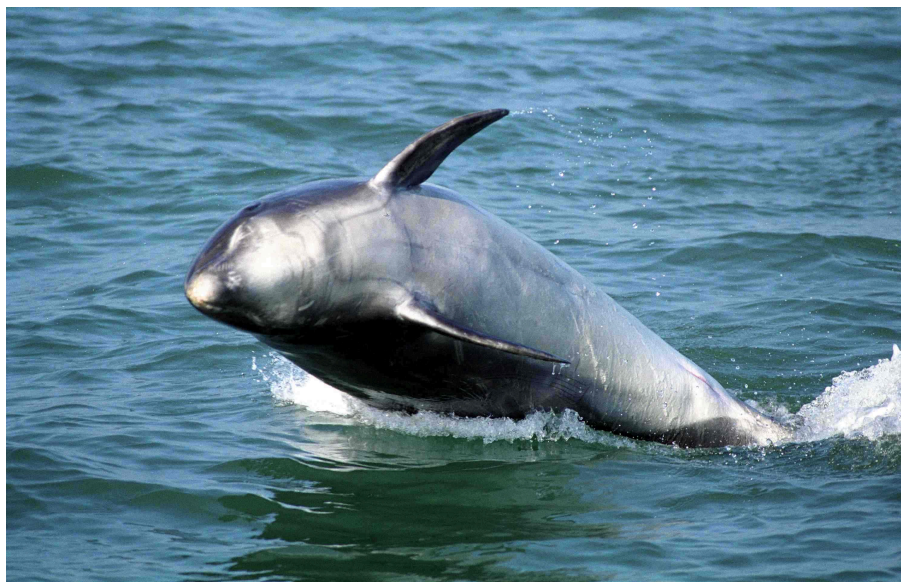


The Cetacean Monitoring Unit

Sea Watch foundation



Bottlenose dolphin, Mick Baines, SWF

Sea Watch Foundation News:

Welcome onboard to Caroline Chipperfield and Giovanna Pesante!

Caroline Chipperfield has recently been appointed as the Development Manager for Sea Watch. Her main role is to ensure the effective management of the charity and to carry out initiatives that will strengthen the organisation and meet its strategic plan. Caroline previously worked as the Senior Manager in the International section of the Royal Society, the UK's National Academy of Science. She has also worked for the British Association for the Advancement of Science organising their education programme and as a science teacher.



Giovanna Pesante has recently joined Sea Watch as the Cardigan Bay

Monitoring Officer, based in New Quay. Her role is to assist with the conservation management of the bottlenose dolphin population throughout the Bay, monitoring abundance, distribution, reproductive success and population structure using a combination of surveys and photo-identification studies. Giovanna is Italian and she has worked with the Tethys Research Institute for 10 years, being involved in different projects aimed at the protection and conservation of cetaceans inhabiting the Mediterranean Sea. She has participated in many line-transect surveys both in the Mediterranean Sea and the North Sea (including SCANS II), and has photo-identification experience with many different species, from fin and sperm whales to smaller odontocetes – common, bottlenose, Risso's dolphin and pilot whales – and also with some pinniped species. Her main interest is the interaction



between cetaceans and humans, with a focus on the problem of collisions between fin whales and ships.

Editorial

Welcome to the March 2006 edition of the Sea Watch Foundation newsheet, covering February and March 2006. It has been a relatively quiet couple of months, with the winter weather being quite unrelenting, especially in Scotland. However we still have some news to report including good sightings of harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphins, fin whales and a super pod of common dolphins in south west England, steady reports of bottlenose dolphins in Grampian, and Risso's dolphins off the Isle of Man. Plus we have new recruits to the Sea Watch team, and Spring has finally arrived! What more could you ask for? Grab those binoculars and make the most of the spring sunshine – happy sea watching,

Lori

Lori Handley


Cetacean Survey Training Courses in New Quay, West Wales

June - September 2006

If you would like to learn more about British cetaceans, how to survey them and contribute to their conservation, why not join one of our training courses this summer? Courses will consist of illustrated lectures and video presentations as well as headland watches and boat surveys aboard a local whale-watching vessel.



There are two types of course: a weekend course for those with little previous knowledge or experience of cetaceans; and an extended 4-day course for those who already have some knowledge of cetacean watching.

