

sea watch FOUNDATION



Bottlenose dolphins

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Editorial

Welcome to the winter edition of the news sheet which covers cetacean sightings and news from December 2009 to March 2010. The cold British winter this year meant that observing was especially difficult but despite this there were still a number of sightings to report. If you would like to contribute to future editions or have sightings to send in you can contact me at sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk.

Best wishes,

Gemma Veneruso, Sightings
Officer

NEWS & SIGHTINGS HIGHLIGHTS DECEMBER 2009-MARCH 2010

A very big thanks to Pure Chesil CD, who are donating a proportion of all sales to SWF. Relax to the sounds of the sea on the Jurassic coastline. Pure Chesil CD combines the calming and melodic sound of the waves and the soothing drag of the pebbles - allowing you to reach an almost hypnotic and regenerative state! To find out more, go to <http://www.purechesil.co.uk/>.



The British winter well and truly kicked off in December with very cold conditions throughout the country that was to last the next few months. As usual during the winter

months, sightings tend to be few and far between, generally because of poor watching conditions. However, this did not deter some very dedicated observers, such as Colin Bird, who braved watches out in the snow!

Despite the weather, there were still nine species reported in these months, including fin whale, minke whale, humpback whale, long-finned pilot whale, bottlenose dolphin, short-beaked common dolphin, Risso's dolphins, and harbour porpoise, with a few surprise sightings.

Harbour porpoise were widely distributed throughout the country, as normal, but particularly off the coasts of Norfolk, North Wales and North Devon.



The bottlenose dolphins were regularly spotted when weather allowed, in the Moray Firth, off Aberdeenshire, in the Hebrides, Jersey, Cornwall and around North and West Wales. The majority of the Cardigan Bay population is thought to move northwards in winter towards Anglesey and the Isle of Man where the species can be seen in large groups and this held true this year, with a number of groups reported of up to 90 animals. SWF winter surveys using photo ID around Anglesey confirmed that many of the animals are those that are known to summer in Cardigan Bay. Bottlenose dolphins were seen unusually far north in NE Scotland in February, as they followed the John O' Groats Ferry from Buckie in the Moray Firth all the way up to Wick! Further south in the country, there was an even more unusual report of a bottlenose dolphin off Norfolk, also in February. This ID has yet to be confirmed; however, if this is true it will be one of the southernmost records on the east coast of England.

Common dolphins were spotted in a number of locations including Cornwall, the Bristol Channel, off Lundy Island, in Ireland and Southwest Scotland, including a group of 100 animals seen off Portpatrick, Dumfries & Galloway in March.

Sightings of Risso's dolphin began to pick up in March with records from Peterhead in northeast Scotland. Also in this region, further south off Stonehaven, there was an unusual report of a possible humpback whale in March. The animal was described as far too large to

be a minke whale. Humpback whales were also spotted in Shetland and Co. Waterford, Ireland.



Of other large whale species, fin whales were recorded off Ireland as per usual, but two animals also made an appearance off Gwennap Head, Cornwall. This species is often seen off Southwest England in the winter months. Sadly, a fin whale was found washed up in North Cornwall on the 22nd February.

The most well known stranding of the winter in Europe must be the sad mass stranding of sperm whales in the Adriatic Sea. On the 10th and 11th December, seven sperm whales stranded on the coast of the Gargano Peninsula, Italy. Mass strandings of sperm whales in the Mediterranean are extremely rare, including a stranding of 16 individuals off the coast of Sicily in 1734 and a stranding of six in the northern Adriatic Sea in 1853. At least one of the males has been identified as an individual that was seen a number of times over the past nine years in the eastern Ionian Sea. It remains unclear as to what caused this unusual event.

Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Send in your sightings to Gemma at sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk

REGIONAL ROUNDUPS

SHETLAND

Compiled by Kate Green, SWF volunteer

December 2009 was a quiet month with just two sightings, the first of which was a pod of eight killer whales on the 8th just off Fetlar. The second sighting consisted of two humpback whales on the 31st in Bluemull Sound.

