

sea watch FOUNDATION



Editorial

The June and July period is usually a busy one. The better weather and school holidays mean that there are more people out and about with their eyes on the sea. Despite June's awful weather in many regions, this newsletter makes for interesting reading. I'm sure you'll all remember the pilot whale saga from the Hebrides, but what about the Devon sperm whale and the Scottish sei whale? If not, read on!

Thank you to all the members of the public who contributed sightings and of course, to our regional coordinators, regional groups and fellow conservation organisations as well!

Danielle Gibas
Sightings Officer



NEWS

Trustee meeting in New Quay

The Sea Watch Cymru office hosted a Sea Watch Foundation Trustee meeting on 24th July this year. Trustees Andrew Lack, Tony Osborn, Ivor Rees, and Robin Petch congregated in New Quay on the 23rd to meet Sea Watch staff and volunteers with a view to starting the meeting early the next morning. The meeting covered aspects of the management of the monitoring project, the sightings network and related press issues, and the Adopt a Dolphin scheme. Overall, it was deemed very successful by all participants and we all look forward to another one in the next six months.

With the meeting behind us, trustees embarked on the *Islander*, a local tour boat, to get down to the serious business of dolphin watching. A couple of hours (and dolphins – to my relief!) later, they all piled into our small office for a final sum-up of a very successful couple of days.



Donations – Just Giving



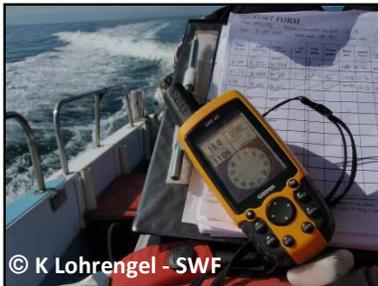
Sea Watch can now accept donations for as little as £1-£10 via Vodafone JustTXTGiving. All you need to do is send a text message to 70070 quoting "SWFC01" followed by the amount that you would like to donate; for example "SWFC01 £10". Remember that 100% of your donation goes directly towards the research and conservation of British cetaceans.

CCW funding for the monitoring project and the return of line transects!

Sea Watch had some fantastic news in July. The Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) awarded Sea Watch a contract to resume the monitoring of the Cardigan Bay bottlenose dolphins! This means that after two years of functioning with no external funding, the Welsh monitoring project has full funding once again with the full support of CCW.



In practice, this implies more boat-based surveys and the return of line transects. Line transect surveys are used to estimate the abundance of bottlenose dolphins and other marine mammal species in Cardigan Bay. This is a distance sampling method that allows for the monitoring of population size and density over time. To complete a line transect survey, observers travel along randomly positioned lines within the area of interest and record sightings. The data collected – including number of individuals seen and their distance and angle from the line – allow analysts to extrapolate the size and density of the population in the entire area. In our case, this is Cardigan Bay with emphasis upon the Cardigan Bay and Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) with the former divided into inshore and offshore transect lines. For each survey, a transect line is randomly chosen to ensure that the every part of the study area has an equal probability of being sampled.



The methodology of line transect sampling assumes that all individuals along the line will be detected, which is rarely possible to achieve. Therefore it is necessary to try to determine what proportion of animals may be missed, and to account for the possibility that animals may respond to the survey vessel either by moving towards or away from it. This is achieved by having two primary observers, who watch from the highest platform on the boat; two independent observers, who scan the horizon with

binoculars; and one person recording effort data such as sea state, visibility, boat course, and speed.

Data from these surveys, along with photo-identification data, have led to population estimates over the last ten years varying from 150-250 bottlenose dolphins in Cardigan Bay, with a generally increasing trend. This information is incredibly important for the management of the SAC and it is brilliant to be in a position to conduct these surveys once again!

Recent Sea Watch Reports

Dr Pia Anderwald who serves as Sea Watch analyst published her paper on stock structure of minke whales in the North Atlantic in July. In this article she considers the importance of the distribution of genetic diversity among populations with regards to species management plans. Pia used genetic markers to investigate population structure of minke whales in the North Atlantic. The results indicated that minke whales range seasonally in this area but segregate on at least two breeding grounds which has important implications for the current stock boundaries used for management in the area. This paper is available on the Sea Watch website or on request at info@seawatchfoundation.org.uk.

Anderwald, P., Danielsdottir, A.K., Haug, T., Larsen, F., Lesage, V., Reid, R.J., Vikingsson, G.A., & Hoelzel, A.R. (2011) Possible cryptic stock structure for minke whales in the North Atlantic: implications for conservation and management. Biological Conservation, 144, 2479-2489.

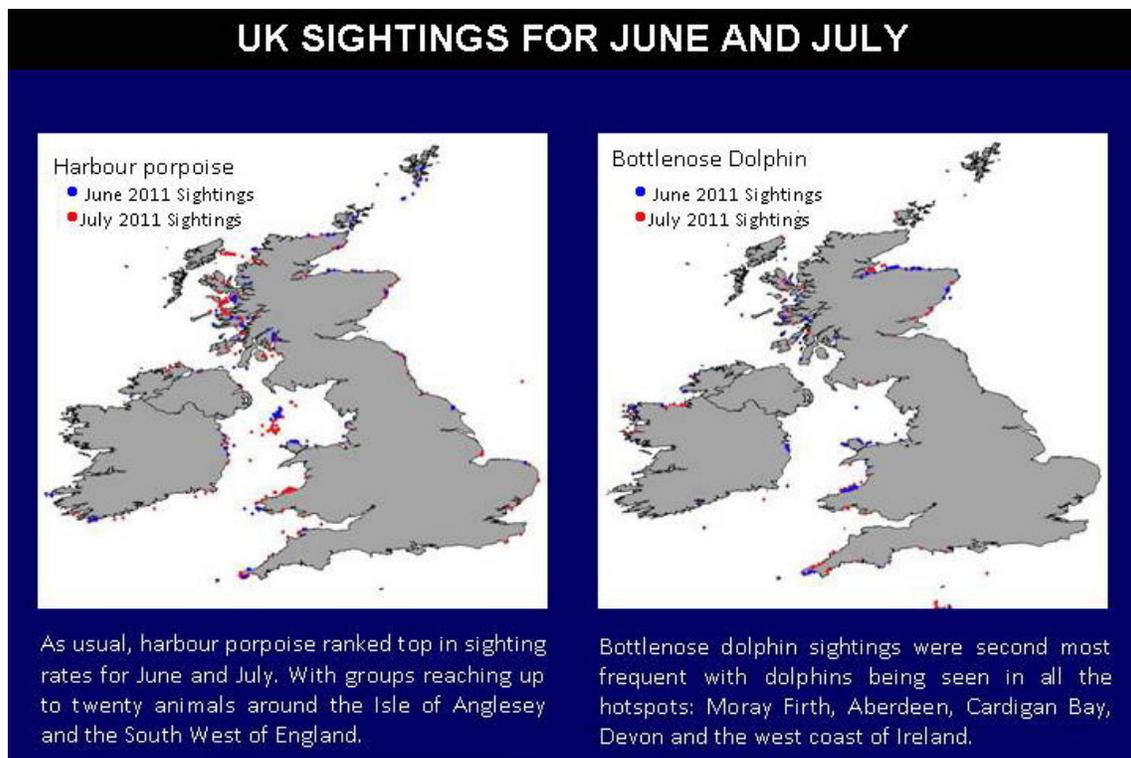
Sea Watch at two Welsh National Boat Shows

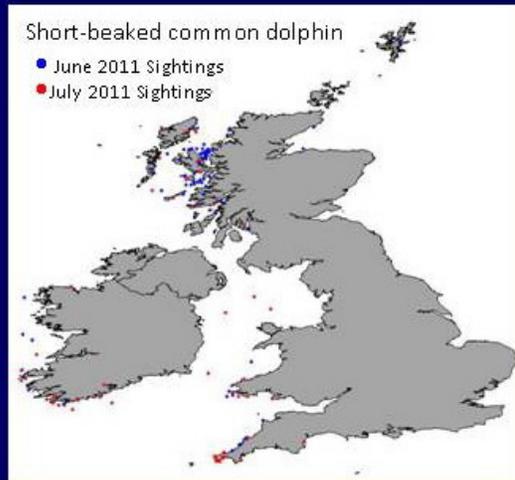
The staff and volunteers from the New Quay office had a busy couple of months in terms of public events. We hit the road on two occasions to attend both the North and South Wales boat shows. These three-day events provided an excellent opportunity to meet boat operators and to raise awareness about Sea Watch’s activities and the sightings network.



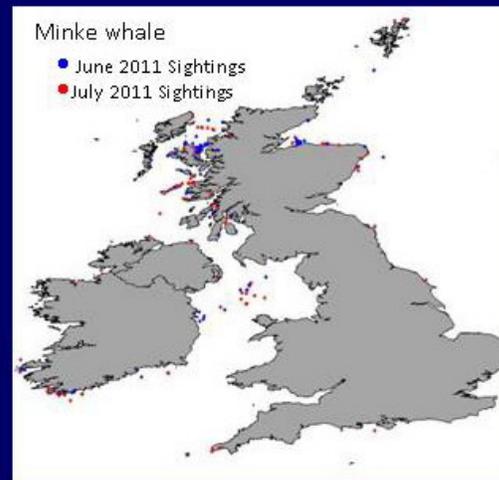
SIGHTINGS SUMMARY, JUNE-JULY 2011

June, as you'll remember, had unseasonal bad weather over much of the UK’s coastline. Despite this, I was surprised to find that sightings reports were fairly evenly distributed between both months covered by this summary. With a total of 1630 sightings for the UK, 720 sightings took place in June and 910 in July. I expected a far wider gap between these figures so was pleasantly surprised!