For the introductory course, the programme will include a lectures introducing cetaceans – their biology, ecology and behaviour, and focusing upon UK cetaceans. For the extended course, there will be more “in-depth” lectures including research studies, and, weather permitting, extended time at sea, with additional training in field techniques like photo-identification.

Both courses will include lectures/videos on conservation issues facing UK cetaceans, species identification, and recommended survey methods for monitoring cetaceans. The course will be based at New Quay, Ceredigion, West Wales, and will provide an unparalleled opportunity to see marine mammals in the wild and to contribute to cetacean conservation in Britain.

The practical element of the course will combine both land and boat-based watches allowing participants to directly learn how to conduct systematic watches and fill in standardised recording forms. There will also be the chance to practice species field identification and the recording of different behaviours. All participants will receive a detailed manual on how to record and monitor cetaceans. The courses will be taught by experienced and enthusiastic staff from the Sea Watch Foundation. Dates for the introductory weekend course are: 24th-25th June, 15th – 16th July or 5th-6th August 2006, and the extended four day course will be held 2nd -5th September. Prices start at £120 for the weekend course, excluding accommodation and meals.

For more information and to book, visit www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk or email: info@seawatchfoundation.org.uk or call: 01545 561 227

February-March highlights

In general February and March have been relatively quiet in England and Wales, while Scotland has had its share of Risso's dolphins, harbour porpoises and bottlenose dolphins. Unfortunately, strandings of sperm whales and a humpback whale on the east coast of England (*check with Hanna that these are all listed; they don't appear to be; the humpback surely was in April*) and regular strandings of common dolphins on the south coast have instead kept our regional coordinators busy.

The Isle of Man has had some interesting Risso's sightings this winter in addition to the more usual bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises, and a minke whale was seen very early on in the season, off Douglas Head on 19th March. Harbour porpoises were reported from Blackpool on 15th, 16th and 17th March and in the Bristol Channel, off Weston-super-Mare, on 12th March.

Spring is well on its way now so it's time to get out there and get watching! If you feel a bit rusty after the winter, remember that your regional coordinators run training days and are more than happy to help you get back on track. Plus, as in previous years, Sea Watch is running training courses in New Quay every month of the summer. See above or the website for more information!

Hanna Nuuttila

As always, please send your raw sightings data to Hanna Nuuttila, Sea Watch Foundation sightings coordinator, at:

<hanna.nuuttila@seawatchfoundation.org.uk>

Regional Roundup February and March 2006

Northern Scotland: Caithness

From Colin Bird, NE Scotland observer

Risso's dolphins and harbour porpoises were seen at Lybster Viewpoint around the 4th February.

Moray Firth

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

We have very little to report from February and March. I understand there have been a few porpoises about but have not received details. I did a couple of watches at Chanonry Point and the Fort George area but saw nothing. Bob Reid (from the Scottish Agricultural Centre) reported the stranding of a young Sowerby's beaked whale on Culbin Sands, which was found on 26th February. The animal was around 3 metres long. No necropsy was performed due to decomposition but the skeleton has been collected for National Museums of Scotland.

The planning for the formation of an Inverness based Sea Watch Group is moving apace. Peter Evans will give a presentation on "Whales & Dolphins of Northern Scotland" on 15th May 2006 at 7.30pm in the Inverness Museum. All are welcome.

North East Scotland

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

February highlights: Records were sparse and involved only two species. Porpoise were reported on only one date, the 12th when there were two seen off Strathstevan, one seen off Brora and two seen off Lybster. Risso's dolphin continued to be present off the Caithness coast with four seen off Lybster by Colin Bird on 4th and two seen off the same site by Colin on 12th. Colin said that the sighting on 4th was his best for six months.

March highlights: Three species were recorded in March, half as many again as in February! The start of the month produced no records at all, but there was a brief let up in the winter weather towards the end of the month. The first cetaceans were seen on 17th when Jennie Bird spotted two porpoise from the Ferry just off the island of Stroma (just outside north east Scotland, so technically the first for Caithness). This was followed on 18th by a single porpoise seen off Golspie, a single porpoise off Lybster and two Risso's dolphins seen only 300-400m off Whaligoe steps by Colin Bird. On the 19th four porpoise were seen off Whaligoe, with another four seen also seen by Colin on 22nd. The 22nd proved to be a great day for Colin with two to three Risso's dolphins seen off Lybster and possibly the same animals seen later the same day when he spotted three off Whaligoe.