The beginning of 2010 started off slowly with recorded sightings for both January and February. However, killer whale reports picked up again in March with three sightings; a pod of four to five animals was seen on the 5th in Breiwick Bay off Lerwick Harbour, at least six killer whales on the 23rd in Yell Sound and a pod of five on the 28th around Trondra and Scalloway. However, the most notable sighting was a bearded seal which appeared in Mid Yell Voe on 4th January and was seen at intervals throughout the rest of the period and into April.



ORKNEY

There were no sightings reported from Orkney.

NORTH SCOTLAND

Compiled by Kate Green, SWF volunteer

It was not until February that sightings reports came in for North Scotland. On the first day of the month three Risso's dolphins were seen by Karen Munro in Thurso Bay. A few days later on the 4th, two harbour porpoise, an adult and a juvenile were feeding in Dunnet Bay, reported by Paul Castle.

Paul then reported another two sightings in March, both of which were groups of harbour porpoise seen off Scarfskerry, in the Pentland Firth. The groups of two and four were seen on the 22nd and the 25th respectively.

NORTHEAST SCOTLAND

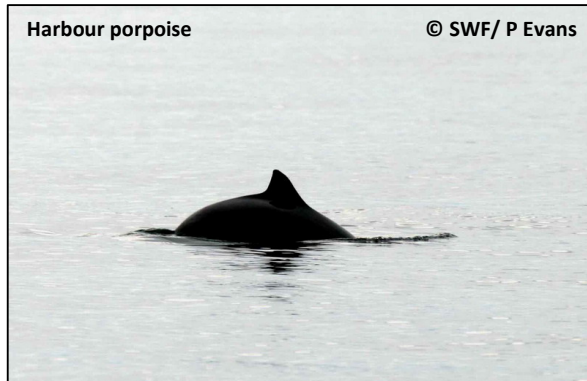
Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for Northeast Scotland (Duncansby Head-Sutors of Cromarty)

December was a very challenging month for Sea Watchers, with very cold temperatures and heavy snow lying in most areas of N.E Scotland. Nevertheless, three sightings of harbour porpoise were made. Three porpoises were seen from Swiney Hill, Lybster on the 13th and 27th, and Colin Carter reported a sighting from his boat on the 16th.

January seemed to carry on where December left off, continuing with very cold and windy conditions and yet more snow. I did watches from Swiney Hill in Lybster, when the wind that was plaguing the area dropped, but the only sighting of the month was on the 31st with two harbour porpoise sighted.

February 2010 showed some improvement over the two previous months with six sightings recorded. A single harbour porpoise was seen from Swiney Hill, Lybster on the 7th and 2 single and one pair on 20th.

The best sighting of the month came from Ivor Thomas of the John O'Groats Ferry returning from Buckie. When they were 10 miles south of Wick, they found they had dolphins swimming in their bow wave. They only noticed the dolphins when they broke away from the boat and swam off. The sighting was classed as 12 dolphin species although it is thought they were in all probability bottlenose dolphins that had followed them from the Buckie area. That behaviour has been recorded before.



Six sightings were recorded in March, and again it was mostly harbour porpoise that put in an appearance at Swiney Hill Lybster on the 21st with a pair and a single porpoise being seen. Also, what may have been a possible bottlenose dolphin constantly breaching, was seen. However, it was very distant to confirm and therefore entered as a dolphin species.

On the 14th the first Risso's dolphin was spotted from Swiney Hill, Lybster, heading southeast. This deep water species with its distinctive dorsal and white scarring is a regular visitor in spring to the waters off Lybster, probably due to the abundance of squid found in the waters of the Moray Firth.

I did spend some time during the month watching from the Whaligoe Steps, Ulbster where on the 7th. I spotted two pairs of harbour porpoise.

It will be interesting to see how the coldest winter in 40 years will affect the sightings during 2010.

MORAY FIRTH

Written by Alan Airey, Regional Co-ordinator for Southern Moray Firth (Kessock-Cullen)

After one of the coldest winters for years, along with the long dark nights this far north in the Moray Firth, it was no surprise to have only 19 sightings for the months of December through to March.

December did have a few calm sunny days, and on these the local bottlenose dolphins were seen off Findochty and Portknockie, with the biggest group being of 25 bottlenose including four calves on the 8th. The only porpoise sighting came on the 11th and was seen 4km NW of Burghead in a mirror like sea.



