the numbers of porpoise sightings have been much lower than in previous years with only 3 reported sightings in May and 7 in June and these from north of Aberdeen. The largest groups were 5 north of Peterhead from Northlinks freight ferry the MV Hascosay on 13th May and 4 off Cove on the 3rd May. Remainder of the sightings were 1-2 animals from the usual Bullars of Buchan and Collieston areas.

Regular white beaked dolphin sightings arrived as per previous years towards the last week of June although a possible single animal off Stonehaven Harbour on 2nd May was reported and two reports of animals feeding in the vicinity of bottlenose dolphins at the end of May was received. The main occurrence occurred after the 25th June when five reports came in with an exceptional movement of a minimum of 64 animals south past Girdleness Point on the 26th June.

Minke whale sightings have so far been scarce, with a single animal from Stonehaven on the 2nd May and a lone animal north of Fraserburgh from the productive ferry survey on MV Hascosay on the 13-15th May

In July, we received 15 white-beaked dolphin records, with numbers ranging from 3-8 although 15+ at Collieston on the 7th and 50+ off Girdleness on the 27th. 10 bottlenose dolphin records from Stonehaven and Montrose with 100+ off Montrose on the 16th and 80+ on the 27th (both of these represent very dubious counts, but the observer is adamant there were that many and usually pretty good with these things). 8 harbour porpoise records of 1-3 animals generally at Donmouth, Cove and St Cyrus. 5 minke whale reports from Cruden Bay, Montrose and three from Stonehaven mid month. 3 orca reports, 4 probable south past Girdleness on the 16th July, with 3 near Montrose on the 27th and a dubious 10 reported by fishermen off Auchmithie on the 28th July sightings during the month, mostly the first two weeks and last four days of the month as the second half of the month was very poor for watching with high seas.

North-east England

From Andy Tait regional co-ordinator for Northumberland, Tyne and Wear,

May was a very quiet month for sightings starting off with 1 porpoise in King Edwards Bay Tynemouth on the 1st with 2 on the 2nd off Lizard pt and another 6 individuals on the 3rd, but on the 20th another dead porpoise was found at church point Newbiggin by the Sea. A sighting of a single porpoise on the 4th from Blyth west pier

June 4th in a rough sea saw a porpoise travelling north off Lizard Point, with a single porpoise seen between Bamburgh and Inner Farne on the 5th. A dead porpoise was found at Druridge Bay on the 26th and to finish off another quiet month 3 Bottlenose Dolphin were seen travelling east off Coquet Island on the afternoon of the 30th

July began with the arrival (officially) of a bottlenose dolphin at Amble (first confirmed sighting on 8th although talking to the locals it had been seen occasionally for the previous three weeks ...another sighting on the 9th beside the harbour entrance seem to convince everyone he was going to stay for a while, surfacing at very long intervals it seemed very relaxed although on the 11th following the tour boat out of the harbour jumping a few times and on the 12th was seen chasing fish very close in between the piers. In between sightings of the dolphin a minke whale was seen a mile offshore just south of Seahouses on the evening of the 10th, with a single Bottlenose dolphin seen in the same area earlier in the mid afternoon. More sightings of the dolphin at Amble on the night of the 13th with an association with a canoeist just out of the harbour, and another sighting 500 metres offshore on the 14th followed by a sighting of a harbour porpoise 5mts off the reef at Cresswell just down the coast on the same evening. On the 18th, a bottlenose dolphin was seen off the river Tyne in the morning travelling north, a couple of days later a lunging minke whale was seen amidst a feeding frenzy of birds 2miles off the coast at Lizard Point. On the 24th more sightings of the dolphin continued with it being seen in various areas just outside of the piers at Amble and also circling a buoy about half a mile out past the piers.

Eastern England and East Anglia**From Mark Iley, Essex Wildlife Trust**

Seven harbour porpoise sightings, with small groups of up to 3 individuals were recorded between June 4th and July 7th. On 15th July at least two unidentified dolphins (unidentified due to darkness) were seen on the ferry crossing from Holland to Harwich. The dolphins seemed to be having a jolly good time speeding to the bow and turning a way over again. The dolphins were bow riding for 10 - 15 mins

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

While we have not had a large number of sightings reported this year, we have received some interesting observations. The number of sightings received may have been affected by an increase in my workload during this time period, which meant less time to run and organise cetacean recording. 27th May I received a report of 2 bottlenose dolphins which had been observed and photographed from Hastings Pier. They were observed feeding, small silvery fish seen leaping from the water and the dolphins were still feeding when the observer left them. Two possibly three harbour porpoise were seen heading east close inshore past St Leonards at about 8.30pm on Wednesday 22nd June. A small group of gannets were seen closely following behind them.