North Grampian

From Pete MacDonald, regional coordinator for North Grampian

Aberdeen was the place to be during February with large groups of bottlenose dolphins feeding and loitering around the harbour. The first week saw group sizes of 10-30. Bottlenose dolphins were also seen near Chanonry Point and towards the Inner Moray Firth.. On the 6th February, 30+ bottlenose dolphins were seen heading into the Firth at Finecht. A dead harbour porpoise stranded at Strathlene. On the 1st March the sea was bright with white horses and the snow was so thick there was no chance of sea watching. The bad weather stayed with us for the best part of two weeks. Sightings began to pick up again towards the end of the month and bottlenose dolphins were recorded off the viewpoint at Findochty and off Longhead on 30th March. Harbour porpoise were seen at Chanonry Point, Lossiemouth and Findochty. In the Inner Moray Firth seven dolphins were seen at the Sutors.

South Grampian

From Kevin Hepworth, regional coordinator for South Grampian

Cetacean sightings in February were again dominated by bottlenose dolphins with all of the 15 records received being of this species and all but one from the Aberdeen area. However, February sightings were down compared with the previous month and probably reflected decreased effort due to prevailing bad weather conditions rather than a drop in sightings. This trend continued well into March with deep snow on ten days at the start of the month. The only bottlenose dolphin sighting from outside the Aberdeen area came from Stonehaven Bay on the 14th February, when a school of 20+ were seen. Bottlenose dolphin numbers reached a peak on the 5th February with 32 seen from Torry Battery. Other notable reports were of 25 from Torry Battery on the 8th. As in January, calm seas meant a vessel-based survey was possible with good encounters with bottlenose dolphins.

March saw a decrease in sightings from February with just eight reports received - all of which were of bottlenose dolphins from Aberdeen Harbour. The maximum recorded count was 16 off Girdleness on the 19th. Notably during the several feet of snow on the 7th March, ten dolphins were spotted heading north past Greg Ness and later relocated in Aberdeen Harbour. Finally, a dead sperm whale stranded north end of Forvie Sands on the 23rd March.

West Sutherland**Andy Summers, Sutherland Highland Ranger**

We received regular sightings of harbour porpoise during February and March from Stoer lighthouse and around Scourie, confirming they do stay around here all year. Great views were seen by many of two porpoises lunging at a shoal of fish with lots of gannets diving into the melee. On the 9th February a dead common dolphin was washed up at Drumbeg but it was too decomposed to see any obvious cause of death. Finally, the first single killer whale of the year was seen by the boatman near Handa Bird Reserve on 30th March.

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

Unfortunately we have more strandings than sightings to report for this period. Bizarrely, a porpoise fin was found behind one of the hides in the Hauxley nature reserve just outside of Amble on the 21st February. The next day a juvenile porpoise was found on the beach at Druridge Bay, apparently unmarked. Sadly another porpoise, this time an undamaged adult, was found again at Druridge Bay on the 28th, which ended a month without sightings. March 1st heralded a sighting of five porpoises heading north early morning at Cresswell followed by a sighting of two porpoises off Lizard Point feeding only 50m offshore. These were the only sightings in March. March strandings included a juvenile porpoise found at Cambois Beach (just north of Blyth) on the 22nd with head damage, and another juvenile further up the coast at Bamburgh with fin damage. The next day a sub-adult was found at Whitley Bay in an undamaged but thin state. The Cambois and Whitley Bay animals were sent to the Natural History Museum in London for autopsy. On the 26th, another juvenile porpoise was found on the beach at Longhoughton, again with head damage. Finally a sub-adult was found on the 28th in an undamaged state at Druridge Bay.

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

It has been very quiet in East Anglia with only two records for March and nothing in February. The March sightings were of three harbour porpoises at Dunwich, Suffolk on the 3rd, and a dead porpoise was washed up on Horsey Island, Essex.

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

It has been a relatively quiet couple of months but an unidentified dolphin was spotted near Cuckolds Point during February. Six seal sightings were reported - one of which was seen up towards Twickenham, and the rest in and around the Isle of Dogs. During March, five seal sightings were reported, two of which were seen in the Docklands area, one in Barking Reach, one out at Tilbury and one in the mouth of the River Crouch.