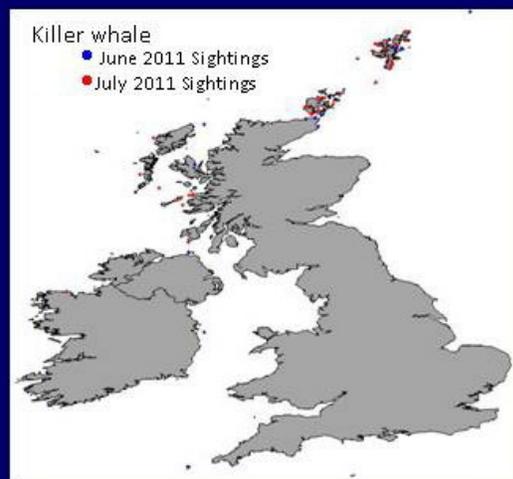
Common dolphin sightings were concentrated in north west Scotland and the Hebrides throughout June and July. They also appeared off Pembrokeshire and Cornwall.



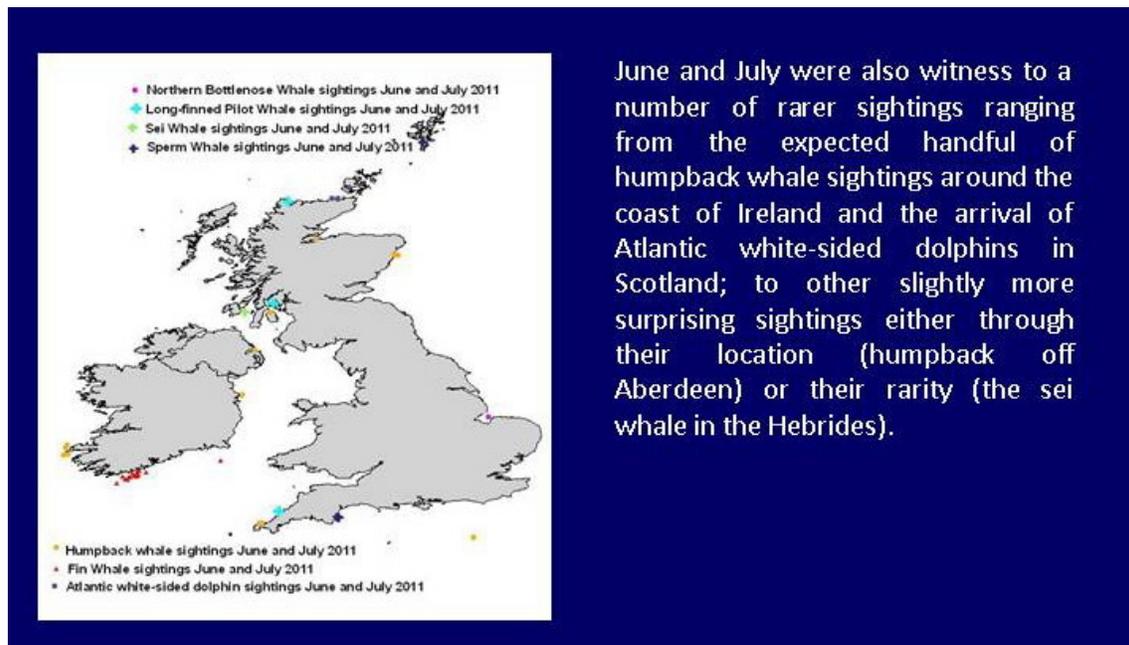
Minke whale sightings were more frequent in July than in June. The Hebrides had the bulk of sightings followed by North East Scotland, the Isle of Man and SW Ireland.



Risso's sightings followed a patchy distribution for June and July. They were sighted mainly around the Isle of Man, off North East Scotland.



Killer whale sightings increased from June into July and were located mainly off the north-west coast of Scotland and Shetland Isles.



June and July were also witness to a number of rarer sightings ranging from the expected handful of humpback whale sightings around the coast of Ireland and the arrival of Atlantic white-sided dolphins in Scotland; to other slightly more surprising sightings either through their location (humpback off Aberdeen) or their rarity (the sei whale in the Hebrides).

Bottlenose Dolphin birth in Scotland

June and July were peppered with one-off sightings. On 3rd June, one of our dedicated observers in Scotland wrote in to tell us about the once in a lifetime experience of witnessing a wild bottlenose dolphin birth! This is a truly exceptional sighting as there are only a handful of directly observed wild births; even in closely studied populations like the Moray Firth and Cardigan Bay dolphins, females often disappear for several weeks during the summer before being spotted again with a new calf at their side, and there is very little information about their movements or behaviour close to birth.

This new arrival was witnessed by Kevin Hepworth in Nigg Bay near Aberdeen. A female bottlenose dolphin was sighted slowly swimming in circles and logging at the surface for approximately half an hour before a 'striped' calf with a bent-over dorsal fin was spotted for the first time. The fin gradually straightened in the next 15 minutes of the observation, and the mother-calf pair was observed for a further half hour, swimming slowly in the bay.

The striped appearance is typical of newborns and young calves, and is caused by the foetal folds, creases in the skin where the calf was curled over in the mother's womb. The folds usually disappear during the first weeks after birth, but light stripes on the skin, referred to as foetal folds, remain apparent for at least a month.

Sperm Whales

Sperm whales made a particularly strong impression during June and July. On 25th June, we received an exciting email from Jane Patmore reporting a probable sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) sighting in the Firth of Forth. Two, possibly three, large whales were seen, between 9.30pm and 10.30pm, spending long periods of time resting on the surface, occasionally blowing, before heading east past Inchkeith Island. Sperm whales live predominantly in deep waters beyond the continental shelf edge, and sightings in the North Sea are rare events.

Later, in early July, a single sperm whale was seen twice off Devon within the space of a few days. The first sighting took place off Brixham breakwater in the late hours of the evening.

Alison Robbins told Sea Watch staff that she heard the animal blowing before she saw it. It was seen surfacing twice before disappearing altogether. Unfortunately the time of day and the distance at which the animal was spotted made it impossible for us to confirm this sighting as a definite sperm whale.

However, a few days later, on 9th July, a definite sperm whale was spotted in a similar area, near Brixham, by the Paignton Pleasure Cruises. It was first seen by a crew member who saw the animal's characteristic bushy blow, directed forwards and to the left, and immediately alerted Sea Watch Foundation to the presence of the animal. It was re-sighted later that morning which confirmed the species identification. These events bore a



© C Swann – Sperm Whale

striking resemblance to last year's sighting of a sperm whale. In 2010, a sperm whale was spotted in exactly the same area on 28th June and then re-sighted a month later on 21st July.

Humpback whale in East Scotland



© I Hay – Humpback Whale

Humpback whales made a surprise appearance off the east coast Scotland in mid-June. A humpback whale was sighted lunge-feeding in Aberdeen Harbour on the evening of Thursday 16th June. Ian Hay spotted the animal and managed to get a few photos to confirm the species. Aberdeen Harbour, already famous for spotting bottlenose dolphins occasionally receives these large visitors. On the next day, reports were

received of a humpback feeding off Chanonry Point, Moray Firth, for two hours in the morning (06:30-08:30 hrs) and then breaching near the Sutors of Cromarty at 10:00 hrs. The animal was then sighted moving back out to sea.

Humpback whales are uncommon in the UK, but they are occasionally encountered in coastal waters in summer months as they migrate between their winter breeding grounds off Africa to summer feeding grounds around Iceland. There have in fact been nine humpback whale sightings across the East Grampian region since 2001, ranging from Arbroath to Girdleness and venturing into the outer Moray Firth as far as Findochty. Happily it seems that humpback whales are entering British waters more frequently in recent years, possibly a result of the protection they have received for the past century.

Northern Bottlenose Whale in Norfolk

Sea Watch Foundation received two reports from members of the public of a northern bottlenose whale off Hunstanton, Norfolk on 2nd July. The National Strandings Network then verified that a large, beaked cetacean stranded on Hunstanton beach later that day. The animal fortunately refloated itself and returned to sea.



The northern bottlenose whale (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*) is a beaked whale found only in the North Atlantic, from the Caribbean and Canaries to West Greenland and Svalbard. It occurs mainly in waters deeper than 1000m, as its main prey are deep-sea squid. It is

therefore most commonly sighted beyond the continental shelf edge or near to oceanic trenches, such as the Rockall Trough. They occasionally enter shallower seas and sightings are uncommon in UK shelf waters, often sadly resulting in strandings. There have been a few strandings on the UK's east coast in recent years: on Skegness beach in September 2006, in neighbouring Suffolk in July 2007, and the infamous Thames whale incident in January 2006.

Sei Whale in the Hebrides

A sei whale was sighted by the pilot of an Air Ambulance between Islay and Gigha in South-west Scotland on the 11th July. The paramedic on board, Danny Kerr, was able to capture a few pictures as they flew over the whale. He sent the pictures to Sea Watch after realising that it was probably a rare sighting as it didn't have the characteristic shape of a humpback whale.

Upon receiving the pictures, scientists (Drs Philip Clapham, Tom Jefferson and Peter Evans) also ruled out the humpback whale possibility and independently came to the conclusion that it was a sei whale! The dorsal fin was taller and more curved at the top than that of a fin whale, the only other possibility given its size and shape, and the surfacing pattern fitted the species.

