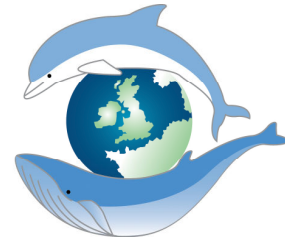


# sea watch FOUNDATION



## Editorial

Welcome to the October and November edition of the Sea Watch News Sheet. October for many marks the end of the field season and this month revealed some interesting sightings. Although sightings frequencies dropped in November there was still plenty to report. Despite the winter months, SWF is still up and running so please do continue to send in sightings and if at all possible brace the cold winter weather for watches! Our Facebook page also continues to be active and everyone is welcome to share with us their thoughts, sightings and news. If you have any queries or would like to contribute to the news sheet, please contact me at [gemma.veneruso@seawatchfoundation.org.uk](mailto:gemma.veneruso@seawatchfoundation.org.uk).

Best wishes, Gemma Veneruso, Sightings Officer.



Fin whale

© Nick Davies

**SWF completes review of Welsh Marine Mammals and Fisheries**

In many parts of the world, the incidental capture of non-target marine species in fishing gear is a significant management issue facing fishermen, fisheries managers and marine conservationists alike. Besides direct impacts by drowning due to net entanglement, marine mammals and fisheries may conflict with one another where they compete for food, or where a fishing activity modifies the habitat sufficiently to change the local ecosystem and thus the prey available to marine mammals.

Six species of cetaceans are common to Welsh waters. The overall aim of this project, funded by the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), was to determine the sensitivity of marine mammals to the different fishing gear types used within the 12 nautical mile boundary of Welsh territorial waters and to propose a methodology for visually representing such sensitivity.

The principal objectives of the project were to:

- 1) Collate, compile and review the literature on the direct and indirect impacts of interactions between marine mammals and fishing activities. Identify which fishing activities undertaken in Welsh territorial waters may interact with the marine mammals found there.
- 2) Categorise the effects of already defined fishing activities on marine mammal behaviour and activity within the 12 nm boundary of Welsh waters.
- 3) Demonstrate consideration of how other factors e.g. seasonal differences and prey availability, may also influence the effects of different fishing activities on marine mammals.
- 4) Use this information to create a sensitivity matrix (or equivalent approach) for assessing the sensitivity of marine mammals to different types and intensities of fishing.

Objectives 1-3 have been achieved in this review with objective 4 to follow.

The review concludes that in Wales, cetacean by-catch appears to be low, and involves mainly harbour porpoise. Over the last ten years, numbers of stranded porpoises that have been identified as by-catch has not exceeded five per year. Although actual by-catch numbers will almost certainly be larger than this, there is no indication that at present it has a significant impact upon the porpoise population, which in the Irish Sea is estimated to exceed 15,000 individuals (and more than this if the Celtic Shelf area is included).

Indirect effects of fisheries upon Welsh marine mammals are more difficult to ascertain because of the lack of information on the regional diets of most of the species. Competitive relations are often very complex and involve understanding the spatial coincidence of fishing and marine mammals, their respective consumption rates, as well as interactions between prey species. Scallop dredging, for example, if intensively repeated over important seabed habitats, could have a detrimental effect upon

bottlenose dolphins, although present regulations are likely to reduce any effects. Trawling and net fisheries for species such as sole, plaice, whiting, and sea bass potentially overlap the diets of several of the marine mammal species found in Welsh waters. With activities occurring mainly in the inshore sector, they are more likely to affect bottlenose dolphin, harbour porpoise and grey seal, although as yet, for reasons given above, the level of impact cannot be established.

*Full reference: Evans, P.G.H. and Hintner, K.(2010) A Review of the Direct and Indirect Impacts of Fishing Activities on Marine Mammals in Welsh Waters. CCW Policy Research Report No. 104. 160pp.*

### **UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme celebrates 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

The UK Strandings Network (CSIP) has reached its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and marked the occasion by holding a conference at the Zoological Society of London. The conference delivered a number of presentations that illustrated CSIP's work and achievements over the last 20 years. These included topics such as by-catch, inter-species aggression, disease, pollutants and gas embolism. The conference was a great success. For further information on CSIP, visit [www.strandings.com](http://www.strandings.com).

### **SWF Director, Dr. Peter Evans reports on by-catch issues at 17<sup>th</sup> ASCOBANS Advisory Committee Meeting, Bonn**

Last month Dr. Peter Evans, Director of SWF, took part in the 17<sup>th</sup> ASCOBANS (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas) Advisory Committee Meeting in Bonn, Germany. Many issues facing cetacean conservation were discussed. These included focus on the conservation of harbour porpoise in the North Sea, and the problems of by-catch, underwater noise and ship strikes.

During the meeting Dr. Peter Evans reported on the outcome of the *By-catch Workshop* in Germany in March. At this meeting, 20 countries had been represented. The use of pingers (instruments that alert cetaceans to the presence of fishing nets), fishing gear and ways to reduce seabird by-catch were all discussed, by representatives from the USA, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain. In many parts of Europe, fishermen have been reluctant to use them because of various practical difficulties. Discussions at this workshop included how



best to work closely with the fishing industry to improve incentives to use practices less likely to result in by-catch, the improvement in labelling of products from fisheries with good fishing practices, and increasing awareness amongst fishing communities of the by-catch problem and how they can help to solve it. It is hoped that an outcome of this workshop will see a change to EU Regulations, which could improve fishing practices aimed at reducing cetacean by-catch.