Southern England: Kent**From Jonathan Bramley, regional coordinator for North Kent**

Several dead cetaceans have been reported so far this year, possibly the result of bycatch. A harbour porpoise was found washed up on the beach near Whitstable on 2nd March and was collected by the Natural History Museum for post mortem. An unidentified dolphin, described as sub-adult washed up on the 9th February. Finally a harbour porpoise, which had been cut in half (possibly drowned and cut away from a net) was found at Sandwich Bay on 1st April.

A seal (probably common) was reported from Milwall Docks (London Docklands) on 28th March, and seals (mainly common with very occasional grey) are now reported lying on sandbanks at the mouth of the River Stour, near Sandwich.

Please note that on 17th June, Sea Watch in Kent is holding its annual training event in marine mammal identification and ecology. Cost is £30 for this one-day course. For more information contact Jon Bramley on 01227 750092.

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

March saw the first good sightings of bottlenose dolphins in Sussex. The first sighting occurred near the Brighton Marina on Saturday 18th March. Three separate sightings of the same dolphins were made over a 20-minute period from a sail boat. The dolphins were roughly 500 m from the shore. Two bottlenose dolphins (probably the same

animals) were also sighted on the Sunday 19th March. The first sighting was at Brighton, and the second sighting, a few hours later, occurred several miles westwards along the coast near Shoreham harbour.

On a sadder note, one of the Selsey dolphins previously reported present in the area between February and September last year (nicknamed Adidas because of a fin marking) may have been involved in a serious accident in February. A solitary dolphin was present in Portsmouth Harbour the latter part of last year and early this year. It regularly interacted with vessels and was named "Spinnaker" by Portsmouth locals. Sadly, this dolphin was involved in a bad collision with a vessel (9th February 2006) which removed a large part of its tail fluke. I have not been able to obtain good images of this dolphin to compare with the Selsey animal, but a couple of poor quality pictures suggest that it could be the same individual. I am endeavouring to get better images of the Portsmouth dolphin to resolve this. Colin Stratton who regularly sails between Chichester and Brighton (and reported these dolphins on several occasions last year) has not seen Adidas or his companions this year.

On 24th February, an oiled and very old and sick grey seal was washed up on the rocky shore at Cuckmere Haven (near the Seven Sisters), East Sussex. It was attended by BDMLR, and it was decided after examination by the vet and much deliberation that the best course of action for this seal was to euthanase it. A healthy common seal was reported off Selsey on the 18th and 19th March. There is a small colony of common seals that live in the nearby Chichester Harbour.

We are very keen to get more offshore records in Sussex and so in March I ran an ID session for a fellow tutor running a navigation course. It is hoped that at least some of these sailors will report sightings in the future. As usual, we took part in the local Sussex Biodiversity Seminar. I have been Sussex County recorder for marine mammals for nine years, which promotes record data sharing and helps raise the profile of cetaceans locally.

A great boost to the Sussex regional activities came in the form of a grant of £5000, awarded to the Sussex group by VERITAS DGC Inc., which has been involved with Sea Watch Foundation to limit possible impact on cetaceans during their geophysical survey work. This award followed an illustrated presentation we made at Veritas at the end of 2005. The funding has been provided to help run and expand the educational programme in Sussex (as a marine educator, this has always been a keen interest of mine and will make a great difference to what we can offer). The funding has been divided into two areas: visiting local schools and educational events, and developing further educational materials which will also be made available for use in other Sea Watch regions, directly by schools or by other regional coordinators.

South West England: Cornwall

From David Ball, Silver Dolphin Centre, Porthleven

February has been a good month for sightings, with 14 reports of harbour porpoise around the Cornish coast, 15 reports of bottlenose dolphins and two confirmed sightings of fin whales. The fin whales were reported by Orca Sea-Faris of Falmouth who have reported fin whales in the past in the same area at this time of the year. Records show that the new year often brings these baleen whales along our south coast. Harbour porpoises have been seen in small groups, some with young, all round the coast. The bottlenose dolphins have been sighted most on the north coast. This seems to be following a trend for sightings at this time of the year.