Stranded harbour porpoise

Wednesday 27th July, (12.25pm) I received a call from British Divers Marine Life Rescue regarding a live baby porpoise (umbilicus still attached) that has stranded on Eastbourne Beach. A search was on for the mother and I telephoned round my contacts and sent out a plea via 2 e-groups for possible information on adult porpoise in the area (giving my hotline number). I received a message during Wednesday afternoon from Sussex Sea Fisheries (whom I had emailed but had no contact for them while at sea). They had heard about the search for the porpoise calves mother and located 2 adults approximately 1.5m in length. They rushed to the beached porpoise position in order that they might be able to take the stranded porpoise out to sea. Sadly, when they arrived at the beach they discovered that the vet had made the decision to euthanize the porpoise as it was considered to be suffering and had deteriorated. I also received confirmation of this from BDMLR. The porpoise calf was male and approximately 90cm in length. We have found the occasional dead baby porpoise with umbilicus attached in previous years. We also received a report of a group of 2-4 dolphins (probably bottlenose dolphins) observed passing the entrance to Brighton Marina at 20:00 on Friday 29th July.

Selsey Dolphins

The 3 bottlenose dolphins still seem to be present in the Looe Channel near Selsey Bill. Along with the anecdotal reports I receive details of 2 separate encounters from Colin Stratton, sailing from Chichester, on the 19th and 26th June and 30th July. The dolphins usually approach vessels and swim alongside and under the boat. Occasionally riding the bow wave. From the various reports it seems that at least one of the dolphins seems happy to interact with vessels. Some sightings suggest that two of the dolphins are more commonly seen together and the third (which readily approaches vessels) is often a little way apart at least when encountered. A sighting of a single bottlenose dolphin, 1/2 mile off Brighton, on 6th June 2005 was also reported.

I also received 2 further sightings from Peter Lamper on 25th and 27th June and 13th July, which reflected the same behaviour. I have also received anecdotal information about the dolphins playing around a divers club inflatable rib. Sadly I do not have access to a vessel or funding to study them properly. I have tried encouraging vessel owners through my contacts, such as Sussex Sea Search and Sussex Sea Fisheries to report observations in as much detail as possible. I have avoided involving the media, while initially this may lead to more data the downside is knowing human nature it would likely end with increased boat traffic and harassment problems. So I have contented myself with the information I have been able to glean – hopefully more news in next month newsletter.

Events

We took part in two major events this year. The Lowtide Festival in Brighton (May) and World Oceans Day Event in Shoreham-by-sea (June). In the latter event we provided a joint exhibition between the Sussex regional Group and the River Ocean Foundation for whom I have worked as Education Coordinator this year. The result was a very large display including 3 x 6ft tables which included an art activity information sheets and various whale and dolphin objects (skull, vertebrae etc). We also had the life sized inflatable bottlenose dolphin with anatomy pics and photographs from local sightings. We also used the Sea Watch Foundation display panels. The art activity was wire frame model making of 4 whales and dolphins to appreciate shape and size. This was provided through River Ocean as was their volunteer help making it a very successful event.

South West England - Devon**From Gavin Black, Dolphin protection project officer, Devon Wildlife Trust**

Records of sightings this season started coming in slowly in May but slowly increased in regularity through June, becoming a deluge of sightings in July! This was evidently related to the long settled period we had in mid July and the more people out and about.

It was the north coast of Devon that seemed to be the hotbed of cetacean activity this season, with the vast majority of sightings come from Bideford Bay and further east. There were 21 records of groups of bottlenose dolphins during the May to July period. Almost all from the north coast between Exmoor and Westawrd Ho! There were some marvellous reports of encounters with bottlenose dolphins surfing in the breakers off Woolacombe which excited local surfers on 3rd and 4th July. There was an unusual series of records of an adult bottlenose dolphin staying in the Combe Martin area on and off for at least 2 months. Although there were concerns initially, these seemed unfounded. There were three records of groups from the Torbay area, including one sighting of 20 animals off Hope's Nose on 10th July.

Common dolphins were recorded 5 times, all but one record coming from the north coast. Most of the groups consisted of between 8 and 24 individuals but there were two instances of much larger numbers (50-100 on 20th May off Sharkham Head near Torbay and 150 off Baggy Point, North Devon on 20th June 2005).

We received 9 casual sightings of harbour porpoises between May and July, excluding the dedicated watch data. David Jenkins has been carrying out a few watches from Foreland Point (right on the Devon Somerset border) and had several sightings of porpoises and bottlenose dolphins. This is an area we get few records from as the area is not heavily populated. There were only two records from the south coast both in the Salcombe area.

A minke whale was recorded by a fisherman 4 miles south of Prawle Point in the South Hams. This is the first confirmed record from Devon this year although there was an earlier record in April, this was not confirmed. A single long-finned pilot whale was also sighted on 19th May off Hope's Nose.