January was particularly cold and snowy, and the only sightings came at the end of the month. A single bottlenose dolphin was foraging in Burghead Bay on the 22nd. The next day, six bottlenose were leaping near Alturlie Point, near Inverness, and a further eight in Rosemarkie Bay.

Four sightings of bottlenose dolphins along the coast between Burghead and Lossiemouth were recorded in February, with a group of 35 seen on the 21st. A single sighting of bottlenose dolphins was recorded off Chanonry Point, but the usual dolphins are there or nearby on a daily basis.

March produced three sightings of bottlenose off Burghead, with 50 seen on the 8th. On the 24th, five bottlenose dolphins were seen really close to Cullen Harbour.

SOUTH GRAMPIAN

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

December began with five sightings. Bottlenose dolphins were recorded three times from Stonehaven, with six animals being the largest group size. There were two harbour porpoise reports in this month from Johnshaven.



Bottlenose dolphins were recorded just twice in January on consecutive days, the 23rd and 24th. The animals were sighted from their usual haunts - Torry Battery, Aberdeen and Inverbervie.

Thanks to a series of systematic watches at Stonehaven performed by Ian Sim, Regional Coordinator for Findon to Arbroath, ten sightings of bottlenose dolphins were recorded from this location in February. This included a large group of 27 animals seen on the 8th. There was also five probable harbour porpoise reported from Nigg Bay on the 21st.

Sightings continued to pick up in March with a number of sightings of bottlenose dolphins from Ian Sim at Stonehaven once more. This species was also recorded at Torry Battery on five occasions during the month. On the 5th March, off the Longhaven cliffs, Peterhead, a harbour porpoise and three Risso's dolphins were reported by Kevin Hepworth, Regional Coordinator for Peterhead to Findon. Another very interesting report came a few days later on the 9th, back in Stonehaven where a possible humpback whale was reported!

SOUTH-EAST SCOTLAND

There were no sightings recorded in South-east Scotland.

NORTH-EAST ENGLAND

There were no sightings recorded in North-east England.

EASTERN ENGLAND

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Harbour porpoise sightings were the most common over the winter months as is expected from this region. This species was recorded at Walcott and Mundesley, Norfolk in December by Mick Fiszer. An unusual sighting of a possible minke whale was reported off East Tilbury, Essex on the 31st.



With no sightings in January, February brought another surprise. A possible bottlenose dolphin was recorded off Holme next the Sea, Norfolk, which is yet to be confirmed. If this ID is correct, it would be one of the southernmost records of this species on the east coast that we know of. The rest of the month was much more like normal with harbour porpoises recorded at Hopton on Sea and Walcott in Norfolk and off Pakefield Cliffs, Suffolk.

SOUTHERN ENGLAND

No sightings were recorded in Southern England.

CHANNEL ISLANDS

Written by Bertram Bree, Regional Coordinator for the Channel Islands

Despite some very bad winter weather in the European Channel Isles from December to March, 20 or more bottlenose dolphins were seen in a group off Gorey harbour on the east coast of Jersey on 2nd January. They were feeding close inshore due to mild spells when fish are active close inshore near Gorey in mid-winter. This probably results from the warmer sea temperatures being experienced in recent winters due to currents which push past Jersey originating from the warmer southern part of the Atlantic. This maintains a milder climate in the western Channel extending to Jersey, compared with much of Western Europe, thus permitting olive trees at Gorey to bear olives even in mid winter, and palm trees to survive there also with lush blossoms due to the mild climate from the warmish maritime breezes!

On the 4th January, whilst passing east of the Minquiers reef in Jersey waters, at least one bottlenose dolphin was noted moving south towards St Malo. This is an area known for good numbers of bottlenose dolphins present near the Minquiers in winter! On 31st January, at least ten bottlenose dolphins were in Grouville Bay RAMSAR Reserve, and it wasn't until 5th March that around the same number were again seen in this area, a regular feeding site off Gorey harbour.