March sightings were not so good but then neither was the weather, which has been cold and windy making it poor for standing on cliff tops or being out on boats. There was only one confirmed sighting of harbour porpoise and 14 reports of bottlenose dolphins. I expect the porpoise were still out there but conditions probably made it impossible to see them. The bottlenose dolphins may be seen on both coasts. We seem to have a small group of adults in the St Ives Bay area and a second group of adults, possibly with calves, staying on the south coast. This might mean two separate groups or one group splitting in half to feed or look after the young. Hopefully our studies over the next few months may give us a better picture. As the weather seems to be getting better, this may influence the distribution of the two groups.

As always, we are continuing our projects studying the movement of cetaceans around the Cornish Coast and had a visit at the centre from Marijke De Boer a researcher funded to record sightings in Cornwall, where we discussed possible training courses in recording techniques for the Centre's volunteers and staff. The Cornish Marine Life Rescue group has a training day on June 3rd, starting at 10.00 am to 4.30 pm. This course is free and membership of the group is free. Please contact the Centre to book as there is a limited number of places.

Again we have been busy with recording by-catch with horrific numbers of dead cetaceans being washed up on our beaches. All our information will also be forwarded to the Cornwall Wildlife Trust and the Natural History Museum. A full report is available so please contact the Centre if you require a copy (email conservation@silverdolphin.freeserve.co.uk, www.silverdolphinmarineconseervationanddiving.co.uk).

We are looking to fit out a yacht with hydrophones and recording gear for the summer. If you have any information on suppliers or equipment that you have used we would be grateful for your information.

Finally, our thanks go to Captain Keith Leeves of Orca Sea-Faris, of Falmouth, and Duncan Jones of Marine Discovery and Adrian Thomas of Mermaid boat trips both operating out of Penzance, for all their help and reports and sightings.

From Dan Jarvis, Cornwall Wildlife Trust

(information reproduced with permission of the Cornwall Wildlife Trust www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/).

For this period there have been more sightings compared to last time... but less species! Only four cetacean species were identified off the Cornish coast during February and March compared with five for December and January. As usual though, harbour porpoises and bottlenose dolphins have been seen much more frequently than the rest.

As reported previously, three whales, probably fin whales, were seen off SE Cornwall during January. It is thought that one or two of these animals were still around in February as one was seen off Dodman Point near Mevagissey on the 2nd with about 50 common dolphins nearby, and either the same or another fin whale was reported on the local BBC News on the 7th from the same area. There have been no more reports since then so the whales must have moved off elsewhere - until next year....

The superpod of common dolphins has now dispersed as well. There was only one confirmed sighting of this species for these two months and that was the pod of 50 mentioned above traveling and feeding with the fin whale. Bottlenose dolphins have been visiting their usual haunts around St Ives, Hayle and Godrevy with a spate of sightings from February 2nd - 5th and again between March 15th - 20th. Other locations where bottlenose were seen were at Porthtowan, Hannafore near Looe, Porthtowan and Rump's Point where a group of 16 was seen in conjunction with around 200 gulls and gannets feeding. One or two minor disturbance incidents have been observed where boats or jet skis have been too close to pods of bottlenose dolphins, but as Easter approaches, more serious incidents are bound to happen with the influx of tourists to the West Country and other coastal destinations around the UK.

Harbour porpoise were seen mostly around the South West peninsula from the Brisons near Sennen to Mousehole in Mount's Bay. The latter of these sightings was of a fairly large pod of 10 individuals that appeared to be chasing a shoal of fish. Fish weren't the only ones being chased though, as an interesting report came from St Ives Coastwatch on February 24th of three porpoises being chased across the bay by larger cetaceans, probably bottlenose dolphins. Other porpoise sightings of interest include that of a young calf on February 19th, and a recognisable individual, that has been seen before, observed on the 23rd of the same month. Both reports came from the Porthgwarra/Gwennap area near Land's End. The remaining sightings came from Rosemullion Bay and Crackington Haven. There were a few sightings of unidentified dolphins from Cape Cornwall, Stepper Point, Whitsand Bay, and Godrevy.

The common seal that has been around for a few months has not been seen since it visited the Isles of Scilly in January, but there have been a few more basking shark sightings. Lone sharks were observed at Talland, Sennen and Cadgwith, while a pair were spotted at Gwennap.