Sei whales are uncommon in British waters with none reported in some years, and only one or two at most spotted in any year. However, Sea Watch has had reports of further sightings this year: further north in the inner Hebrides and one in Shetland. They spend most of their time out in the open ocean of the Atlantic in deep water. They are protected internationally as their numbers have been severely depleted by whaling in past years.

REGIONAL ROUNDUPS**SHETLAND**

(Including sightings data kindly forwarded by Shetland Sea Mammal Group)

A total of 39 sightings were reported from Shetland for the months of June and July. These sightings consisted of six different species with the most common being the harbour porpoise and killer whale. The other four visitors included the Risso's dolphins, minke whales, common dolphins and white-beaked dolphins.

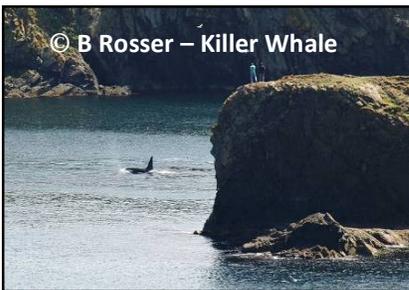
June

Harbour porpoise was the most common species reported and was observed throughout the month in groups of one to five, concentrated mainly in the south-east from South Nesting Bay down to Sumburgh Head. There were also four sightings off Fair Isle and one from the Good Shepherd ferry between Shetland mainland and Fair Isle.

Killer whales were the second most commonly reported species for June. Five killer whales were reported off Noss on the 16th; eight from north of Whalsay on the 17th; eight were also reported from Vidlin on the 17th; and eight (possibly the same pod on all three occasions) were observed from Yell Sound on the 30th. Mark Addison was fortunate enough to have seen 25 killer whales on the 27th June from the Tern oil rig.

Risso's dolphins, minke whales and common dolphins were also reported during the month of June. On the 5th, a single Risso's dolphin was observed from Sumburgh Head at 8 am and two were reported from the same location later that day. A solitary minke whale was reported from Easter Lothar, Fair Isle on the 10th, and, most notably, a single common dolphin was observed from Vidlin on the 30th.

July



Killer whales were the most frequently sighted species in July, with six sightings of between two and eight animals. All sightings took place off Shetland with one exception; the first day of July brought a particularly memorable killer whale sighting from Fair Isle. Residents were treated to the dramatic sight of eight orcas rounding up seals. The animals were so close to shore that onlookers had no problem in following the sequence of events. The animals circled the targeted seal and when they finally made their move, the seal submerged. Luckily for some, this coincided with the opening of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory which meant that as word spread quite a crowd gathered to observe the event. As a result, plenty of beautiful photos were taken as well!



Besides killer whale sightings, there was little to report in July. Two harbour porpoises were seen off Bunness, Fair Isle on the 9th July. One minke whale was observed also off Bunness, Fair Isle on the 10th, and another at the other extremity of Shetland, off Hermaness, on the 30th. A further common dolphin was reported from Vidlin Voe on the 28th. David Parnaby, the warden of Fair Isle Bird Observatory was fortunate to observe three white-beaked dolphins off South Lighthouse, Fair Isle on the 26th whilst two white-beaked dolphins were also seen on the 10th from Sumburgh Head. In recent years, this species has become comparatively scarce in the Northern Isles.

NORTH SCOTLAND AND ORKNEY

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland

June

June produced 25 sightings, which is much lower by comparison to the 60 plus sightings for June last year. There were 15 harbour porpoise sightings reported, 64 individuals in total, with the largest group being a pod of 12 seen in Thurso Bay on 16th June.

Three pods of Risso's dolphins were seen: a pod of seven at Strathy Point, north Sutherland on the 11th, and groups of five and two in Thurso Bay by Karen Munro on the 18th and 20th respectively.

The John O'Groats ferry crew had two sightings of killer whales. A pod of four was spotted near Lothar Rock, South Ronaldsay on 10th June and a pod of eight was seen in Stroma Sound, Pentland Firth on the 22nd. A single Minke whale was also seen by the crew of the ferry on the 23rd again in the Pentland Firth near the Ness of Duncansby.

A pair of Atlantic white-sided dolphins was seen in Thurso Bay by Karen Munro on the 27th. Chris Booth also reported four individuals in the Bay of Holland, Stronsay on 20th June; these were stranded individuals that were successfully refloated. Three Atlantic white-sided dolphins were later seen near Bring Deeps, Orkney on 22nd June.

There were also two unidentified cetaceans seen near Scrabster harbour on the 29th. No Basking sharks were recorded this year compared with five along the North Coast last year.

July

July produced 35 sightings. Again, numbers were lower than last year. Karen has spoken to local fishermen and mackerel numbers apparently were very low compared with previous years, so it does look like a change in the food chain and cetacean movement this year. The species most affected seems to be the minke whale which was a regular visitor in Thurso Bay in previous years.



© C Bird – Long-finned Pilot Whale

The first sighting I will mention is that of the 60 plus pilot whales; some of which were rescued from the sand banks in the Kyle of Durness on the 22nd.

When the animals were first spotted, naval boats were able to drive the majority of the animals back towards the open sea but a group of about 30 animals slipped back past the boats and stranded on a sandbank. When British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) arrived on the scene, there were already a number of dead animals but they managed to re-float some of the others using the incoming tide. In total, seven animals died (including four euthanased).



© C Bird – Long-finned Pilot Whale

There were 13 reported sightings of harbour porpoise, all involving small groups of six or less.

Risso's dolphins appeared again this month with three sightings recorded. There were two pods of Risso's dolphins seen by Paul Castle in the Pentland Firth at Scarfskerry; on the 10th, five dolphins were seen, and on the 30th, three dolphins were spotted. Karen Munro also saw a large pod of 12 animals on the 30th in Thurso Bay.

Atlantic white-sided dolphins were recorded five times this month. Karen Munro had three sightings at Thurso Bay: three animals on the 1st, ten on the 2nd, and a further ten on the 15th. Donald Oman spotted seven Atlantic white-sided dolphins at Ushat Head to the west of Thurso on the 14th. The Silverline Angling boat then reported ten Atlantic white-sided dolphins on the 30th also in Thurso Bay.

The first sighting of a killer whale was reported by Kenny Sinclair on 3rd July at Stronsay Firth. The next report was along the north coast on 11th July, seen by Karen Munro from Duncansby Head. The killer whales were first spotted by members of the Orkney Bird Group who saw them enter Scapa Flow at Stromness and kept Karen informed of their progress through Scapa Flow, this enabled Karen to see the pod of six orca exit the Flow into the Pentland Firth. She was then able to watch them for a short time as they made their way west along the Firth.



© C Headworth – Killer Whale

One more killer whale was seen by Rick Thompson near Pentland Firth on 13th July, and Colin Headworth saw four near Tresness, Sanday, on the 19th. Finally, Kenny Sinclair had sightings of a pair west of Wyre on the 27th, and a single whale on the east side of Egilsay on the 28th.

There were two reports of unidentified dolphin species. The first was by Michael Williamson, who spotted six dolphins while working offshore near Reay on the 2nd and the second was on the 3rd when four dolphins were seen in Thurso Bay.

The only sighting of bottlenose dolphins was reported by Malcom O'Reilly, who saw a group of six near Marwick Head on the 15th of July.

Only one basking shark was recorded in July and this was seen at John O'Groats and reported by Ivor Thomas of the JOG Ferry. This number of basking sharks is well down on the 13 seen last year.

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland

June

June is the month when cetacean sightings start to increase markedly in number, and yet this year the sightings were at about the same level as last year. The weather did play a part, with very few good days for sea watching due to strong winds blowing from the south-east. We did, however, record 17 sightings for June.

There were eight harbour porpoise sightings along the coast at various locations, with small numbers seen usually in groups of one, two or three animals. Certainly, at Lybster, they were much further offshore than previous years and not feeding in their regular location.



Risso's dolphins made their usual appearance at Lybster, with three sightings of pods of three on the 21st, five on the 23rd and two on the 24th. Again most of the sightings were further offshore than in previous years.

Two sightings of minke whales were reported several miles off Lybster on the 19th and 24th.

One sighting of at least three short-beaked common dolphins was reported on 19th June. They were seen south-west of Lybster heading further into the Moray Firth, again a very distant binocular sighting.

A pod of three killer whales was seen off Wick on the 4th by Susan Kirkup. Killer whales have been seen in this area several times in previous years. The Wick river estuary is a location where seals are often seen, waiting for salmon to exit the Wick river.

There was also a report of a stranded dolphin seen in the Wick river estuary on the 11th, received via the BDMLR. I was asked to check out the report by their local coordinator. I spoke with the group of sea anglers that reported the stranding to have taken place on a small underwater projection where a breakwater used to be. I watched the area and saw no sign of any dolphin. Tracy, with assistance from the RNLI, went out and took a closer look but nothing was found.

No basking sharks were reported in June compared with two last year.

July

July showed no increase in the number of sightings, and the weather for the time of year was well below what we would expect. This reduced the number of days that one could expect to see cetaceans. The local fishermen also reported that mackerel numbers were low and this is never good news for cetacean sightings. There were 13 sightings recorded for July.

Nine harbour porpoise sightings were recorded. These included five sightings by local creel fisherman Colin Carter from his boat. All sightings were of small numbers of animals, the maximum group being four. I recorded small groups at Whaligoe Steps, Latheronwheel and Lybster with the biggest group being five.