Written by Sharron Bosley, SWF

## SIGHTINGS SUMMARY, OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2010

As expected for this time of year, sightings rates begin to decline and there is often a significant drop in reports between October and November due to a reduction of effort, difficult weather and light conditions, and the movements of certain cetacean species to offshore waters. Despite this, nine species were recorded in these months. Happily, the reliable harbour porpoise was seen in most regions during October and November.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, there were a number of sightings of the great whales in October and November. Fin whales, the second largest animal on earth, are known to regularly use the waters off Southeast Ireland, St. George's Channel, West Wales, Shetland and North West Scotland. In these months they were seen in good numbers in the Republic of Ireland as normal, with sightings concentrated in Counties Cork, Waterford, Wexford and Kerry. On the 16<sup>th</sup> October, a fin whale was once again



seen in North West Scotland, one mile west of North Erradale. This follows the sighting of two individuals at the end of September off the Isle of Harris. Fin whales are seen only occasionally in Hebridean waters, with sightings reported just once or twice a year although some years there are no records of the whales in this region.

A humpback whale was seen off the Republic of Ireland at Black Ball Head, Co. Cork on the 30<sup>th</sup> October. There were also two unconfirmed reports of the species in November both from Co. Waterford. In addition there was a report of a probable humpback in October north of the Isle of Man.

Just a few months after the sperm whale in South Devon hit the headlines, the species came to our attention once again, this time with six of them in the Moray Firth! SWF Regional Coordinator, Alan Airey spotted the six, possibly seven, animals on the 6<sup>th</sup> from Burghead using a telescope. The animals came within three kilometres of the coast and could be seen with the naked eye, staying for most of the day. Sperm whales are occasionally seen in the Moray Firth. However, it is rare to see them in this unfamiliar habitat, particularly six of them. Happily there were no stranding reports to follow.

Unfortunately, the same could not be said for a substantial group of long-finned pilot whales that sadly stranded and died on Rutland Island, Co. Donegal. 30-40 pilot whales were first reported off the Isle of Uist, Outer Hebrides on the 27<sup>th</sup> October. The animals were dangerously close to shore and seemed to be in distress. Strandings teams were on standby in case the animals would beach. However, they managed to make it out to sea. Sadly a few days later on the 6<sup>th</sup> November, 33 whales were found dead on Rutland Island in NW Ireland, and some were photo-identified as belonging to the group seen in the Outer Hebrides ten days earlier.

It is not known what caused these animals to beach but mass stranding events of pilot whales occur worldwide. It is often the case for this species that if there are a few sick individuals that seek shallow waters, the whole group will follow and even the healthy individuals are unable to make their way back out to sea and unfortunately strand. Another possible cause of stranding is significant noise pollution such as that produced from naval exercises that may disturb and disorientate the animals. However, no naval exercises were said to have taken place during this period. Unfortunately, the condition of the whales once found was not good so it is unlikely that a cause of death will be determined from the post mortems.

There were a number of happier pilot whale sightings, with reports off the Orkney mainland, and possible sightings of the species off Hastings, East Sussex at the end of October and Trawbreaga Bay, Co. Donegal in November.



Long-finned pilot whales

© F Ugarte/ SWF

Killer whales were not seen much in these months but were reported off Shetland, east of Fetlar at the end of October and in Yell Sound on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November. Two animals were also reported off the Mullet Peninsula, Co. Mayo in mid October.



Risso's dolphin sightings were also relatively low with animals being seen in deeper waters off south Cornwall, Co. Waterford and Co. Cork. There was also a late sighting off the Isle of Man in October.

By this time of year, bottlenose dolphins tend to start moving to other areas or offshore in various parts of the country. In October, sightings of dolphins in southern Cardigan Bay were still relatively high, although by November sightings had dropped significantly. In addition groups have begun to arrive in Anglesey, which we now know is a popular winter spot for many of the dolphins that stay in



Bottlenose dolphins

© P Evans/ SWF

Cardigan Bay over the summer. As expected, the Isle of Man has seen an increase in sightings of the species too. Dolphins were also seen regularly off the Llyn Peninsula, in the Moray Firth and off Aberdeenshire. Additional sightings were recorded at South Devon, Cornwall, Northern Ireland in Counties Antrim and Down, and the Republic of Ireland in Counties Dublin, Wicklow, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Sligo and Donegal.

Short-beaked common dolphins were seen in southern parts of the UK and Ireland, which is also to be expected at this time of year. Sightings predominated in the Republic of Ireland with a number of records from Counties Cork, Kerry, Waterford and Wexford. Dolphins were also seen off south Cornwall and in Poole Bay, Dorset. However, further north, there was an unusual sighting mid October of these animals spotted from a ferry off Dumfries & Galloway.

On the contrary, minke whales were mainly seen in the northern regions, with the majority of sightings coming from Scotland. Whales were seen off Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, Moray Firth, Aberdeen, Ayrshire, Argyll & Bute, Inner Hebrides and North West Scotland. There were also sightings in the Isle of Man, and a couple at the opposite end of the country with two reports coming from Cornwall.

Send in all cetacean sightings to Gemma Veneruso at [sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk](mailto:sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk) or via our online reporting form found at <http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk>.

## REGIONAL ROUNDUPS

## SHETLAND

(Including sightings kindly forwarded by Shetland Sea Mammal Group)

There were just two sightings reported in October. Two minke whales were spotted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> off Aywick, Yell. A few days later on the 28<sup>th</sup>, four killer whales were reported passing the east side of Fetlar.

It wasn't until the 2<sup>nd</sup> November that the next sighting was recorded and it was the only one of the month, when six killer whales were sighted in Yell Sound.

## ORKNEY

There were just three sightings reported in October. Colin Bird had two sightings on the 12<sup>th</sup> from Hoxa Head, a group of seven harbour porpoise and another single porpoise. It wasn't until the 26<sup>th</sup> that harbour porpoise were recorded again, this time a group of three from Hoxa Sound.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> November, a minke whale was seen in Scapa Flow. Two weeks later on the 15<sup>th</sup>, five pilot whales were reported from Marwick Head.