The scarcity of sightings was merely due to poor number of hours spent looking, due to bad weather from December to March with sea conditions too rough to merit a session monitoring the waters offshore. It is possible that the dolphins were there all winter, in particular in the Minquiers reef area, but with repeated poor conditions to do any monitoring it was not possible to determine if the area is used by fewer animals compared to the summer, when they come close inshore regularly following fish to feed! Interestingly, the winter was relatively good for fishing close inshore due to fairly high sea temperatures for winter with some very big fish being caught very close in when normally most fish move out to deeper waters.

Interest in our dolphins was shown by French groups including GECC who now have a new website up and running. The islands north of St Malo have been identified as a biodiversity hotspot, and in 2012 will be designated as a national French Marine Protected Area. Information on marine mammals in this area and others around France can be seen at an exhibition now, and running until the end of autumn this year, at the Porte de Versailles Centre, Paris.

I hope people will visit the area and benefit from trips from Cancale east of St Malo by Al Lark at :-<http://www.al-lark.org>. RIB Tursiops II also operates from here, offering dolphin and seabird cruises. This area also hosts Atlantic grey seal and harbour seal populations, which generally haul out at Tomberlaine Islet.

DORSET

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF (including sightings data kindly forwarded by Durlston Marine Project)



There were 11 sightings of dolphins in the Dorset region between December and January. Most of these were recorded in December from a number of locations such as Peveril Point, Poole Bay, Church Ope Cove, and around Portland. Of these sightings, a group of four bottlenose dolphins were successfully identified at Church Ope Cove on the 20th. The species for the other sightings could not be verified.

Dolphin sightings in Portland continued into January, February and March, including 45 common dolphins spotted on the 20th February southwest of Portland Bill. There was one other sighting of five dolphins at Swanage Bay on the 26th February.

CORNWALL

Written by Dan Jarvis (sightings data reproduced with kind permission of Ray Dennis/Cornwall Wildlife Trust's Seaquest Southwest project www.ercis.co.uk/wildlife_recording/seaquest_southwest.htm and Gemma Veneruso, Sea Watch Foundation www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk).

Sightings

The winter months, and the rough weather that comes with it, have made sightings a difficult prospect this year, and although there were several observations made of harbour porpoises and bottlenose dolphins, there was a big increase in the number of dolphins that remained unidentified and overall the number of species seen was pretty low. Small groups of harbour porpoises were spotted all around the Land's End peninsula from Pendeen to Penberth Cove, while the bottlenose dolphins were more distributed, having been recorded



Bottlenose dolphin

© SWF/ G Veneruso

from Hayle, St Ives, Cape Cornwall, Sennen, Land's End and Fal Bay. The most significant sighting was a group of 20 bottlenoses seen off Porthcurno on 2nd March, unusual due to the high number of animals present – normally we have around eight in our 'local' pod. Common dolphins were seen on three occasions off

Cape Cornwall, Gunwalloe and further offshore by a boat out towards the Eddystone Lighthouse. All of these had good numbers in each pod, the most being approximately 50 animals. Unidentified dolphin species were seen several times, with the locations once again concentrated towards the west of the county around Newquay, St Agnes, Lelant, St Ives, Cape Cornwall, Sennen, and Marazion. Many of these were of small groups, so were probably bottlenose dolphins again. A single sighting of a pair of fin whales was made off Gwennap Head, some distance offshore, while even further out at Wolf Rock an unidentified large whale (most likely a fin whale again) was accompanied by a decent number of harbour porpoises on 15th December. One lucky observer also spotted a large whale's tail fluke as it dived about a mile off Coverack too, which rounds out the sightings for this period.

News

Grey seals

© SWF/ P Evans

The seal rescue season was a busy one for British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmrlr.org.uk), but finally petered out through January and February. Most of the pups that were taken for rehabilitation have at time of writing nearly all been released and those still left are almost ready to go back to the wild from the National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn1.html). March marks the period when the Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) starts to collate the previous 12 months of wild seal observations and photo-identification pictures,

and analyses it for their annual report. As many new observers have come forward in the last year, individual seals have now been tracked between various locations, joining up different colonies around Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly on an increasing scale. The 2009-10 report should throw up some very interesting new information. The Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings Network (www.cwtstrandings.org) has dealt with a number of dead stranded grey seals, harbour porpoises and common dolphins through the winter, but a couple of surprises came in the form of a white beaked dolphin at St Mawes on 16th January, while a large whale spotted offshore at Pendeen on 16th February was confirmed as a fin whale when it was finally washed up a few days later at Porthtowan, attracting significant public and media attention.