One pod of five Risso's dolphins showed up at Lybster on the 2nd. I managed a few pictures of one animal that came close to the shore. The remainder stayed well offshore and appeared to be feeding.



A group of 25 bottlenose dolphins was reported on the 16th near Bayfield, Caithness, by Ecoventures Dolphin Trips. This is an unusually large group for the area.

There was one unknown dolphin species seen off Latheronwheel on the 18th.

One basking shark was reported in July compared with four last year.

MORAY FIRTH

Written by Alan Airey, Regional Coordinator for North Grampian

June

Early June saw unusually large feeding flocks of auks in the outer Moray Firth and around the Grampian coast, with reports of great quantities of sandeel in the area.

The highlight for June was the group of over 100 common dolphins feeding back and forth in outer Burghead Bay on the 27th. Amazingly, I almost missed them! I had gone to Burghead during my lunch break and immediately saw three minke lunge feeding. I got completely engrossed watching them, especially when two started doing partial breaches. Sensing that I was going to be back late to work, I reluctantly dragged my eyes from the 'scope and immediately saw the common dolphins to the west. Talk about having tunnel vision! There was no way I was going back to work immediately until I saw what the commons were up to. They kept getting tantalising close but would then turn and head in the opposite direction. After watching them for 45 minutes, I finally had to return to work without discovering in which direction they finally headed. Unfortunately, there was no sign of them after I finished work.

June was good for minke whales, with 16 sightings and a total of 21 animals seen. Most minke were seen off Burghead, but one was seen off Logie Head, Cullen on the 15th from the Gemini Explorer and two off Strathbeg on the 28th by the RSPB.

There were 29 reported bottlenose dolphin sightings spread throughout June. Sightings were off Chanony Point, Burghead, Cullen Beach, Cummington, Hopeman, Covesea, Lossiemouth, Spey Bay, Buckie, Portknockie, Banff and Strathbeg. Groups of over 25 bottlenose dolphins were seen several times and most seemed to have at least one calf with them.

The latter part of June provided 11 of the 12 harbour porpoise sightings. The early porpoise sighting was on the 3rd off Covesea; the rest were off Burghead except for the 25th when one was seen off Portsoy, and the 27th when two were seen in Cullen Bay. On the way to work on the 27th, I saw three porpoise including the tiniest of calves really close into the rocks at Burghead. I'm sure the calf had just been born.

Finally, on the 25th of June, Jane Patmore reported a sighting of an unidentified large whale near Inchkeith, Fife.

July

Unlike last year, minke sightings for July were actually better than June this year. In total, there were 17 reported sightings with 31 animals seen.

July 1st was a really good day with two minkes seen from Burghead in the morning, and seven seen in the late afternoon. Everywhere you looked, there seemed to be rafts of seabirds with minkes lunge feeding amongst them. At one point, there were six feeding really close together and then two partially breached. Cullen Bay, further east, was also having good numbers of minkes.



© A Airey – Minke Whale

The Gemini Explorer saw two minkes on the 8th. The next day, the 9th, two feeding minkes in Cullen Bay were watched by diners eating in the Cullen Bay Hotel. I went to Portknockie on the 14th and saw three minkes. One went west but two juveniles remained feeding really close into the rocks at the Bowfiddle Rock. They then went into Cullen Bay feeding not far off the beach and travelling back to Bowfiddle, with many lunges on the way. It was a wonderful experience for

the dog-walkers who watched them from the cliff top. One minke kept raising its head out of the water in front of a group of gulls before finally lunging into them.

There were 39 reported sightings of bottlenose dolphins for July. Ecoventure Dolphin Trips reported 16 sightings between the 13th and the 17th, near Inverness and Caithness, with several groups between 15 and 30 individuals.

Howard Loates reported four bottlenose sightings in small groups within the Moray Firth, at Chanony Point, and in the Kessock Channel.

Many also came from the Gemini Explorer along the Buckie to Cullen stretch of coast, where groups of approximately 18 individuals were encountered although there were 30 dolphins around the boat in Cullen Bay on the 30th. Sightings of bottlenose along the Burghead to Lossiemouth stretch of coast were especially poor with only three reported for the whole month.

Harbour porpoise were recorded 12 times with sightings off Burghead, Portknockie, Fraserburgh, Ardersier, Pennan and Peterhead. Also off Peterhead, Mike Innes reported 10 white-beaked dolphins on the 27th.

On the 26th, an unidentified cetacean was seen off Cummingston, Moray. A large disturbance was seen on the surface, followed a minute or two later by a dorsal fin. The species was not confirmed but it could possibly have been a bottlenose dolphin or juvenile minke whale feeding close to shore.

On 17th July, a humpback whale was seen at two different locations. Once at the Sutors of Cromarty and later at Chanonry point. This may well have been the same animal as was seen the day before in Aberdeen (turn to Kevin Hepworth's round-up for more details!).

SOUTH GRAMPIAN & SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND

With contributions from Kevin Hepworth, Regional Coordinator for North Grampian

South East Scotland – June and July

Surprisingly, no sightings were sent in from South-East Scotland in June but there were a couple of bottlenose dolphin sightings in July. Ten animals were observed off Broughty Ferry beach, Angus on 4th July by Gerry Dailly, who had great fun watching three of them riding the bow wave of a large boat heading to Dundee port. Another three animals were seen in Ardanish Bay, Cruickness, on 6th July, and reported to the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust. The final sighting of the month also came in via the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Group and consisted of a group of three white-beaked dolphins north of Rattray Head on the 20th.

South Grampian - June

During June and July, Aberdeen proved to be the place to be for whales (and dolphins of course, but then we're used to them year-round). As regional coordinator for South Grampian, I received a call around 9pm on the 16th June from Ian Hay of the East Grampian Coastal Partnership who was keen to discuss a sighting he'd had at Aberdeen Harbour that afternoon. Unfortunately, he'd left his mobile phone on Yell during a cetacean survey from Aberdeen to Shetland earlier in the month or I might have got the news earlier. Anyway, he told me that he had had a meeting in the centre of Aberdeen which finished early so he had decided to stop at Torry Battery to count the bottlenose dolphins which had been around for several weeks in a group of between four and twenty plus animals. There were a few people gathered so he was sure there would be something around. However, when an animal surfaced, it turned out to be much larger than he had envisaged. After much discussion, we came to the conclusion that it was a humpback whale, although, despite watching it for a couple of hours, he wasn't convinced at the time and had even almost talked himself into identifying it as a minke whale.



The identification was confirmed for once and for all when he uploaded his images to his computer and checked them. The whale gave Ian a great show, lunging from the water showing its head and full mouth. Blows were also seen a couple of times. Ian also informed me that, as he left, the bottlenose dolphins turned up and the whale headed north. Despite a few hours delay in receiving the news, I went down to the beachfront at Aberdeen anyway,

just in case. I managed to locate a huge bushy blow in the distance and some activity in the harbour, plus a couple of potential white-beaked dolphins and a harbour porpoise in Aberdeen Bay. Due to the activity in the Girdleness area, I went round to the Torry Battery just in case. Apart from a few bottlenose dolphins, there wasn't a lot happening, but on any other day, I'd have been able to claim a successful evening. I went and had a look the following morning at 5.30am and had just a few bottlenose and a couple of harbour porpoise from the beach in near perfect conditions. The sea was littered with groups of feeding seabirds, so I was hopeful the animal may still be around but I had to head to work.

Whilst at work, I learned that a humpback had been seen at Chanonry Point. At first it felt pretty unlikely that it should be our animal, but after some e-mail traffic with Peter Evans, it was decided that the timeframe did make this a real possibility. So there it was: the one that got away. I had seen humpback whales off Aberdeen on two or three occasions and missed a pair around New Year earlier this year, so we do seem to be getting 'regular' sightings in our neck of the woods, which is always nice.

The end of June is when minke whales and white-beaked dolphins turn up off Aberdeen, so despite not conclusively seeing the humpback whale for myself, I was happy that our season was about to kick off and that I should start to see more than porpoise and bottlenose (and maybe the odd Risso's or two). Exactly one week after the excitement had died down, the press releases had gone out and the whale had faded into the database, I started hearing reports from the birding community about a humpback whale off Aberdeen along with several minke whales. Was it back? Had it never left? Anyway, off I toddled down to the coast on the afternoon of the 24th June (it had been reported on the 23rd and 24th off Girdleness) to see what I could see. Again, I had very distant bushy blows as well as white-beaked dolphin, bottlenose dolphin and harbour porpoise, so it was still around - no sign of any minkes though. We finally managed to get a weather window (well sort of - it was quite lumpy out on the water) and a boat organised for the 29th June, but only managed to encounter the fifteen or so bottlenose dolphins on the way back in. Still, they put on a great show at catching salmon alongside our vessel and even seemed to be using the vessel as an aid to taking the confused fish. Given there were no more reports of the whale after the 24th June, we had to assume it had moved on, although there was still a huge amount of bird activity in the region and large rafts of guillemots and razorbills with chicks suggesting that this year may have seen better breeding success than for quite a few years.

On 10th June, Kevin Hepworth reported 16 harbour porpoises around Donmouth, Aberdeen. Successive sightings around Donmouth, Aberdeen on the 13th and 23rd of June from Kevin noted the presence of a single harbour porpoise on both days. In Aberdeen, two harbour porpoises were sighted by Kevin on 24th June. On the 29th of June, four harbour porpoises were recorded in Donmouth, Aberdeen.