## NORTH SCOTLAND

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland

The autumn and winter months are always a challenge for sea watchers in the North with some species of cetaceans moving further south to warmer seas and others staying well offshore. The shorter daylight hours will leave most with just the weekends to carry out any serious watching, providing the weather is favourable. Nevertheless, there are



Harbour porpoise

© K Hepworth/ SWF

cetaceans still to be seen by those willing to dig out the thermals and flask and go face the elements.

The harbour porpoise can usually be observed feeding in their usual areas and this was certainly the case for the north coast of Scotland with three sightings for October and one in November. Highland Ranger Paul Castle spotted a group of five on the

12<sup>th</sup> and three on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October from his work place at the Highland Rangers Seadrift Centre, which has a grand view across Dunnet Bay. There was also a report from Neil James who saw three harbour porpoise in Thurso Bay on the 26<sup>th</sup> October.

The sighting in November was again by Paul Castle who saw five harbour porpoise feeding in Dunnet Bay on the 10<sup>th</sup> November.

### **NORTH EAST SCOTLAND**

**Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland**

The east coast in the far north of Scotland fared no better from the wind than the north coast but there were some interesting incidental sightings.

October provided two sightings of minke whale and three harbour porpoise reports as well as a single sighting in November. The first minke sighting was reported by Dave Nicolson from the Whaligoe Steps at Ulbster just south of Wick on the 11<sup>th</sup> October. George Campbell then spotted two feeding a good way offshore from South Head, which is the south side of the Wick River estuary on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Harbour porpoise were spotted from Swiney Hill, Lybster on the 16<sup>th</sup> October as two groups made up of two and three were seen feeding. Dave Nicolson also recorded 12 harbour porpoise at the Whaligoe steps on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

November was a very bad month for watching with strong winds blowing from the east, but I did manage to get in a few hours of watching and recorded three harbour porpoise from Swiney Hill on the 14<sup>th</sup> November.

There was also a report of a turtle seen on the 5<sup>th</sup> November, half a mile south of Keise Harbour, by Ian Johnson. The sea in early November was still quite warm and well within the tolerance for a leatherback, although Ian could not confirm the species.

### **MORAY FIRTH**

**Written by Alan Airey, Regional Coordinator for South Grampian**

Whilst driving to and from work I always stop if time permits to have a quick scan with binoculars over the Moray Firth; in fact probably 90% of all my sightings are made within a minute of scanning. On the 6<sup>th</sup> October, I did precisely that at Burghead on the way to the opticians and saw several large forward blows approximately 6km offshore at 11:55. I have seen sperm whales all over the world in many totally different locations so my assessment that these were sperm whales was confirmed on looking through the scope. I could clearly see the forward blows and the backs of six, possibly seven, sperm whales heading west. One was raising its tail fluke out of the water doing male orca



impressions. Imagine my joy, frustration and alarm all at the same time. Joy in seeing them, frustration because I had to leave for the opticians, but alarm at the possibility that they could get into trouble if they continued west into the confines of the Inner Moray Firth.

Returning over an hour later, I picked them up again now further west, and approximately 3 km off Burghead, the group was quite tightly packed and they were spyhopping as well. Unfortunately, the wind from the west was picking up but I managed to track them as they went NW until the light faded. Luckily, no reports came in over the following days of sperm whale strandings, so they must have managed to head either north or east to more open water. On each of the last two occasions, sperm whale sightings in the Moray Firth have resulted in the stranding and death of a whale.

There were six minke whale sightings in October in the Moray Firth, five of which were off Burghead. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, I saw one minke at lunchtime, another or possibly the same whale in the evening, and a further minke on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, I went to Burghead for lunch hopeful of more minke sightings in the calm sea. A couple who had made contact with me before were also there, hopeful of seeing minkes. They were in luck. I spotted three distant minkes feeding, then a juvenile minke popped up a little closer.

Another minke was also seen much further east off Strathbeg by the RSPB on the 16<sup>th</sup>.



Bottlenose dolphins

© A Airey

There were 18 reported bottlenose dolphin sightings in total, with sightings off Fort George, Burghead, Lossiemouth, Findochty and off Strathbeg. The largest group seen was 68 bottlenose heading west on the 22<sup>nd</sup> off Burghead.

There was one probable sighting of seven common dolphins by Peter Stainthorp off Macduff on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

Eight sightings of harbour porpoise were reported in October off Burghead, Lossiemouth and Strathbeg.

On 16<sup>th</sup> Nov off Burghead at lunchtime, I had the latest minke sighting I have had so far in the Moray Firth, 12 days later than last year. However, this occurred on probably the

only day of good sea conditions that we had during the month. Darkness before and after work coupled with bad weather did not allow much time for watching.

There were nine reported bottlenose dolphin sightings in November, spread out all along the coast. These were at Chanonry Point, Burghead, Hopeman, Lossiemouth, Findochty and Portknockie.

### **SOUTH GRAMPIAN & SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND**

Twelve sightings were recorded in the region in October. The majority of these were



bottlenose dolphins with eight records. Sightings were reported from Girdleness, Stonehaven, Torry Battery and Aberdeen Harbour.

Two sightings of a single harbour porpoise were reported from Greyhope Bay and Aberdeen. Individual minke whales were also reported from these same locations.

Bottlenose dolphins continued to be recorded in November, with six sightings, including a group of 20 seen from Collieston on the 5<sup>th</sup>. Sightings were also reported from Greyhope Bay, Girdleness and Torry Battery.