British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org) medics were called out on March 28th to a dolphin swimming close inshore at Praa Sands. On arrival, medics were then informed that there might in fact be two animals. However, after a thorough search of the entire beach, only one dolphin was located and was observed for around two hours. It was first seen at the back of the surf circling, before suddenly coming close inshore to about waist-deep water and quickly moving south before stopping and coming in even closer. Medics had just gotten into their dry suits as the dolphin disappeared and was never seen again as dusk fell, even after an extensive search of a large part of the surrounding coastline early the following morning. Despite being so close inshore, the species could not be identified, although bottlenose dolphin and harbour porpoise were ruled out. It is thought that it was most likely to be a common dolphin though.

The Cornwall Wildlife Trust's Strandings Network (www.cwtstrandings.org) continues to be busy with a steady stream of cetacean and seal carcasses washed up even as I write this article. However there was another bad patch in March when at least 10 common dolphin carcasses came ashore in one day around Falmouth and the Lizard. The total number of cetacean bodies reported so far this year had already passed the 100 mark by the beginning of April. The Trust also recently launched a Marine Appeal to help gather support and funding for the valuable work done by many volunteers, and also to publicise the Marine Bill, which has recently been drafted by the Government. More information on the appeal can be found at http://shop.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/product_info.php?cPath=32&products_id=86

The National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn.html) has continued to release rehabilitated grey seals, and also taken in a couple more injured pups including one from the Channel Islands, called 'Pacific'. A few of the released pups have been spotted and reported back to the Sanctuary by people out walking the coast paths or seal watching. All pups released by the Sanctuary have rear flipper tags with individual identification numbers on so that each one can be tracked to show where seals move, and hat tagging has been used on some seals with great success in getting more feedback over the last few years. Some of their seals have been known to travel to the

Isles of Scilly, Devon, Wales and even Ireland, and it is hoped that more results can be gathered to back up this data and help with management plans for conservation purposes of the Celtic Fringe population. Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) has been busy lately too, with two new reports on the state of the main seal colony studied by CSG members due for release soon, postcards in the works, and also a localised Marine Code of Conduct to reduce disturbance and harassment of marine animals around St Ives Bay. The code is being printed at present and copies will be forwarded to the harbour authorities in the area and boat, diving and jet ski clubs as well. This code comes just in time for the busy summer tourist season and a huge increase in incidents of harassment. Dolphins and seals in particular were badly affected last year and it is hoped this year that a more proactive approach can be taken to ensure the well-being of our animals.

In February, the CWT Strandings Network Forum was held at Truro College and many Network volunteers from Devon and Cornwall attended, to hear lectures on various subjects including a very interesting one on cetacean parasites, and also took part in practical demonstrations to update recording techniques using inflatable life size models. A Marine Mammal medic course was also held in Looe following a surge in membership requests after the Thames whale and Cumbrian dolphin incidents at the beginning of the year. Cornwall Seal Group members gave a talk to personnel at the 771 Search and Rescue Squadron at RNAS Culdrose at the beginning of April with the aim of reducing airborne disturbance of seals during the breeding season. Low flying aircraft are one of the more frequent causes of mass stampedes of seals down haul-out beaches and into the sea – with the potential for causing injuries in the process as they scramble over rocks, and possibly causing abandonment of unweaned pups. The talk was very well received by the Squadron and positive action has been taken.

South West England: Devon and Dorset

The Durlston bottlenose dolphins have arrived, with plenty of sightings in February and March. Jo Wharam reported the first sighting for this period, of three dolphins from Double Dykes at Hengistbury Head on 1st February. Most sightings in February were of one individual from Peveril Point, Durlston Head and Swanage, but seven individuals were seen in St Ives Bay on 16th February. Larger groups were seen in March, with a group of eight seen on six occasions, particularly around the Hayle area. Harbour porpoise were reported four times. On three occasions two individuals were seen (from Nash Point, 12th February, St Ives Bay, 24th February, and Penberth Cove, 15th March), but on 11th March seven individuals were seen from Sand Point near Weston-Super-Mare.

Wales

From Hanna Nuuttila, sightings coordinator, Sea Watch Foundation Wales.