Events

Events are starting to gear up again now that we are coming out of winter. BDMLR have a couple of Medic courses coming up for the students at Newquay College and Falmouth Marine School as well as various beach demonstrations and a stand at Dive Fest 2010. A Medic named Sara Roberts has taken up the challenge of paddling from Plymouth to the Isles of Scilly to raise funds for the rescue charity and the Isles of Scilly Veterinary Support Group under the banner of Paddlefree (www.paddlefree.co.uk). The National Seal Sanctuary is running a sponsored 'Walk for Whales' again like last year to raise money for Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society campaigns. Meanwhile some staff members are in training for very challenging sponsored event with the aim of climbing the 12 highest peaks in the country in 48 hours! Cornwall Seal Group has held a series of evening talks about seals in conjunction with the National Trust and a walk at a local seal haulout spot as well, which went down well with those that attended.

Emergency numbers:

For dead cetaceans, seals, turtles, sharks etc, call the **Cornwall Wildlife Trust** hotline on 0845 2012626.

People are advised not to touch carcasses due to the risk of infection. CWT is the official recorder of dead marine wildlife in Cornwall and sends trained volunteers to tag, measure and photograph all carcasses.

For live marine animals in distress, call **British Divers Marine Life Rescue** on 01825 765546.

People are advised not to return stranded cetaceans to the water, but to instead keep the animal upright and wet, avoiding getting water in the blowhole, until trained Medics and veterinarians can make thorough health checks and give first aid. Stranded turtles should also not be returned to the water and will need urgent transport to the nearest suitable rehabilitation centre once Medics arrive to give first aid.

For live seals, call the **National Seal Sanctuary** on 01326 221361.

People are warned to not approach or handle any pups that they may find on the beach, as this can cause the mother to reject it, as well as the danger of being bitten and risk of infection. Instead, observe from a safe distance and keep other people and dogs well away to minimise distress to the animal until help arrives.

NORTH DEVON

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Thanks to the systematic watches carried out by Chris and Sharron Blackmore at Capstone Point, Ilfracombe, there were a good number of harbour porpoise sightings recorded.



Seven sightings of porpoises were spotted on six days in December, always in groups of one or two animals. There were no sightings to report in the first half of January; however, four porpoise sightings from Capstone Point were to come in the last two weeks of the month. Another ten sightings of harbour porpoise were recorded by Chris and Sharron at Capstone Point. A single porpoise was spotted between Woolacombe and Morteohoe on

the 17th. Further offshore on the 4th February, two probable short-beaked common dolphins were recorded west of Lundy during a CEFAS survey.

March came with more porpoise reports from Chris and Sharron, with two records at Capstone Point, one at Ilfracombe pier, and another from Tunnels beach.

BRISTOL CHANNEL & SOUTH WALES

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Thanks to a CEFAS survey, there were two sightings of short-beaked common dolphins to report in February. The first of these was on the 3rd when six animals were reported in the outer Bristol Channel. On the 7th, another group of six animals were seen off St Gowan. There were no further sightings recorded.

WEST WALES

Compiled by Kate Green, SWF volunteer

Two sightings were reported in December in west Wales, the first being from their usual haunt, New Quay, where two harbour porpoise were seen in the bay on the 28th. Further south in Pembrokeshire, off Dinas Head, an unidentified whale was seen on the 31st.

Sightings from New Quay continued, with two reports of bottlenose dolphins and one harbour porpoise sighting in January, and three more reports of bottlenose dolphins and one porpoise record in February.

In March, north of New Quay at Ynyslas, three bottlenose dolphins were reported on the 21st. Two days later in the southern limit of Cardigan Bay SAC between Tresaith and Aberporth a harbour porpoise was found alive entangled in netting in the shallows. RNLI crew, who were on exercise, followed up on the report and successfully freed the animal.