Two sightings of harbour porpoise were recorded on the 6<sup>th</sup> November from Girdleness as well as a report of an unidentified cetacean. A single harbour porpoise was also seen at the same location on the 13<sup>th</sup>.

### **NORTH EAST ENGLAND**

There were no sightings reported in October. In November, harbour porpoises were seen on two occasions at the beginning of the month. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, two animals were reported feeding off Buston Beach near Alnmouth. Four individuals were seen two days later off Craster.

## EASTERN ENGLAND

Written by Robin Petch, Regional Coordinator for Eastern England



© R Petch

After the excitement of our humpback and minke encounters in September, October and November have been something of an anti-climax! Really poor weather and sea conditions have limited us to a few days only at Whitby towards the end of October. However, during that short time, some really nice porpoise sightings were made, including our first ever totally airborne adult!

Although we spent the whole of the final week of October there, it was not until Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> that we were able to get a boat out of the harbour. Even then, most of the trips had to stay close inshore where cetaceans rarely venture, but towards the end of the day we persuaded the skipper to venture along the usual route which goes up to a mile offshore round the "Bell Buoy". We were rewarded with a sighting of five harbour porpoise rushing west to east along the "porpoise highway" and at 15:24 actually saw one leap clear of the water. We have seen porpoise surging along the surface exposing most of the body on a few occasions but this was a first for us and something many books claim porpoises don't do! The porpoises appeared to spend some time foraging and feeding before rushing on again.

Nothing was seen on the 29<sup>th</sup> but again on the Goth Weekend 30<sup>th</sup>/31<sup>st</sup>, further porpoise sightings were made within a mile of Whitby on numerous occasions during short 25 minute trips and also near to Ravenscar to the east of Robin Hood's Bay on a 3 hr+ trip to the seal colony there. Altogether, there were 13 sightings of up to three harbour porpoise each time.

Two sightings of harbour porpoise have also been made at Spurn Point: one animal was reported by Paul Childs at 16:00 on 7<sup>th</sup> November, and another three logged by Malcolm Cressey at 13:00 on 19<sup>th</sup> November. Thanks for these.



Harbour porpoise

© R Petch

May I finish by once again appealing to anyone interested in taking the Lincolnshire Region (SWF region 10) under their wing. I rarely if ever get that side of the Humber these days, except to Water's Edge at Barton on Humber, and it really shows in my

reports. I really feel that if someone living there could undertake watches, co-ordinate sightings and promote Sea Watch along that bank of the Humber and the Lincolnshire coast, they could do a better job than I am able to do. All of Yorkshire is more than enough for me to cover!

**EAST ANGLIA**

**Written by Dave Powell, Regional Coordinator for East Anglia**

Reports were only submitted from Norfolk during this period, thanks to the concerted effort of Mick Fiszer. Four harbour porpoise were seen from Walcott on the 8<sup>th</sup> October, three adults and one calf, and one was located at Mundesley on 11<sup>th</sup>. These sightings once again show value of the stretch of coast from Cromer round to Walcott. Unlike much of the Norfolk coastline, there are cliffs in this part of the county, with many vantage points.

There were no sightings recorded in November.

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND**

There were no sightings recorded in South East England.

**SUSSEX**

**Written by Steve Savage, Regional Coordinator for Sussex**

There were no dolphin sightings to report, but this is not unusual for this time of the year. However, I did receive a probable pilot whale sighting off Hastings on the 20<sup>th</sup> October which is yet to be confirmed; this species has been recorded in this area in previous years.

We have continued to monitor the local common seal sightings. Although they may be seen locally all year round, in East Sussex sightings increase this time of the year. So do the number of river observations where common seals travel many miles inland, although this is likely to be observations of only two or three individual seals. We know for example that the same common seal, identified by its unique spot pattern markings, regularly visit the River Ouse. It is thought these winter sightings are due to the upriver migration of fish during the winter months.

The following seal reports exclude the sightings from the Solent area where the resident seals may be seen on an almost daily basis. These common seals live in the area between Chichester and Langstone Harbour. I included a report of these seals in the July



2009 news sheet and how the electronic tagging project I was involved with revealed their major haul out and foraging sites. The tagging also revealed how some of these seals frequently cross to the Isle of Wight, and one travelled almost as far as the West/East Sussex border



Several common seal sightings were reported in October. On the 14<sup>th</sup> October I was called to a possible injured seal late evening at Saltdean beach (east of Brighton). Unfortunately the traffic was bad and it was getting dark by the time we got there. The moonlight was bright enough to see that the seal was not on the pebble beach, or in the water. However, it was difficult to tell for sure if it was on the rock

breakwater or not. I searched with the help of a chap from BDMLR. Hopefully, this was a healthy seal, which the observer thought was in trouble, often people's first reaction if they see a seal on the beach.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> I received another common seal sighting (identified by photo taken on a mobile phone), this time at falling sands just to the east of Beachy Head lighthouse. Two seals were observed (by Jack Harris and his father) on the beach in the morning. One of the seals was observed in the sea close to shore late afternoon when they returned to the site. They also observed a seal (probably the same one) in the same area on the following morning and again in the evening. I received another independent sighting of these two seals on 17<sup>th</sup> October, both in the sea.

On 7<sup>th</sup> November I received a particularly interesting sighting of a common seal, hauled out on the gravel/mud bank of the Cuckmere River, about half a mile in from the sea. The time was about 16:20. The seal was about five metres from the water's edge. It was resting in the typical banana position which suggested it was a healthy seal. The seal had an orange tag on its hind flipper and the number was visible. We traced the seal to the RSPCA who provided the following information. The seal, a yearling, was named Twinkle by its rescuers. The seal was taken to the RSPCA on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2010 from Lowestoft where it was rescued, weighing 21 kg. It was successfully released into the Wash on 18<sup>th</sup> August weighing 35 kg. This seal was observed again in the same river on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of November. A seal reported at Seven Sisters nearby on 28<sup>th</sup> November was also likely to be the same seal. We have for some time suspected that at least some of the seals we see in East Sussex come from the Wash and surrounding area, so this is a very interesting group of sightings.