Two minke whales were seen at Arbroath on the 16th June by Jay Inwood.



© K Hepworth – White-beaked Dolphin

In Aberdeen harbour, ten bottlenose dolphins were sighted on 8th June, followed by a sighting of five bottlenose dolphins later in the day. Twenty bottlenose dolphins were observed at Stonehaven, Aberdeen on 9th June. On 10th June,

two sightings, each of eight bottlenose dolphins, were recorded in Donmouth, Aberdeen and Aberdeen harbour. Kevin Hepworth sighted eight bottlenose dolphins on 13th June in Donmouth, Aberdeen. On 14th June, 12 bottlenose dolphins were seen off Blackdog bridge of Donmouth, Aberdeen. In Stonehaven, Aberdeen, 20 bottlenose dolphins were seen by the Stonehaven Dolphin Research Trust on the 18th and 19th June, while only three were sighted later on in the day on 19th June at Donmouth, Aberdeen, where six were sighted on 23rd June. In Aberdeen, there were two sightings of ten and 12 bottlenose dolphins on the 24th, and 14 and 10 animals on 25th June.

There were just two sightings of white-beaked dolphins in June. On June 20th, 30 white-beaked dolphins were sighted in Fowlsheugh Nature Reserve, Aberdeenshire by Paula Redman. Seven white-beaked dolphins were then reported by Kevin Hepworth at Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire on June 30th.

South Grampian Sightings - July

In July, South Grampian recorded five cetacean species, a slight decline from the previous month. I was away for much of July, but was keen to get some decent views of the white-beaked dolphins that were around. So I spent a few evenings up at Collieston after work, because it means I don't have to cross the city and I have also had quite a bit of success up there.

I had received a belated report of a large whale off Collieston on the 20th July, with possible sei whale being cited. So, on the 26th July, I set off to Collieston, ever hopeful, but realistically not expecting anything. As it turned out, I had only been watching for less than twenty minutes before I had a large whale approximately three miles out. Even with binoculars, I was unable to positively identify the species and it may or may not have been the same animal. The main feature of my sighting was a tall vertical blow, followed by a very large, slowly surfacing, back surrounded by white water, which then sank equally slowly.

I never got a good view of any fin, but with the angle from my high position on the cliffs two miles north of Collieston and the swell, it didn't necessarily mean there wasn't any fin. I watched it for around 45 minutes during which time it surfaced four times, with dives of 7-12 minutes. The blow was like a waterspout, vertical, several metres tall and quite narrow, but the outstanding thing was the velocity at which the blow emerged. On one occasion, I also saw the tail flukes lifted horizontally maybe 1-2 metres clear of the water, after which the animal gave its longest dive of 12 minutes and which appeared to be a response to the Shetland ferry passing extremely close by. After much deliberation, chatting with folks, and leafing through various ID books, I am pretty sure that this animal was a fin whale, despite only showing its fluke once. The three dolphin species and seven porpoises closer in were merely a side-show. I had a look the following morning in a sea state 0, but saw nothing other than four porpoise, although there were minke whale, Risso's dolphin, white-beaked dolphins (in groups of 60+), bottlenose dolphin and harbour porpoise all recorded on the 27th July.

Anyway, it does seem to show that the Grampian region (indeed, all of Scotland's east coast) was a cetacean hotspot in terms of numbers and variety.

The recorded observations of harbour porpoises declined by comparison to June. Two harbour porpoises were sighted outside Porthlethen, Aberdeenshire, by Kevin Hepworth on July 9th. Ian Hay recorded an additional two harbour porpoises on July 27th at Collieston,

Aberdeenshire. Finally, three harbour porpoises were sighted at Aberdeen, again by Kevin, on July 30th.

Only nine sightings of bottlenose dolphins were reported in July. On the 12th, ten were reported off Aberdeen, while 15 were sighted at Arbroath, Angus on the 13th. 15 dolphins were sighted on the 15th at Aberdeen. On the 19th, in Lunan Bay, south of Montrose, six dolphins were sighted by Caroline Weir. Four bottlenose dolphins were reported on June 21st off East beach, Arbroath. In Collieston, Aberdeenshire, 18 bottlenose dolphins were sighted on June 23rd, although only 12 were seen on June 27th. On June 30th, one bottlenose dolphin was observed at Aberdeen, with a later sighting the afternoon of four dolphins.

During the month of July, there was an increase in minke whale sightings. On July 7th, Mark Sydenham sighted a minke whale near the BP ETAP Platform. Ian Hay reported a minke whale at Collieston, Aberdeenshire on July 27th and Kevin Hepworth observed two minke whales at Porthlethen, Aberdeenshire on July 29th. On July 30th, Kevin Hepworth also reported two sightings of a minke whale at Aberdeen.

Seven sightings of white-beaked dolphins were reported during the month of July. Ian Hay sighted a school of 30 dolphins at Collieston, Aberdeenshire on July 27th. On July 29th, Kevin Hepworth observed three, seven, and four white-beaked dolphins at Porthlethen, Aberdeenshire. On July 30th, Kevin Hepworth reported sightings of two, three, and 10 white-beaked dolphins at Aberdeen. The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Group had a report of a group of three white-beaked dolphins north of Rattray Head on the 20th.

NORTH EAST ENGLAND

June

There were several sightings in June in North-East England. On 10th June, three white-beaked dolphins were spotted at Newton Point, Northumberland, and another six animals were seen 10 miles east of Amble. A larger group of 15 white-beaked dolphins was seen in Druridge Bay, Morpeth on the 30th. Two dolphins (thought to be Risso's) were also seen inshore of the Farne Islands on 26th June. John Nadin was fortunate enough to spot a harbour porpoise at Newton Point, Northumberland on 10th June. The most unusual sighting for North-East England this month was of an unidentified large whale seen by Peter Cossins from a sailboat between Boulmer and Amble on 12th June. Peter caught sight of this animal during a regatta and at first didn't think that it was alive, assuming it was something floating in the water. It was only when the animal blew that he realised that it was in fact a whale of some sort. Unfortunately, the sighting was too brief to provide a confirmed species identification.



July

The 4th of July was a good cetacean-spotting day, with two Risso's dolphins seen in Staple Sound, Farne Islands, and three white-beaked dolphins seen at Newbiggin-by-the-Sea. Later in the month, four short-beaked common dolphins were seen on the 22nd in the Blyth area. There were a few more harbour porpoises this month, with six animals seen on 11th July at Seaburn and Roker, and a single porpoise in the Blyth area on the 22nd.

EASTERN ENGLAND – NORTH AND EAST YORKSHIRE

Written by Robin Petch, Regional Coordinator for Eastern England

Poor weather and sea conditions continued to restrict our sightings in the Whitby area during this period. *Specksioneer* actually only worked nine days in the whole of June whilst *Esk Belle II* managed more trips but was generally restricted to the “beach run” when she could get out of the harbour, where porpoises are seldom seen.

We did manage to log one encounter in June, however, three harbour porpoises being seen one mile north-north-east of the Bell Buoy on 3rd June.

July saw some improvement, but it was still the 27th before *Esk Belle II* reported seeing porpoises in twos and threes throughout the day. On 28th, the skipper of the angling boat, *Tina Dawn*, reported having seen a large whale two miles off Whitby, and then on 30th, Josh Hall reported three porpoises from *Esk Belle II* in the morning. We finally saw a porpoise ourselves that afternoon and then, at last, a minke whale travelling west to east about ¼ mile away. We then encountered five more porpoises during the Evening Cruise on *Esk Belle II*, including a calf with two adults as escort.

Stuart Baines has continued to send sightings regularly from Marine Drive in Scarborough, having made 32 separate sightings for a total of 45 porpoises, another two being seen by Laura Popely of the RSPB, two more by Adrian Ewart, three by Chris Thompson, five by Sharon Dickinson and two by Emma Howe-Andrews. Thanks again to Stuart and his friends who are contributing a wealth of data from this region.

Andy Shearer enjoyed an encounter with what he believes to have been a porpoise on 28th July, and Queensferry Cruises logged a definite minke on 11th. Thanks for these too.

That’s all for now. We will be away for most of August but hope for more sightings in the area, and look forward to the return of the herring shoals with many more minke and “our” humpback from last year!

EASTERN ENGLAND – LINCOLNSHIRE

Written by Dave Miller, Regional Coordinator for Lincolnshire



June was a very quiet month with no casual records sent in and no sightings during five effort-based watches along the coast.

July was much more productive with sightings of harbour porpoises on seven separate days. On the 4th, two were seen off Gibraltar Point National Nature Reserve (NNR). On the 7th, one was spotted from the beach at Winthorpe; and from Gibraltar Point NNR further singles were seen on the 9th and 15th, with two animals on 12th, 13th and 23rd. Sightings were observed as part of sea bird monitoring by local birdwatchers; R. Doan, J.C. Nicholson, T. Bagworth and D. Matthews.

EAST ANGLIA

Written by Dave Powell, Regional Coordinator for East Anglia

June

Yet again, the eastern end of the county provided the lion’s share of the sightings, and as expected it was Mick Fiszer who has been fortunate enough to be in the right place at the right time. Mick had four sightings of harbour porpoise from Mundlesy sea front. Single animals were seen on the 3rd, 9th and 30th and a group of two animals was seen on 18th.