NORTH WALES

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

There was an impressive 21 sightings reported in December alone from North Wales, all of harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphins. Thanks to Mike Thompson, harbour porpoise were seen regularly from land throughout the month from north Anglesey off Llanbadrig and Bull Bay. At Bull Bay, Dr Peter Evans, SWF Director, regularly saw groups of harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphins from his living room window! Both species were also recorded on a number of occasions in December during SWF surveys onboard 'Seekat'. Large groups of bottlenose dolphins were seen in the north and north east of Anglesey



during these surveys, including a group of 60 animals encountered on the 10th at Red Wharf Bay. Groups of this size are expected at this time of year and many have been identified using photo ID as individuals that are seen regularly in Cardigan Bay in the summer. On the same day, 25 bottlenose dolphins were reported off Marianglas, East Anglesey.

In contrast, there were just three sightings in January, all from Mike Thompson. Two of these were harbour porpoise sightings off Llanbadrig and another from Bull Bay.

Five more porpoise sightings from Mike came in February, again from Llanbadrig and Bull Bay. Relatively large groups of 25 and 30 bottlenose dolphins continued to be recorded on survey in north and northeast Anglesey as well as from land, as reported by Harry Sheils in Bull Bay on the 20th and 26th. There were also porpoise reports further west of the Island at South Stack and East Middle Mouse at the end of February and beginning of March. Off the mainland coast of North Wales, there was a report of two harbour porpoise on the 20th at Pensarn beach, Conwy.

In March, there was another sighting of harbour porpoise from Llanbadrig, and both porpoises and bottlenose dolphins were seen from land at Bull Bay.

ISLE OF MAN

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF (including sightings data kindly forwarded by MWDW)

The winter in the Isle of Man saw appearances from four species, the most common being the bottlenose dolphin with 12 sightings between December and February. Large groups of these animals tend to be seen in the Irish Sea in winter months reaching group sizes of 35, 45, 50 and even 90 animals. Prime locations for these sightings included off Dalby and Douglas. It is shown in the past by photo ID that at least some of these animals are part of the population inhabiting Cardigan Bay in the summer months.

There were also seven reports of harbour porpoise throughout the winter, seen predominantly from the Arches near Douglas Harbour but also making an appearance at Laxey Bay, Langness and Glen Maye.

Other species included a single minke whale reported on the 9th January at Peel Hill, and two Risso's dolphins spotted on the 9th March off Marine Drive at Walberry.



NORTHWEST ENGLAND

There were no sightings reported in northwest England.

SOUTHWEST SCOTLAND

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Sightings of short-beaked common dolphins were reported in every month during the winter by Ian Cerexhe from Portpatrick, Dumfries & Galloway. Group sizes ranged from eight and ten, to 30 on the first day of January, and 100 on the 9th March! On this same day, 60 probable bottlenose dolphins were reported in the northern Irish Sea off Stranraer.

HEBRIDES

Written by Laura Mandleberg, Sightings Officer, HWDT (sightings provided by HWDT and SWF)

December - February

The winter has, as usual, been quiet for cetacean sightings with fewer animals in the area and even fewer people around to watch them. The two species that are present all year round are bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises, and in the three months leading up to Christmas there were just seven sightings reported, the majority being of bottlenose dolphins. Two of these reports were of harbour porpoises, one being of a larger group of around 20 animals in Loch Carron.

The prolonged spell of settled weather after Christmas meant flat calm seas throughout January and February, and this produced a good number of bottlenose dolphin sightings throughout both months across the area. There was also a second sighting of a large group of harbour porpoises, this time of 18 animals reported in the Clyde. Large groups of this species are more commonly associated with the summer months but the exceptional spotting weather for this time of year revealed that this is not always the case!

Finally, a local farmer witnessed four 'very large' whales surfacing near the shore off the Ross of Mull towards the end of January. He recounted seeing large blows from the animals, which surfaced several times in Ardanish Bay. He described 'the rolling of their large backs taking forever to surface before the small, sickle-shaped fin appeared way down the length of the back before the animal dived again'. He later watched them as they headed off towards the Isle of Colonsay, and could still see them from a huge distance away.

This is a very unusual and is a spectacular sighting for this time of year, and for such large whales seen in excellent conditions, it is perhaps surprising that we didn't receive any further reports of them. However, after all, this is the winter - a time of year we know even less about the movements of these animals.