I spotted a common seal off Hove Beach, heading towards Brighton on 30<sup>th</sup> November



Through my role as Sussex County Recorder for Sea Mammals, I have been requested to put forward Sussex marine mammals for consideration for the new Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre's "Significant Species Register". This new register will be a revision of the Sussex Rare Species Inventory. This new list will highlight species that do not meet other criteria but which in Sussex waters would be considered of interest and at possible risk, so that they are automatically flagged up. The harbour porpoise will be included (from the original Sussex Rare Species Inventory), and I have proposed the bottlenose dolphin, common dolphin and pilot whale to be added and these have been accepted.

As Sussex County Recorder, I also contribute a yearly round-up for the Record Centre's journal for biological recorders called Adastra. For anyone who might be interested, back editions (2001 – 2009) can be downloaded from the website at <http://sxbrc.org.uk/biodiversity/publications/>

More details and photographs can be seen on my blog:  
<http://sussexmarinejottings.blogspot.com/>

## **DORSET**

**(Including sightings kindly forwarded by Durlston Marine Project)**

Common dolphins were spotted on two occasions on the 5<sup>th</sup> October in Poole Bay. Two animals were recorded at Canford Cliffs Chine, and a single animal was seen at Branksome Chine.

Towards the end of the month, one harbour porpoise was seen at Flaghead Chine also in Poole Bay, on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

There were no sightings reported in November.

## **CHANNEL ISLANDS**

**Written by Bertram Bree, Regional Coordinator for the Channel Islands**

There were no sightings recorded in this region in October and November.

However, at the end of November off Cancale, a few white-sided dolphins were seen with bottlenose dolphins just south of Jersey, so just outside of British waters. This is yet another example to show that a number of species have been in seen in the sea around the Channel Islands, and in the New Year, Dr. Tom Brereton of Marine Life, myself and American colleagues plan to start a new project based in Granville and twinned with St Brelades in Jersey. This project aims to map marine megafauna around the Channel Islands.

**SOUTH DEVON**

Written by Eleanor Knott, DBRC

There were very few sightings sent in for the south coast of Devon; a couple of sightings of bottlenose dolphins (12 off Paignton and 4 between Teignmouth and Holcombe) and a couple of grey seals around Plymouth.

**CORNWALL**

Written by Dan Jarvis (Including sightings kindly forwarded by Ray Dennis/Cornwall Wildlife Trust's Seaquest Southwest project)

***Sightings***

Fewer sightings were reported in the run up to winter compared to the summer season, as expected, although five different cetacean species were still recorded. Once again, the large majority of sightings came from the west of the County with harbour porpoises being particularly abundant in the Land's End area with all sightings of the species coming from the coast between Pendeen all the way around to Penzance. All sightings



Bottlenose dolphins

© D Powell/ SWF

were of fairly small pods or occasionally lone animals. Bottlenose dolphins turned up in most areas, however, with reports from Port Isaac, Hayle, St Ives, Sennen, Marazion, Looe Bar and Portscatho. The sightings at Sennen and Marazion were on the same day (30<sup>th</sup> October) and comprised three and ten animals respectively, but all of them

were very active at the surface. Common and Risso's dolphins were found in the deeper water off the south Cornish coast, with both species being spotted in the Land's End to Porthgwarra area, while further east another small pod of Risso's dolphins were seen heading inshore at Lizard Point. Interestingly, the Risso's sighted at Land's End and Gwennap were both of eight animals and were seen on consecutive days, so probably the same group. A lone minke whale also turned up at Gwennap, with another showing itself off Cape Cornwall later in this period.

Potentially the last ocean sunfish and basking sharks were seen in October, with individuals of the former at Newquay and Porthleven and an individual of the latter at Sennen. Although it is extremely unlikely that basking sharks will be seen through the

winter, it has happened on rare occasions in the past so never say never! We expect to see them back probably around April.

***Seawatch Southwest survey sightings.***

(Sightings data used with the kind permission of Dr Russell Wynn/Seawatch Southwest [www.seawatch-sw.org](http://www.seawatch-sw.org)).

The final fortnight of this survey wasn't too good for cetacean sightings, as harbour porpoises and common dolphins were only recorded a few times each and Risso's dolphins on just two or three days. Also lone basking sharks were seen in the first few days of October before disappearing entirely, so marine megafauna was pretty scarce compared to most of the rest of the survey, which started back in the summer. Hopefully Russell and his team will be back next year!

***News and events***

The grey seal pup rescue season is now in full swing and the teams from British Divers Marine Life Rescue ([www.bdmlr.org.uk](http://www.bdmlr.org.uk)), the National Seal Sanctuary ([www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn1.html](http://www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn1.html)), and RSPCA West Hatch ([www.rspca-westhatch.co.uk](http://www.rspca-westhatch.co.uk)) have had little time for rest. Aside from the usual abandoned, malnourished and injured, there have been a few notable cases already this year. One young female pup was found in a very bad way near Bude with over fifty separate injuries – quite possibly the most we have ever found on a single animal. They were mainly infected bite wounds from larger seals, to the head, neck and foreflippers, but there were also abscesses, a damaged eye and breathing problems as well. Sadly she passed away days later due to the severe infections she was suffering from. Another story with a sad ending involved a pup near Sennen that washed up exhausted following a night of rough stormy seas with a badly damaged lower jaw where teeth and part of the gum were missing and the bone underneath exposed and broken. Unfortunately, this young male was also struggling with a nasty umbilical infection and died less than an hour after being admitted for care. On the bright side, many of the pups rescued at the beginning of the season are doing really well and it shouldn't be too long before they can be released back to the wild near where they came from in the New Year. It is also worth mentioning that there have been calls about pups on beaches that are in fact healthy and are just resting and orienting themselves ready for life after their mother has left them. Cornwall Seal Group ([www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk](http://www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk)) members have been helping to monitor some of these pups and keeping members of the public a safe distance away to avoid disturbing them.