July

The month got off to a remarkable start when Sea Watch Foundation received reports from members of the public of a northern bottlenose whale seen off Hunstanton, on Saturday 2nd June. The animal then stranded on Hunstanton beach on this date but fortunately re-floated itself and returned to sea.

Harbour porpoise were reported on three occasions by Mick Fiszler: from Mundesley on the 1st and 24th and from Walcott on 25th.



© S Hooker – Northern Bottlenose Whale

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND**North Kent – June and July**

There were no sightings for northern Kent in June. Three sightings, however, were reported for the month of July. South of Dover Harbour, David Portwain observed one harbour porpoise on 14th July. On the afternoon of July 27th, six harbour porpoises were sighted feeding by Andy Cunningham and then again by Maurice Ewart off Dungeness.

Suffolk and Essex – June and July

No sightings were reported for Suffolk and just one for Essex in June and four sightings of harbour porpoises in July. David Giles saw a porpoise in the entrance to the Thames on 14th June. Martin Pearson recorded one harbour porpoise in the River Blackwater on July 7th. On July 11th, two harbour porpoises surfing near Pakefield were observed by Sophy McCully, who also sighted two harbour porpoises there on July 28th. David Portwain also sighted one harbour porpoise on 31st July near the mouth of River Colne.



© M Baines – Harbour Porpoise

Near Pakefield, Sophy McCully reported one unidentified dolphin species on 13th July. Another unknown dolphin species was sighted by Pete Hamson on 30th July near the River Crouch Estuary.

SOUTHERN ENGLAND**Written by Steve Savage, Regional Coordinator for Southern England**

The only cetacean sightings reported between June and July were contributed by the Groupe d'études des Cétacés du Cotentin which is a French organisation with whom Sea Watch have a data exchange agreement. Three bottlenose dolphins were observed on 3rd July at Daffodil Wreck in the English Channel. The wreck of HMS Daffodil is home to a variety of marine wildlife including large shoals of bass and black bream, which could be the reason for bottlenose dolphin's presence in the area. The second sighting occurred on the 5th July when a single humpback whale was observed in the English Channel.

We did record some interesting common seal activity at Brighton, East Sussex as part of my role as Sussex County Recorder for sea mammals. On 12th June, a single common seal was recorded repeatedly between Brighton Marina and Pier. The sightings occurred at 10 am and then again at 9 pm less than 50 metres from the shore.

On 17th June, a common seal was again reported by workers on the Brighton Pier. Like the previous sighting, the seal was very close to shore and kept looking at the beach as if it were looking for somewhere to haul out. It then moved slowly west towards Hove. Later, there was another report of a common in the river Adur close to the Toll Bridge which was recorded as the rescued and released seal "Twinkle". There is some speculation over whether it was Twinkle who was seen by Brighton pier as well.

On 7th July, a seal was recorded close to the Brighton Marina by surfers at 9.00am. They reported the seal as being very curious. The behaviour recorded in all of these sightings does suggest that these might all have been sightings of Twinkle. However, it is difficult to be sure of this. This being said, over the years I have received several calls where other common seals have approached swimmers and touched them with their whiskers, so of course we can't be sure if this is Twinkle or not. Unfortunately we have no photographic evidence from these above sightings, which is a shame since Twinkle can be identified by his spot pattern.



I received a call about a seal pup on Hove Beach on Sunday 31st July. Unfortunately I was unable to attend but received a detailed report from Elaine from BDMLR. A summary of this follows:

The seal turned out to be a common seal pup, possibly less than a month old, with serious injuries to its face and head, including a bad gash beside the left eye. At 4:45pm, the pup was briefly on the beach near Hove Lagoon before returning to the sea. After much waiting, the seal came back ashore and was located by BDMLR and the wildlife rescue ambulance service who worked together on the rescue. The pup was then taken to the RSPCA Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre Mallydams Woods, in Hastings where it is currently receiving care.

We have no breeding groups nearby so no one is sure where the pup came from. We are currently looking at Chichester as a possible site since it is the nearest. Possibly the adult seal seen in June and earlier July was pregnant and looking for somewhere to give birth? In which case this seal could not have been Twinkle as he is a male. Common seals only feed their young for 4-6 weeks. This seal does look quite thin (rather than having the large fat reserves a pup should have when weaned) so one hypothesis could be that it became separated too early.

We took part in two major events during June and July: Spring Watch at Brighton, linked to the BBC Spring Watch, and the Adur World Oceans day Event. We took my life-sized inflatable bottlenose dolphin to both events, along with information about dolphin life history and with photographs of local dolphins and seals. I also took my education

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programme called “One World One Oceans Adventures of Ed the Bear education project” which considers local and global biodiversity and ocean conservation and sustainability issues.

adventuresofedthebear.blogspot.com/.

Both displays generated a lot of interest and questions.



As Sussex County Recorder, I 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 – 2010) can be downloaded from the website at

<http://sxbr.org.uk/biodiversity/publications/>

More details and photographs of Sussex sightings can be seen on my blog: <http://sussexmarinejottings.blogspot.com/> including update on the rescued seal pup.

DORSET

(Including sightings data kindly forwarded by Durlston Marine Project)



There were no sightings for the month of June in Dorset but there were seven dolphin sightings in July. The Durlston Marine Project reported two sightings of unknown dolphin species on 3rd July off Bat’s Head, Ringstead Bay and St. Aldhelm’s Head. The next day, the project sighted another unknown dolphin species in Poole Bay. The last sighting of an unidentified dolphin species was on 19th July off of Durlston Head as observed by the project.

On 3rd July, 16 bottlenose dolphins were sighted off Kimmeridge Ledges. The Durlston Marine Project then reported ten bottlenose dolphins at Chesil Beach on 13th July. Louis Van Zyl recorded eight bottlenose dolphins surfing near Burton Bradstock Beach on 15th July.

CHANNEL ISLANDS

Written by Bertram Bree, Regional Coordinator for the Channel Islands

June

In June, I visited the GECC offices to discuss the hydrophone project that is being developed for Jersey waters. Hydrophones will be deployed in the area around Jersey, concentrating on the Minquiers and Ecrehous reefs, as well as along the coast of Normandy. The aim of the



study is to record signature whistles for the 600-strong population of bottlenose dolphins in the area.

On 5th June, ten bottlenose dolphins were sighted at Cap d'Erquat in the Bay of St Brieuc. Bottlenose dolphins tend to move east in summer along the north coast of Brittany to feed upon large groups off the reefs of Chausey and the Ecrehous. On 13th

© G Veneruso – Bottlenose Dolphin

June, six or more bottlenose dolphins were seen east of the Minquiers reef near our new hydrophone site. On 14th June, in the evening, I was passing north of Chausey reef on my way east to Granville and at least one hundred bottlenose dolphins were present there, spread along the north of the Chausey reef which provides a rich feeding ground. On 26th June, twenty plus bottlenose dolphins were seen off St Catherines breakwater. At St Catherines breakwater, the cafe owner tells me that he sees dolphins on most days, which would seem to indicate that the area is a marine mammal hotspot; both harbour seal and Atlantic grey seal have been photographed there as well. On 29th June, at midday, five common dolphins were seen at the Roches Douvres reef, which is another wildlife hotspot at this time of year, not only for marine mammals but also for sunfish, basking sharks, turtles and sea birds.

July

Risso's dolphins made an appearance in July. They were seen at 15.30 hrs on 3rd July south-west of the Minquiers reef, then again in the Bay of St Brieuc for a few days, feeding on the decapod concentrations.

There were 24 sightings of bottlenose dolphins in July. During most days of the month, groups of up to 100 bottlenose dolphins were sighted off the east coast of Jersey, often near the green navigation buoy, off Gorey pier. Twenty animals were seen on 6th, thirty-five plus animals on 11th July and 100 plus on 25th July feeding in that location. A group of 40 was also recorded on the 27th by the GECC in St Catherine's Bay. Fourteen other sightings were recorded throughout the month and were of groups of up to ten animals. Dolphins tend to come to feed on mackerel in this area. They operate by pushing the fish into a narrow part of the submerged sandbank called the Banc du Chateau. If you are in the area, the green navigation buoy is the hotspot to see them chasing the schools of mackerel!

Chris Mansford recorded a group of 20 bottlenose dolphins on 26th July in St Helier harbour, and another group of five animals on 30th. Dennis Spencer saw bottlenose dolphins from onboard the Southern Bay Rose on 20th and 21st July, and again on the 27th and 28th along the south-west coast of Jersey. Groups ranged from between six and ten individuals. The Southern Bay Rose takes tourists to La Corbiere and back each day with up to one hundred tourists onboard.

Dolphins were also seen most days in July in Grouville Bay, off Jersey's east coast, particularly off Gorey pier and near Le Fara beacon to the north of Gorey pier.

SOUTH DEVON

June

June began on an exciting note with a sighting of a possible sperm whale off Brixham Breakwater near Torbay. Allison Robbins reported that she was out fishing late in the evening of 11th June when she heard a blow. She then saw the large whale surface twice before disappearing. Although her sighting matches the description of a sperm whale, the lighting conditions and the distance at which the



© P Evans – Sperm whale

animal was spotted make it difficult to confirm this sighting as a definite sperm whale. Last summer, a very similar sighting of a sperm whale was confirmed on 28th June and 21st July nearby, in Torbay.

Three days later, on 14th June, Chris Tapley reported a sighting of an unidentified cetacean near Dartmouth. The whale appeared briefly at the surface, blew once, and then dived. Although the species was not confirmed, the animal was said to be of similar size to a minke whale.