March

The first week of March was a spectacular week for dolphin sightings, with large groups reported off the Ayrshire coast. The first group, seen off Maiden's Harbour, were confirmed to be bottlenose dolphins. We can be almost certain that they were not the Hebridean bottlenose dolphins, as there are only about 30 animals belonging to this group! However, the observer did report a group of Risso's dolphins swimming loosely with the dolphins which, together with the large group size, may indicate that the dolphins were offshore



bottlenose dolphins rather than coastal ones. Offshore bottlenose dolphins have a completely different ecology to coastal dolphins and live in much larger groups. They are also bigger in size and more robust than the coastal bottlenose dolphin. A second, similar-sized group was then reported almost a week later some 50km down the coast off Port Logan. Although we had no photographs from the second sighting to identify the

dolphins, the description and group size match the group seen the week before, and it is therefore most likely to be the same group slowly moving down the coast.

Closer to home, there were just two other reports from March, both of bottlenose dolphins. The first was of a small group of five playing around Port Askaig Harbour, Islay over a period of several days at the beginning of the month. The second was a group of three animals seen later in the month off Hynish, Tiree.

NORTHWEST SCOTLAND (MALLAIG-CAPE WRATH)

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

There was just one sighting to report from this region during the winter months. This occurred on the 2nd December and consisted of two harbour porpoises recorded at Rubh'an Dunain, Assynt, by David Haines.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Compiled by Kate Green, SWF volunteer (including sightings data kindly forwarded by IWDG)

The first half of December kicked off with four porpoise sightings totalling seven individuals. These sightings were records from the Antrim, Down and Derry coastlines. There was also one sighting of a lone bottlenose dolphin recorded during December, seen fast swimming near Black Head, County Antrim on the 20th.



In January, there were five sightings reported, consisting of harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphins in County Antrim. Two groups of 18 and 12 individuals of bottlenose were seen on the 7th in Ballygalley and on the 8th in Red Bay, respectively. One harbour porpoise was seen off Ramore Head on the 25th. In County Down, three sightings of harbour porpoise were recorded, two individuals at Grey Point on the 3rd, and two individuals at St John's Point on the 24th.

In February, two sightings were recorded, both of which were in County Down and on the same day. Harbour porpoises were seen on the 6th, firstly in the morning with aggregations of a number of small groups near Bloody Bridge, Newcastle, totalling about 19 individuals. A single animal was seen later that day off Donaghadee.

No sightings were recorded during the month of March.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Compiled by Kate Green, SWF volunteer (including sightings data kindly forwarded by IWDG)

In December, an impressive total of 48 sightings were recorded, the majority of which were taken off County Cork. There was a single sighting of a humpback whale feeding off Mill Cove, Roscarbery Bay on the 26th. A pod of seven killer whales was seen fast swimming heading east past Galley Head, County Cork on the 17th. From the coasts of County Cork and County Waterford, 11 sightings of short-beaked common dolphins were recorded, totalling 605 individuals. One sighting recorded was an estimated 300 common dolphins, seen off Mill Cove, Roscarbery Bay,



Cork on the 22nd and another group of 100 off Seven Heads on the 21st. 199 individuals of bottlenose dolphins in seven sightings were spotted; one group of 150 bottlenose dolphins was recorded off Lough Swilly, Donegal on the 16th. This is one of the largest group sizes recorded for this species in North-west Europe. Ten sightings of fin whales were recorded all off County Cork, totalling 23 individuals. Ten sightings of harbour porpoise were also recorded, in groups numbering one to five individuals. Seven sightings of large whales of unknown species were reported, the majority of which again were seen off the coast of County Cork, in addition to one at Dunabrattin Head, Waterford on the 19th (thought to be either a fin or humpback whale), and one off Hook Head, Wexford on the 31st which was observed for 180 minutes. There was one recording of an unknown dolphin species seen feeding close inshore from Cape Clear Island, Cork on the 27th, thought to be common dolphin, but questioned because of their size, dorsal fin shape and colour.