We only had one dead stranding this season. This was an 80 cm neonatal harbour porpoise, which after autopsy turned out to be a victim of bottlenose dolphin attack. This is the first recorded case of a neonate being attacked in the UK.

In other news, Devon Wildlife Trust has just begun a 3 year programme, in collaboration with the Seawatch Foundation, to monitor cetacean populations in Devon's waters. We hope to augment the Seawatch Foundation's existing volunteer network to cover more points round Devon to identify cetacean hotspots, seasonal patterns of movement and relative numbers. Many thanks to David Jenkins and Goodrington Sands Seashore Centre for supplying many of the above records.

From Douglas Herdson, Information Officer, National Marine Aquarium

On midday Friday 8th July, I received a report from a Salcombe fisherman, Graham Foale, of a Minke whale about four miles south of Prawle Point, South Devon. It swam around his boat, Crustacean SE 35, for about 5 minutes whilst they were hauling pots. It came within 50 foot and then slowly swam off to the east. The head could not be seen but the white markings on the pectoral fins were evident.

South West England - Cornwall**From David Ball, Silver Dolphin Centre, Porthleven**

Despite the weather being unsettled with days of sunshine and flat seas followed by stormy weather it has been a good time for whale and dolphin watching.

As usual it has been bottlenose dolphins that have been seen the most. Sightings have been distributed on both coasts which make some people believe that there are now two residential pods in Cornish waters. It will take time and a lot of observations to tell if this is true. The poor old dolphins have also been receiving a fair amount of harassment, some of it from local tour operators who should know better. At the Silver Dolphin Centre we have been receiving reports on the harassment and we are gathering evidence which if harassment continues will be used by the police in prosecuting the offenders.

There were three sightings of Risso's dolphins in May and one in June. Minke whales were seen on seven occasions in June. There were many sightings of unidentified dolphins which shows the need for identification training.

Common Dolphin sightings have been down, but one sighting had 800 off St Agnes head. Harbour porpoise sightings also seem to be down. Both these species have suffered badly as bycatch during the winter, though figures do show a drop in numbers being washed ashore.

We are now settling in to our new building in Penzance. The increased room is giving us the chance to expand the work we are doing with local cetacean populations. Volunteers are always needed and work placements are available for students needing to gain experience. As the centre co-ordinates the Cornish Marine Life Rescue group we held a mass stranding exercise on the 30th of July. We are running the next medic course on 10th September, membership is free and there is no charge for the training.

On 9 June, as luck would have it a young bottlenose dolphin chose to strand itself on Roskilly beach between Newlyn and Mousehole on the very day a team from the centre were doing research on the eel grass beds. The young dolphin was playing in the water following our divers' marker buoy and then swam up onto the beach. As he was in good condition, with no obvious injuries, we were able to refloat him safely.

We are now running more boat trips with the chance of identification training. Anyone interested in the work of the centre can contact us on the new number, 01736 364860 or check out the web site www.silverdolphinmarineconservationanddiving.co.uk

From Dan Jarvis.

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With the warmer weather, there have been a lot of sightings reported to Sequest Southwest for this period, dominated by a large number of bottlenose dolphin sightings. Exceptionally, a pod of bottlenoses 'moved in' at St Ives Bay between May and the beginning of July, and were observed almost every day. However, they appear to have gone elsewhere now. Unfortunately, their appearance in the bay led to many reports of harassment to the police and other marine conservation organisations in the county, some of which required action to prevent injuries or strandings from occurring. Throughout the rest of this period, other pods of bottlenose dolphins were seen around Newquay, Sennen, Porthtowan, Mount's Bay, Falmouth, Looe, Padstow and even a small pod at the Isles of Scilly in mid-July. Risso's dolphins have been scarce recently with a handful of sightings of small pods around the Land's End Peninsula and off Coverack on the Lizard. Common dolphins were seen on several occasions, and most notably a huge pod of approximately 800 individuals was seen off St Agnes on the North coast. There were also sightings around the Land's End area, Port Isaac, and large pod of around 40-50 have been sighted on a couple of occasions around the Scilly Isles in July. Striped dolphins were not observed during this period except for a single animal that live stranded at Gwithian, St Ives Bay, at the start of June. Medics from British Divers Marine Life Rescue attended and after one refloatation attempt, it re-stranded and was euthanased due to its deteriorating condition. A Post Mortem investigation found that it was suffering from brucella and meningitis. Unidentified dolphins were seen off the mouth of the Helford Estuary, Padstow, Looe and the Lizard Peninsula.

There was one sighting each of pilot whales and an orca between May and July. A pod of 25 pilots was spotted off Cadgwith during June, and a lone orca was observed off Porthleven at the end of May. Minke whales were observed on a few occasions, including a pair seen near the Brisons actively feeding at the surface. They were also present off Pendeen on the North coast, the Lizard on the South coast, and also off Wolf Rock and the Isles of Scilly in June and July. Another exceptional sighting was that of two bottlenose whales in the Newquay area on the 29th June. Finally, harbour porpoise were frequently seen around most of the county, at places such as Mount's Bay, the Land's End and Falmouth areas, Newquay, Boscastle and the Isles of Scilly.