The only other sighting reported from June was of a group of seven bottlenose dolphins seen by passengers aboard the Whitestrand Boat Hire in Salcombe, Devon, on 6th June.

July

Another exciting sighting of a sperm whale, this time confirmed occurred on 9th July off the coast of Brixham, South Devon. The characteristic bushy blow was seen by passengers aboard Paignton Pleasure Cruises, which then alerted Sea Watch. The animal was re-sighted again later in the morning. The sightings this summer are strikingly similar to last summer's sightings of a sperm whale on 28th June and 21st July near Torbay.

Sightings of three different dolphin species were reported in July as well. Robert Hayman reported ten white-beaked dolphins – including one calf - in association with a huge shoal of fish, 16 miles south-east of Exmouth on 11th July. On 18th July, John Pattinson had a sighting of 12 short-beaked common dolphins, surfacing and travelling south, seen from land on Oddicombe Beach, near Torbay. Finally, Nigel Wilson reported a sighting of ten bottlenose dolphins on 20th July near Mew Stone, Dartmouth Harbour.

CORNWALL

By Dan Jarvis (including 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)

After the poor showing of any marine life for me to write about in the last newsletter, June and July have once again excelled. Eight different species were spotted over the two month period!

Beginning with harbour porpoises as always, there were 32 sightings throughout the months of June and July totalling 300 individual animals. Most of these sightings occurred in July with only five sightings taking place in June. They appeared in many of their usual haunts like Cape Cornwall, Land's End, Porthgwarra and Lamorna, but also showed up close to Polzeath as well. There were also 13 sightings of porpoise from Gwennap Head in groups of up to 23 animals, recorded by the Seawatch South West project.

Bottlenose dolphins were particularly well reported during this period from all over the county. There were 21 sightings in June and July but as for harbour porpoise, only five of these took place in June. Groups ranged from one to twenty animals and totalled 187 individual animals for both months. Throughout the period, observations came in from Polzeath, Perranporth, Portreath, St Ives Bay, Porthgwarra, Porthcurno, Mount's Bay, Pensance, Falmouth, and Torpoint. Unfortunately, one sighting from Porthgwarra involved a grey unmarked RIB apparently chasing the dolphins at high speed.

I was lucky enough to be assisting with a boat-based Cornwall Seal Group survey along the north coast where a group of 12 bottlenoses was spotted at five different times and locations throughout the day, including on the return trip between Portreath and St Ives where they decided to 'escort' our boat for over an hour while spy-hopping, bowriding and being generally very acrobatic. A mother with her very young calf even came up for a brief look at us before moving back to a safer distance as we motored along at slow speed!

Moving on to the more offshore cetaceans, there were pods of common dolphins seen at Polzeath, Newquay, Portreath, St Ives, Cape Cornwall, Porthgwarra, Penlee Point and the notable sighting of 200 animals seen in Mount's Bay. There were four sightings in June and 23 sightings in July with a wide range of group sizes with over half of the sighted groups comprising over 20 animals.

July had three sightings of Risso's dolphins. A lone animal was seen from Porthgwarra and a further two sightings were recorded by the Sea Watch South West project from Gwennap Head, and were of a single animal and group of six animals. There was also a single sighting of white-beaked dolphins off Land's End on 6th July and a lone pilot whale off Trevoze Head on 10th July – the latter two species being rarely seen in South West waters. In addition to this, minke whales were seen six times in July, off Porthgwarra and in Mount's Bay.

The final species recorded was a humpback whale, although, sadly, it was in need of help as it was found to the west of St Ives in mid July with rope caught around its body – more on this below. The only other cetacean activity was an unidentified group of approximately 100 dolphins off Bude on 1st July, the most likely candidate being common dolphins.

This year has definitely been a great year for one of our summer visitors, the ocean sunfish. Good numbers have been seen around west Cornwall from St Ives around Land's End and up to Mount's Bay. In stark contrast, basking sharks have had a poor showing so far in 2011, despite hopes being raised for a bumper crop by an early sighting in March. The few sightings that have come in are of lone animals or very small groups following a very similar distribution to the sunfish. Whether the more variable weather we seem to have had this year has been keeping them away from the surface is uncertain, but their absence over the last few months is certainly noticeable.



© PGH Evans – Sun Fish

Seawatch Southwest survey sightings.

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

As reported last year, a research team has been monitoring marine wildlife activity off Gwennap Head, near Porthgwarra every day from dawn until dusk between 15th July and 15th October for the Seawatch Southwest project over the last few years. The team has just returned for their fifth and final season and the sightings so far have been quite exciting.

Harbour porpoises and ocean sunfish have been seen almost every day, including observations of sunfish breaching on several occasions! Common dolphins have been present regularly, sometimes with numbers into the dozens. On only the third day of surveying, the group had their first Risso's sighting of six animals. There have also been a few minke whale sightings too. For the birders out there, over 23,000 Manx shearwaters were recorded in one day! Check out their website for more information about the project and a regularly updated sightings log to keep up with the latest from the team.

News and events.

British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org.uk) had an unusually busy couple of months when a striped dolphin was found live stranded at Looe early in the morning on 27th June, which died before medics arrived. Another striped dolphin then turned up early in the morning on 25th July at Carne beach, Gerran's Bay, and had to be euthanased due to its poor nutritional condition and injuries. These two animals take this period's cetacean species tally up to nine. The aforementioned entangled humpback whale was reported to BDMLR, who launched their rescue RIB 'Josh', along with more medics onboard 'Atlantic Diver' from Newquay to attempt a rescue. Sadly the 8–10m long whale couldn't be approached enough to be disentangled, although the 'good' news was that it was feeding normally along a plankton front and didn't seem to be obviously impeded by the thick trailing rope, although a thinner line over its back in front of the dorsal fin was beginning to cut in. An exhaustive 10-hour search of the coast the following day using three boats in communication with the Coastguard, RNLi and National Coastwatch Institute were unable to locate it in lumpy seas and frequent rain showers. The whale was then possibly seen a week later close to Porthtowan, but unfortunately the report came in a few hours after the actual sighting, cue another fruitless search by boat and land from Newquay down to Godrevy and back again.

On top of this, two seal pups were rescued and taken for rehabilitation within days of each other in mid-July, an extremely unusual occurrence at this time of year. The first pup was just a couple of days old and had been separated from her mother in the rough seas, while the other pup had been born in the last winter breeding season, but had sustained some nasty injuries to the front flippers that were badly infected. National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn1.html) staff were kept quite busy with these two very different personalities while they recuperated in the Hospital. They are both now doing much better. Sanctuary staff also did their bit for cetacean conservation by fundraising for the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society with the annual 'Walk for Whales' event, where intrepid volunteers were sponsored for a 5-mile trek around the lanes of Gweek!

Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings Network (www.cwtstrandings.org.uk) volunteers also had a busy time with regular reports of dead grey seals, harbour porpoises and common dolphins from around Cornwall, plus yet another striped dolphin, this time at Hayle, on 9th July, and a newborn pilot whale at Perranuthnoe on 23rd July. Several of these were taken to post mortem at the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratory Agency at Truro for further investigation.



© D Jarvis – Leatherback turtle

Probably one of the most exciting strandings was that of a dead leatherback turtle off Newquay, which had been found dead in pot ropes near St Agnes

over a week previously. The massive carcass was too decomposed by this stage to be useful for post mortem, but MSN volunteers were able to bring it into Newquay harbour where, in front of a gathering crowd, several tissue samples were collected and photographs and measurements taken before the body was wrapped up ready for disposal by the council the following morning.

Finally, Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) members have created some great opportunities by teaming up with BDMLR to run monthly boat-based surveys along the north coast of west Cornwall; and with Cornish Sea Tours and Cornwall Wildlife Trust/Polzeath Voluntary Marine Conservation Area volunteers to do the same along the north coast of east Cornwall. Early results from the initial surveys have been very promising with some surprising locations found where seals haul out, the rare sight of a common seal in South West England, and photo-identification of individuals being very successful. It is hoped these partnerships will continue next year once the winter weather has come and gone. Of course these trips have been very good for other wildlife as well, such as the bottlenose dolphin encounter mentioned at the beginning of this article, but a harbour porpoise and a pod of over 30 common dolphins have been spotted as well as close views of diving gannets, swooping shearwaters and comical puffins!

Emergency numbers:

For dead cetaceans, seals, turtles, sharks etc, call the **Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings Network** 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

Written by Chris Blackmore, Regional Coordinator for North Devon

June

June was quiet with four short-beaked common dolphins seen by Mark Pollitt from Hartland Point on the 29th. The only other records were of four porpoise sightings including seven animals from Capstone Point, Ilfracombe, seen by my wife Sharron and I and by Eleanor Knott who reported three sightings including five porpoise at Capstone Point throughout the month. However, on the 19th there was an extremely rare sighting of a bullock surfing at Croyde Bay! The young animal escaped from its farm, made its way along Baggy Point,

jumped into the sea and ended up in the surf at Croyde Bay. See www.thisisnorthdevon.co.uk for amazing pictures of the bullock in the surf.

July

July was much more productive cetacean-wise with our 30 sightings from the Ilfracombe area. These were made up of 21 sightings from Capstone Point of 34 porpoise, three porpoise at Hele Bay on 5th July, two sightings of four porpoise total at Tunnels Beaches in the middle and end of the month, and two porpoise seen at Watermouth from Paul Barbeary's *Ilfracombe Princess* during a wildlife cruise on 27th July. Sharron and I travelled to Lundy Island in the Bristol Channel for NWDW 2011 and on the trip out on 30th July, we had four sightings of a total of five porpoises from *MS Oldenburg*, the Lundy Island Ferry. Our last sighting for July was of two porpoise from Lundy Island on 31st.