Alongside the live seals being reported recently, have been more young seals that have found survival too much of a struggle and cast up on to the shore. Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings Network ([www.cwtstrandings.org.uk](http://www.cwtstrandings.org.uk)) volunteers continue to record them, as well as a handful of harbour porpoises and a common dolphin or two. October was also the organisation's annual Forum, which is held at Truro College and is

rapidly becoming an established and well-respected event for updates on strandings plus other relevant research on marine creatures found in the local environment. This year was no exception and continues to build on its good reputation with a variety of knowledgeable speakers talking about things such as trials with fishermen using pingers on nets through to marine turtle surveying. The large audience thoroughly enjoyed the day and I'm sure are all looking forward to next year!

## **NORTH DEVON**

**Written by Eleanor Knott, DBRC (Including sightings data kindly forwarded by DBRC)**

There were 25 sightings of harbour porpoise seen throughout October and ten in November, largely spotted at Bull Point, Baggy Point, Capstone Point, Downend, Morte Point, Torrs walk and Tunnels beach. The majority of sightings were from Capstone Point as reported by Chris and Sharron Blackmore and at Downend by Robert Jutsum. Mostly, the sightings were of one or two animals at a time, though there were 12 harbour porpoise seen off Morte Point by Dave Jenkins on the 13<sup>th</sup> October.



Harbour porpoise

© P Evans/ SWF

There were also several sightings of grey seals (mainly off Capstone Point) and two sighting of sunfish off Capstone Point and Bull Point in early October.

## **BRISTOL CHANNEL & SOUTH WALES**

One sighting of two harbour porpoise was recorded on the 25<sup>th</sup> October. The porpoise were seen swimming at Middle Grounds in the Severn Estuary.

There were no sightings in November.

## **WEST WALES**

**Written by Gemma Veneruso (SWF), Regional Coordinator for West Wales**

October continued to be a good month for bottlenose dolphins with 31 reports. Sightings from New Quay pier were as good as ever with dolphins being seen most days

in the first two weeks during land based watches. Group sizes ranged from one to eight individuals in the harbour area.

Surveys onboard SWF RIB 'Gallois' revealed that the dolphins were also still occupying other parts of Cardigan Bay SAC. During a survey on the 12<sup>th</sup>, two sightings were recorded from Cwmtedu, two offshore from Ynys Lochtyn in addition to a sighting whilst leaving New Quay. Sixteen animals were recorded that day and of those, four were calves.



Bottlenose dolphins

© G Veneruso/ SWF

Another short survey on the 13<sup>th</sup> proved just as fruitful. By 11:00 we spotted a group of seven bottlenose dolphins including two calves one nautical mile from Ynys Lochtyn. Sightings continued over the next few hours three nautical miles from Tresaith, at Mwnt and Ynys Lochtyn.

Sightings dropped significantly in November as expected, as the New Quay field season finished for the winter and by this time the volunteers have long gone home. In addition many of the dolphins are thought to travel northwards for the winter to northern Cardigan Bay, North Wales and the Isle of Man. Despite this, dolphins were still seen in New Quay Bay on three occasions, reported by Sarah Bebb. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, a single individual was feeding in the bay and two sightings of one and three individuals were recorded on the 13<sup>th</sup>.

## NORTH WALES

Bottlenose dolphins were recorded 11 times in October reaching relatively large group sizes of 30 and 40 animals, as is commonly seen in this region at this time of year. On the first day of the month, 30 dolphins were swimming west past East Mouse, Amlwch off North Anglesey. Groups of 30 were recorded again around Anglesey off Penmon Point, east of the island on the 13<sup>th</sup>, off Moelfre on the 21<sup>st</sup> and approximately 40 individuals were spotted off Dulas Island, on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, both off North East Anglesey. Four of the 11 bottlenose dolphin sightings took place off the Llyn Peninsula. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, 12 dolphins were seen leaping off Nefyn and three sightings were reported at Porth Dinllaen, a seemingly popular spot for these animals. Land based watches were



undertaken by Martin Moore, a National Coastwatch volunteer, during which two bottlenose dolphins were recorded on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 17 animals on the 17<sup>th</sup>. A group of ten animals were also seen from this site on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

There were eight harbour porpoise sightings recorded in October, all from the Isle of Anglesey. Point Lynas proved once again to be a most popular spot with three sightings in the month and this location attracting good numbers of animals. Sightings of six, 24 and seven individuals were recorded on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> respectively. Other sightings in North Anglesey were recorded at Llanbadrig, Bull Bay and Llanlleiana. There was also a report of five porpoise off South Stack, west of the Island on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

The numbers of sightings recorded dropped slightly in November. Bottlenose dolphins were again the most common species with five sightings, and again group sizes reaching significant numbers.



Forty individuals were seen on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, half a mile north east of Moelfre. The 13<sup>th</sup> was a good day to spot dolphins it seems as they were recorded three times in the day by Jon Shaw. Twenty animals were first seen in the morning between Moelfre and Puffin Island, and in the afternoon a group

of roughly the same number were seen almost a mile north of Moelfre. Six animals were then seen half a mile from Point Lynas later in the day.