February remained quiet in Wales on the cetacean front except for harbour porpoises, which were seen off New Quay several times. At times they came very close to shore, feeding on the surf off Dolau beach. Sightings picked up during March, with more porpoise reported in New Quay, Aberystwyth and Mwnt. Bottlenose dolphins were seen in Aberystwyth off Marine Terrace on the 11th and a group of four dolphins were reported off Ynys Las on the 22nd. The first two dolphins in New Quay harbour were seen on the 21st March by the RNLi crew and another sighting of one dolphin was made on the 27th off Dolau beach by a local fisherman. In South Wales, there have been some reports of harbour porpoise from Nash Point in mid February and reports of common dolphins and Risso's off Pembrokeshire.

Isle of Man

From John Galpin, regional coordinator for the Isle of Man

Continuing rough weather has limited the number of sightings during February and March. Only six effort-based watches were completed, with only one watch recording any sightings. On the 2nd of March an extended watch throughout the afternoon yielded the welcome sight of two Risso's dolphins 2000 metres from shore. One was large with its white markings visibly extending to and along the dorsal fin, while the other somewhat smaller and entirely black. After a long period watching the pair slowly traveling northwards, they sounded just in front of my house and were not seen again. Sightings for the watch concluded with the appearance of a solitary harbour porpoise just before dusk.

Early February provided a few excellent casual sightings from both the east and west coasts. On the 3rd and 8th, Peter Canipa reported a single bottlenose dolphin just 10 m from the rocks below the Lighthouse on Douglas Head, where the cliffs fall dramatically into the sea, providing deep water access even for large cetaceans. On the 4th, Jane Young sighted 12+ bottlenose dolphins while walking the cliff top just north of Peel. Jane watched the dolphins for over an hour as they busied themselves back and forth. When she left at 17:30, the group was still actively swimming just a few hundred metres off shore.

On the evening of Friday the 17th of March, Colin Speedie and Stephen Westcott each gave enthralling and entertaining lectures in the Centenary Hall in Peel. Colin talked about his research, monitoring programmes, and

sightings during the 2005 season. With much of the talk reflecting activity in and around the Irish Sea, the relevance and immediacy of his work delighted an eager audience. The evening continued with Stephen presenting a new and enthusiastic appreciation for seals, particularly relevant as the Island is home to a substantial population of Atlantic Greys and a lesser number of Commons. The same weekend 36 participants received training under their WiSe Scheme for boat operators involved in tourism, conservation and monitoring. The course was organized and hosted by Dr Fiona Gell, the Marine Conservation Officer for the Manx Government.

On Sunday 19th March, around 15 gathered at the Sound, overlooking the Calf of Man, for a field trip to monitor and observe the seal colony. Throughout the day, both Colin and Stephen gave freely their knowledge and experience as they answered a barrage of questions. While most concentrated on the seals, Tara Dunk explored further along the coast where she sighted a pair of harbour porpoise only a few yards from the shore. At 16:00 on the 19th of March, Charles Guard spotted a large whale, probably a minke, as he explored the caves around Douglas Head. The whale approached to within 30 m of the shore, remaining for over an hour. This area of deep water at the Archway/Toll Bridge is proving to be highly productive for sightings, and it is hoped to find someone local who can undertake regular watches at that location.

Republic of Ireland

From Pádraig Whooley, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group sightings coordinator

The following sightings were recorded in the Republic of Ireland between February and March. Harbour porpoise were the most commonly sighted species, with 37 individual reports. Twenty-four bottlenose dolphin sightings were reported, with an average group size of approximately 11 individuals. Common dolphins were seen on nine occasions in groups of roughly 22 (on average). Killer whales were spotted twice, as a pair off Caher Island, Co. Mayo on 8th February and a single individual off Spanish Point, Co. Clare on 25th March. Five fin whale sightings were recorded, one of two whales off Hook Head, Wexford on 10th February while all four other sightings were of one to three individuals off Ardmore Head, Waterford. A humpback whale was reported off Hook Head on the 10th and 12th February. Finally three minke whale sightings were recorded, the first offshore of Cork on 19th February and the others off Sleah Head, Co. Kerry on 24th and 29th March.

Comprehensive analysis of all Irish cetacean sightings is available through the IWDG website www.iwdg.ie, which provides on line access and interrogation of over 8,000 validated sightings

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 01865 717276.