During January, there were no recorded sightings of killer whales, but there was a total of 11 humpback whale sightings, particularly towards the end of the month. They were sighted off Hook Head, Baginbun Head, and Slade Head, County Wexford. Nine unidentified large whales were recorded at the beginning of the month, seen off Roches Point, Rosscarbery Bay and Castlehaven in County Cork, Hook Head, County Wexford and Dunmore East and Ram Head in Ardmore, County Waterford. Thirteen sightings of short-beaked common dolphins were recorded, totalling 581 individuals. The largest group of 125 common dolphins was recorded on the 1st off Galley Head, County Cork. There were many sightings of harbour porpoise this month, with 18 sightings totalling 61 individuals. Fin whale sightings were fairly constant throughout January, with a total of 47 individuals seen in 16 sightings. There were six sightings of bottlenose dolphins, totalling 146 individuals. The largest group seen was 60 dolphins from Adrigole, Bantry Bay on the 23rd. One record of an unidentified dolphin species was made on the 2nd from Cape Clear Island off County Cork. These are thought to have been common dolphins.



February had a sighting of ten long-finned pilot whales, observed around 200nm south south-west of Cork Harbour during a fisheries patrol on a mackerel factory ship. There was a total of 14 humpback whales (one individual per sighting) seen mostly at the beginning of the month, either feeding or breaching. All humpback sightings were off County Wexford, apart from one sighting on the 28th off Dunmore Head, County

Kerry, which was observed for several hours. Like January, fin whale sightings were fairly continuous throughout the month, eight sightings of which were in County Wexford, totalling 25 individuals, seven sightings of which were in County Waterford totalling 17 individuals, two sightings (consisting of one and two individuals) in County Cork, and one in County Kerry. 14 sightings of short-beaked common dolphins were reported during February across four counties, totalling 755 individuals, the largest sighting of which was 150 recorded on the 10th, seen feeding in the Celtic Sea off County Waterford. 135 bottlenose dolphins had been observed from 11 sightings, most of which were recorded off County Clare. A group of 25 bottlenose dolphins was recorded off Loop Head in County Clare on the 14th, heading north. In February, harbour porpoise sightings were fewer than those

recorded in January, with a total of eight sightings and 25 individuals. There were three unidentified whale species sighted during February, and on two occasions these were thought to be of a known humpback whale, HBIRL11, seen off Carnivan Bay, Hook Head and Baginbun Head, Hook Peninsula, County Wexford on the 3rd and the 18th respectively. Four sightings of unidentified dolphins were made, on the 10th at Clogher Head, County Kerry, on the 12th at Lahinch, County Clare, on the 16th in the Celtic Sea off County Waterford, and on the 28th off Inshbafin Island, County Galway.

During March, no humpback whales were seen and there was only one sighting of three fin whales on the 1st off Ram Head in Ardmore, County Waterford. Three sightings of killer whales were recorded: the first on the 6th off Inishturk Island, County Mayo, and the other two, both on the 27th offshore West Cork at 09:30 heading towards Baltimore where they were sighted again at 18:00. Five sightings of minke whales were recorded this month. Three sightings took place off Sleah Head, County Kerry on the 13th and also the 28th at 10.30 am (one individual), and at 10.40 am (two individuals). One minke whale was observed on the 13th close inshore off Wicklow Head, County Wicklow, heading south-east. Two more sightings were recorded on the 13th and the 21st, both offshore West Cork.



Bottlenose dolphin sightings increased during the month of March by comparison with January and February, with a total of 14 sightings, but fewer individuals recorded (113 in total). There were fewer sightings this month of common dolphins (nine in total) by comparison with last month, and also fewer individuals recorded (239). The largest sighting was of 58 individuals seen off Helvic Head, County Waterford on the 28th March, widely dispersed and travelling in various directions.

Eighteen sightings of harbour porpoise were counted, totalling 60 individuals, the largest group of which was seen off Sleah Head, Co. Kerry on the 11th. Risso's dolphins made an appearance with nine seen swimming in various directions during a sighting on the 13th of March off the Blasket Islands, County Kerry. One sighting of two unidentified cetaceans was recorded on the 9th off Black Head, County Clare, heading west. These were thought to possibly be killer whales, but due to the small size and head shape, this was unconfirmed.

Two unidentified large whale species were also sighted on the 13th off Aughris Head, County Sligo, and on the 19th in the southwest of the country.

Further details on all our activities can be found at www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk or by emailing info@seawatchfoundation.org.uk.