Harbour porpoise were seen just twice in the month, both at Bull Bay, North Anglesey. Two animals were seen at the west end of the bay on the 13<sup>th</sup>, and on the 20<sup>th</sup> a lone individual was recorded there by Mike Thompson whilst on watch.

## **NORTH WEST ENGLAND**

**Written by Dave McGrath**

Once again there were few sightings from the Lancashire and Cumbria coasts during the autumn. Anglers fishing from a small boat in the Lune Channel off Heysham power station saw a group of three harbour porpoises on the rising tide on 12<sup>th</sup> October.

Later in the month on 22<sup>nd</sup>, a report of the remains of 'half a dolphin/porpoise' came from Allonby on the NW Cumbrian coast.

In November the only sighting was made independently by two observers. Two harbour porpoises were seen off Starr Gate, Blackpool, and were showing well for about an hour on 22<sup>nd</sup> just after the high tide.

### **ISLE OF MAN**

**Written by Tom Felce (MWDW), Regional Coordinator for the Isle of Man (Including sightings data kindly forwarded by MWDW)**

Although there were not a huge number of sightings in October, only eleven, the number of species seen was quite impressive. In total, five different cetacean species were seen in Manx waters in October. As expected, there were a handful of harbour porpoise sightings (n=3), all of groups of three or less individuals. A sighting of 12 Risso's dolphins on the 30<sup>th</sup>, however, is more unusual in Manx waters at this time of year. Risso's tend to be seen between March and September, so a sighting late in October is fairly unusual.

There were only two sightings of minke whales in October, on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, both on the east coast, which is where we expect the Manx herring stocks to be at this time of year. Though not confirmed, there was also a sighting of a humpback whale in the north of the island on the 24<sup>th</sup>, possibly also taking advantage of the abundant herring.

October did see the return of bottlenose dolphins to Manx waters, with four sightings being reported during the month. There were two sightings on the 30<sup>th</sup> containing 20 and 30 animals. Groups of 60 dolphins were seen on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. The group sizes are about average for bottlenose dolphins at this time of year. All four sightings were on the east coast of the island.

Thanks in no small part to the foul weather during November, there were only three cetacean sightings throughout the month. One minke whale was seen on the 14<sup>th</sup>, from Marine Drive just south of Douglas. The other two sightings were both of harbour porpoise, one mother and calf pair at Port Erin and another group of four individuals, also including a calf, seen just north of the Calf of Man, both on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

### **SOUTH & WEST SCOTLAND**

**Written by Rowan Fraser, Loch Lomond & Trossachs NP**

October was a good month for sailors reporting cetacean sightings. Maybe it's because sailors tend to be stoic and determined to get out there despite the weather.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> October, Gordon and Alix saw a minke whale three miles NW off Turnberry Point, Ayrshire and William Harkness saw ten harbour porpoise one mile off Portpatrick Harbour in Dumfries & Galloway.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> October, Robin Cruickshank saw three minke whales feeding in Kilbrannan Sound, Argyll & Bute and then three minkes again late afternoon in the Sound. They were accompanied by at least one bottlenose dolphin. Photographs of the dorsal fins and colouration may be useful in determining whether these were the same three animals seen in the morning, or a different trio.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> October, Ian Enlander & David Williams from IWDG spotted a rare sighting of 16 common dolphins as they approached Corsewall Point on a ferry in Dumfries & Galloway.

On 25<sup>th</sup>, Kathy Harper saw three harbour porpoise near Blairmore, Dunoon.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, Alan Kohler had the terrific luck of spotting a whale (probably a minke) pass thirty metres in front of his boat and to see a harbour porpoise later that day.



### ***Coming up for Air - Cetacean Monitoring Project based in Cowal: update***

I have just been going through all the records to write a report for Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. From April this year to writing this on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December, the project has collected 75 sightings of cetaceans. These are all from a fairly small geographical region that currently stretches from Ardentinnny to Strone and the Holly Loch, down to Dunoon and across to Gourrock via Western Ferries.

Throughout this time we have seen fairly consistent numbers of harbour porpoise, which possibly suggests that there may be a small resident population in the area. In addition we have three sightings of minke whale, and all of this from a total of 29 hours of observation. We would love to expand the number of volunteers involved in this project, whether they are undertaking systematic surveys or reporting casual sightings. Some of our volunteers are lucky enough to be able to survey from the comfort of their own homes (because their field of view is wide enough), and I am sure this helps keep people watching in these bitter weather conditions. Ironically, along with these extreme weather patterns we have had some of the flattest sea conditions that we have had in months.

We are very excited by the numbers and length of time the harbour porpoise are in the area, but we would love to expand the project's coverage to get a better picture of cetacean diversity in the sea lochs and Firth of Clyde.

If you are at all interested becoming part of our voyage of discovery, please contact me. It would be great to have you on board.

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### OUTER HEBRIDES

There were just two sightings reported in October. Approximately 33 pilot whales entered Loch Carnan off South Uist on the 27<sup>th</sup>. There were fears that these animals would strand but they did make it back out to sea. However, photo-ID confirmed that at least some of these were the same animals that later stranded off the coast of Donegal on the 6<sup>th</sup> November.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> October, a minke whale was seen off the Mull of Kintyre.

There were no sightings reported in November.

### NORTH WEST SCOTLAND

Eight sightings were recorded in the region in October and of these minke whales were seen six times. North Minch was the top spot with sightings of the whales on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. A minke whale was also recorded off the Isle of Skye off Rubha Hunish on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.



A much larger whale visited the region on the 16<sup>th</sup>, when a fin whale was recorded one mile west of North Erradale.

The following day, two common dolphins were spotted off Loch Carron.