Wales

From Kosmas Chatzivasiloglou, Sightings volunteer, Sea Watch Foundation Cymru, New Quay, West Wales

A total number of 53 bottlenose dolphins were spotted from New Quay Pier in July. A group of 4 bottlenose dolphins including 1 juvenile was detected on 11th July chasing mackerels. Two groups of 2 and 3 individuals were sighted possibly feeding, even though numerous behaviours were recorded, such as leaps and tail slaps on 21st July. A total of 6 individuals were observed on 29th July chasing prey off the Harbour.

During July, a total of 7 HP were sighted from New Quay Harbour. An adult HP was detected on 11th July, accompanied by a juvenile traveling South. The rest of the sightings were of solitary individuals.

A total of 5 Grey Seals were sighted from New Quay Harbour in July. All the sightings were of solitary animals.

Tourist Boat Trips from New Quay Harbour

During July a total of 34 BND were sighted on the two-hour boat trips. A group of 4 individuals including a calf was spotted on 18th and another one of six animals containing a juvenile was observed on 27th July. Both groups appeared to be chasing prey.

In July, no harbour porpoise were sighted on the two-hour boat trips.

A total of 29 grey seals were spotted mainly beneath the Bird's Rock and Cwmtudu. Three grey seals were sighted on 2nd and two animals on 17th July beneath the Bird's Rock. The rest of the sightings were of solitary individuals.

On the 16th July three humpback whales were sighted off Ynys Lochtyrn (see news)

Surveys on Dunbar Castle

During six line transect surveys within the Cardigan Bay SAC, bottlenose dolphins were encountered 35 times including groups of eight and nine individuals feeding on the 8th, 22nd and 30th July. Harbour porpoises were seen as well but less frequently, however on the 9th July a group of approximately ten porpoises were seen feeding within the bay.

Isle of Man**From John Galpin, regional coordinator for the Isle of Man**

May Sightings throughout May were very sparse, with 10 effort based watches yielding no observations. A chance sighting of 3 common dolphins on the 10th was the total seen on the west coast. On the 30th, 2 harbour porpoises and 7 Risso's dolphins were seen off Port St. Mary by Graham and Jackie Hall, and a single Risso's seen further around the coast at Spanish Head on the 31st.

June The month began well, with fine weather and good watch conditions, with mirror flat seas and excellent visibility. Windy rough conditions dominated from the 10th and it was not until the 25th before further sightings. A few harbour porpoises were seen on the 4th, 5th, 6th, 8th and 9th, as well as 2 minke whales and a much larger, unidentified whale with an unusually long, slender falcate dorsal fin. An unidentified whale of seemingly identical description has been seen on numerous occasions. Also observed was a large cetacean showing 3 to 4 metres of its body while logging upon the surface. After more than 10 minutes of leisurely inactivity it gracefully arched its back and dived. Despite close and careful observation through 40 times magnification binoculars, at a reasonably close range, this cetacean appeared not to have a dorsal fin.

The 25th and 26th gave boat sightings of a harbour porpoise by Steve Black, while fishing off Derbyhaven in the south of the island. On the 27th, 4 minke and 1 other unidentified whale were seen from Dalby on the west coast. On the morning of the 30th 6 harbour porpoises were seen diving together for a prolonged period 300 metres from shore. The sudden and rapid arrival of 1 and then a pair (1 adult, 1 juvenile) of common dolphins saw the harbour porpoises leave abruptly. 4 more harbour porpoises were seen nearby.

Sightings of inshore basking sharks have been rare, but numbers of basking sharks and cetaceans have been sighted 5 to 8 miles off shore. This seems characteristic of weather dominated by north and northwesterly winds. Sightings of shags and basking sharks have been noticeably absent throughout June.

July Unseasonably windy weather has limited effort based watches throughout the month. However, opportunistic sightings have been numerous, Graham Hall of Port St Mary, and Steve Black of Castletown reporting many sightings of Harbour Porpoise and Common Dolphins from the south of the island. Sightings from the west coast at Dalby continue, but many could only be seen through very powerful binoculars at ranges up to 6 nautical miles.

The wind has been predominantly North or North West, much cooler than our normal South Westerlies.

Republic of Ireland

For information on Irish sightings, see the homepage of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group at www.iwdg.ie.

Sea Watch Foundation's project "Encouraging Public Participation in Cetacean Monitoring" is supported by DEFRA's Environmental Action Fund. Furthermore, Sea Watch is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, BG International, Dong Efterforskning og Produktion and Atlantic Petroleum, and the Countryside Council for Wales.