There was just one sighting in November, of four harbour porpoise at Port Henderson on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

## **NORTHERN IRELAND**

**(Including sightings kindly forwarded by IWDG)**

Bottlenose dolphins were the most common species seen in October in Northern Ireland, with seven reports. The first sightings didn't appear until the 16<sup>th</sup> when six animals were seen leaping from the Maiden Island, Co. Antrim. Three days later, bottlenose dolphins were seen again, this time with two individuals from Kilkeel, Co. Down. Sightings of the species continued until the end of the month with animals seen at Black Head, Ballycastle and Larne, Co. Antrim. A group of 30 individuals was seen off Portstewart, Co. Derry on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

There was a single harbour porpoise sighting on the 28<sup>th</sup> at Ardglass, Co. Down.

A group of three individuals that could not be identified were seen on the 12<sup>th</sup> October off Portrush, Co. Antrim.

There were just two sightings in November, which were both from Black Head, Co. Antrim. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, seven animals were reported, although the species could not be confirmed. Four days later, seven harbour porpoise were feeding in the same area.

## **REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

**(Including sightings kindly forwarded by IWDG)**

There were 68 sightings reported throughout the Republic of Ireland in October. Bottlenose dolphins were the most commonly sighted species with 17 records. Dolphins were seen off Counties Dublin, Wicklow, Mayo, Galway, Kerry, Sligo and Donegal. Generally group sizes ranged from one individual to six. However, there were two encounters reported of large groups: 55 animals were recorded at Glengad, Co. Mayo on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 60 were seen off Aranmore Island, Co. Donegal on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

Common dolphins were reported 12 times. As expected, many of the sightings were recorded off Co. Cork at a number of points including Cape Clear Island, Slea Head, Sherkin Island, Old Head of Kinsale, Black Ball Head, Beara Peninsula and Gascanaun Sound. The larger groups of animals however were recorded off Co. Kerry, including 75 individuals on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 80 on the 17<sup>th</sup>. The largest group recorded in October was 300 animals on the 14<sup>th</sup> off Iniskea Island, Co. Mayo.





Fourteen sightings of harbour porpoise were reported during the month. The first sighting in October was a group of 19 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> off Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork. Remaining sightings consisted of smaller groups and porpoise were recorded at Counties Sligo, Dublin,

Kerry, Donegal, and Galway.

There was a single Risso's dolphin sighting of two animals on the 21<sup>st</sup> at Mine Head, Co. Waterford.

Killer whales were also reported once with two individuals off the Mullet Peninsula, Co. Mayo on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Of whale species, minke whales were seen most with six reports, all from Co. Kerry. Animals were spotted from Sleah Head on four occasions including a sighting of eight animals on the 17<sup>th</sup>. In addition, six animals were recorded from Dingle Bay on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

Fin whales were seen three times in October. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, two were seen from Galley Head. On the same day, two fin whales and a humpback were seen at Black Ball Head, Co. Cork. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, three fin whales were reported off Fair Head, Beara Peninsula, Co. Cork.

There were also 13 reports of unidentified cetaceans.

During November, there were 79 sightings. Of these, bottlenose dolphins were once again the most common species recorded, with 24 sightings throughout the country. Group sizes tended to be relatively small. However, there were sightings of 20 individuals at Ventry, Co. Kerry on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and off Dooey Strand, Co. Donegal on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Killiney Bay, Co. Dublin was a popular spot with a group of three dolphins being seen repeatedly throughout the month on



the 5<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>-24<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. Sightings of the species were also recorded in Counties Wicklow, Cork, Clare, Mayo and Galway.

Harbour porpoises were reported on 12 occasions. As expected, sightings were relatively well distributed throughout the country, with animals seen in Counties Waterford, Cork, Dublin, Sligo and Mayo.

Common dolphins were seen eight times in November. Group sizes range from three to 400 individuals. The large group of 400 was seen on the 6<sup>th</sup> from Black Ball Head, Co. Cork. Other relatively large groups were seen at Fair Head, Co. Cork on the 7<sup>th</sup> with 40 animals, 70 dolphins reported at Ram Head, Co. Waterford on the 14<sup>th</sup>, and 45 at Hook Head, Co. Wexford on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

Risso's dolphins were seen once in the month at Galley Head, Co. Cork on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

Sadly, there was a mass stranding of 33 pilot whales on Rutland Island, Co. Donegal on the 6<sup>th</sup>. It is thought that this was the same group of animals that were seen in very shallow waters off the Isle of Uist in the Outer Hebrides at the end of October.

Later in the month, there was a group of 15 possible pilot whales on the 23<sup>rd</sup> in Trawbreaga Bay, Co. Donegal.

The smallest of baleen whales seen in these waters, the minke whale, was observed just three times in November, all in County Cork. Sightings were recorded at Seven Heads and Black Ball Head on the 6<sup>th</sup>, and ten animals were counted at Fair Head the next day.

There were good numbers of fin whales seen in the month with 15 sightings widely distributed throughout November. Group sizes ranged from one to four animals, and these were spotted in Counties Cork, Waterford, Wexford and Kerry. Co. Waterford seemed the most popular with the whales in November, with sightings off Dunabrattin Head, Tramore, Ardmore Bay, Red Head and Bunmahon.

There were also ten sightings of large whales, of which the species was not confirmed. The majority of these are most likely to be fin whales. However there were a couple of possible humpback whale reports. Sightings of these whales were at Old Head of Kinsale, Co. Cork, Red Head, Tramore and Bunmahon, Co. Waterford, and Baginbun Head, Co. Wexford.

In addition, there were also six reports of unidentified cetaceans.

**Unless otherwise stated, regional roundups were compiled and written by Gemma Veneruso, SWF. Further details on all our activities can be found on the Sea Watch Foundation website (<http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk> or by e-mailing [info@seawatchfoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@seawatchfoundation.org.uk).**