Eleanor Knott also reported 25 harbour porpoise sightings in July: 22 from nine days of watching at Capstone Point, and three total from Downend Point on the 2nd and 22nd of the month. There were no other sightings reported by the usual North Devon watchers.

I had a very strange sighting on 4th July which remains a mystery. It was from Capstone Point and was over 2km away to the west. There were 100+ gulls circling or on the surface, but no gannets. A large dark triangular shape was rising at irregular intervals from the sea then sinking back down again. There was no noticeable "blow". I observed it for 25 minutes as it slowly moved down channel. It was too far away to identify and although I put the word out to local boatmen, no one else reported seeing anything. I'll probably never know what it was...

BRISTOL CHANNEL & SOUTH WALES

Written by Claire Rowberry, Regional Coordinator for Bristol Channel and South Wales

There were no sightings for the month of June in the Bristol Channel. July, however, had a number of great ones, starting off with a fantastic sighting of 100 short-beaked common dolphins feeding on mackerel, bow-riding and displaying aerial behaviours off Fall Bay, Oxwich reported by Judith Oakley on the 4th. Oxwich also had a sighting of two harbour porpoise on the 14th and eight bottlenose dolphins on the 26th. Groups of two and three bottlenose dolphins were seen twice towards the end of the month in Carmarthen Bay by Colin Voisey. The last sighting of the month was of two harbour porpoise spotted feeding in the Ogmore Deeps on 29th. Many thanks to all our spotters out there.

WEST WALES

Written by Danielle Gibas (SWF), Regional Coordinator for West Wales

June

With 131 bottlenose dolphin reports and 496 individual animals, June sighting rates were back up this year compared to last year's 108 sightings for the same month.



© G Veneruso – Bottlenose Dolphin

As usual, thanks to our fantastic team of Sea Watch research volunteers, the bulk of bottlenose sightings came from the New Quay land watches and boat surveys. The size of groups observed from the pier ranged from solitary individuals to a group of 11 animals which was reported by Emily Cunningham on the 14th, but animals were most frequently observed as singles or groups of two or three animals.

Sea Watch surveys also generated some sightings down the coast, spanning from New Quay to Cardigan: two off Target Rock outside New Quay, one in Llangranog, two off Ynys Lochtyn, one off Pencestyll and Pencribach respectively and three off Cardigan Island. The sighting off Llangranog yielded the highest number of dolphins with nine individuals on the 2nd June.

Other sightings from the southern Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation were reported at the usual hotspots: Sarah Bebb reported four sightings from Aberporth and three off Mwnt. *A Bay to Remember* had four sightings at Mwnt including the largest group of the month on the 3rd, which comprised 12 individuals.

Pembrokeshire contributed some variety to the month of June with sightings of both harbour porpoise and short-beaked common dolphins. Porpoise were seen 16 times totalling 41 individuals throughout the month, in groups ranging from single animals to six individuals. All of these were reported off Wooltack Bay and around Jack Sound and the Islands of Skomer and Skokholm by our regional coordinator for Pembrokeshire, Tom Warrell.

Tom also reported common dolphins three times over the month: a group of 30 animals on the 3rd off Grassholm, and two groups of six and 15 respectively south of Skokholm on the 9th.

Special thanks go to Lynn Clough who reported an opportunistic sighting of a group of 20 common dolphins on the outskirts of Cardigan Bay on the 2nd. She was lucky enough to catch sight of these animals while on a cruise boat.

July

As in June, bottlenose dolphins on the west coast were exclusively sighted in Cardigan Bay, but this month's locations ranged further north and south along the Ceredigion coast with sightings as far north as Aberdovey and as far south as Fishguard. In total, bottlenose were sighted on 121 occasions amounting to a total of 415 individual animals being seen throughout the month.



© K Lohrengel – Bottlenose Dolphin

As ever, New Quay harbour was productive in terms of sightings. Ninety-one sightings of dolphins were recorded but not just from Sea Watch land watches this time. New Quay Dolphin spotting boat trips contributed two sightings and *Islander* crew reported one sighting. We also had a sighting from a member of the public: Linda Dongworth reported two animals feeding on 29th in the harbour. The range of group sizes was very similar to the previous month; the largest New Quay sighting was yet again seen by Emily and was of 11 animals.

The Sea Watch survey team had 13 bottlenose dolphin sightings from onboard *Dunbar Castle II* in July. Again, the hotspots of Aberporth, Mwnt and Ynys Lochtyn and Cardigan came up with the goods.

A Bay to Remember had similar luck with the SAC hotspots. They had two sightings at Aberporth, three at Mwnt and one at Cardigan Island. Among those was the largest group for Mwnt in July which was of 12 animals on 21st July. New Quay Dolphin spotting trips also had a sighting off Ynys Lochtyn on 29th.

As I mentioned earlier, members of the public contributed some significant sightings. Steve Booth reported three bottlenose dolphins off Aberdovey on the 4th and Gerry Jordan reported a group of 15 bottlenose north of Fishguard whilst sailing. There were also a couple of reports from Aberporth sent in by Philip Lees and Gerry Knight.

This just goes to show the importance of casual sightings from members of the public. Since our survey effort and the boat operators are concentrated around the southern SAC, it's incredibly valuable to get sightings from other areas of the coast. Thanks to Steve, Gerry, Gerry and Philip for their sightings!

The biggest difference between June and July for me was the appearance of porpoises in New Quay and the SAC!! We had sightings both from land and from our surveys. There were nineteen sightings and not just of ones and twos. Groups of four animals were observed from land on the 8th and the 21st and five animals were observed from *Dunbar Castle II* just south of New Quay at Carreg Draenog. Other sightings followed a similar distribution to the dolphin sightings: Ynys Lochtyn, Cardigan and Camaes Head. Yet again, the northernmost sighting was reported by a member of the public. Corrine Williams saw a single animal off Borth. Harbour porpoise were also seen four times in Pembrokeshire by Philip Lees. The largest group was of six animals in Ramsey Sound on the 18th.

All our common dolphin sightings came from members of the public in July. Andy Bowen had two sightings on the 2nd of seven and 25 individuals respectively. Melvyn Ousely reported a large group of 60 animals on 6th and Andy Freeman saw a single common on 13th.

Thanks go to our research volunteers and members of the public who contributed sightings!

NORTH WALES

June

North Wales had a quiet and fairly predictable month of June. There were eight bottlenose dolphin sightings, of which seven took place around the Isle of Anglesey. The largest group, reaching 50 animals, was sighted by Sea Watch director Peter Evans south-east of Puffin Island on 20th June. There were also two other groups of notable sizes; Vince Jones reported

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a group of 20 animals off Moelfre on the 15th, and Sarah Bebb spotted a group of 15 individuals off South Stack on the 10th. On other occasions, groups comprised less than nine individuals and were spotted around the north of Anglesey with the exception of Deborah MacIntyre's sighting of a single animal off Barmouth on 26th June.



All of the other sightings in June were harbour porpoise. There were 11 sightings in total, most of which took place on the north coast of Anglesey: at South Stack, Llanbadrig, Bull Bay, Point Lynas and Penmon Point. Amongst these was a report by Jon Shaw of 20 harbour porpoise off Point Lynas on 26th June. All other reports were groups of less than five animals.

July

The month of July was a lot more varied in terms of species and, surprisingly, totally lacking in bottlenose dolphin sightings!

Three sightings of harbour porpoise were reported from the well frequented Bull Bay by Mike Thompson: a group of four on the 9th, a group of two on the 10th and another group of four on the 20th.

Risso's dolphins were seen twice in July. A group of four was spotted off Carmel Head on 13th and the second group of six animals was sighted off Bardsey Island on the 26th.

Jon Shaw had another productive month and recorded both of the sightings of minke whales for July. Three animals were seen on the 3rd and a single animal on the 26th. We also had two very different offshore reports of common dolphins thanks to Jon. The first was a sighting of one animal which took place the 3rd, 22 miles north of Amlwch, and the second took further offshore (40 WNW of Amlwch) on the 9th and was of an estimated 500 animals!!!

Thanks to all the observers who contributed sightings for North Wales! If anyone lives on the Llyn Peninsula or further south down the NE coast of Cardigan Bay, or knows anyone who does, we have poor coverage in that area and would greatly appreciate the sightings!

ISLE OF MAN

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

June



There was a total of 44 sightings in June, comprising four species. With the exception of eight sightings, these were all of harbour porpoise. Although the majority of the sightings were of groups of less than five individuals, there were three sightings of relatively large groups, numbering between 12 and 15 individuals. All three of these sightings were reported to the north and west of Peel on the west coast. Twelve out of 37 of the harbour porpoise sightings contained at least one calf.

Porpoise aside, June proved a relatively poor month for cetacean sightings, with only four minke whale sightings, two sightings of Risso's dolphins, one sighting of common dolphin (a group of 20) and two sightings of unidentified dolphins, most likely to also be Risso's dolphins.

July

There were a total of 84 sightings in July, comprising four species. Although this sounds impressive compared to June, at least half of these sightings were from one day's worth of boat surveys, by Manx Whale and Dolphin Watch and Manx Basking Shark Watch, towards the end of the month.

There were a total of 56 harbour porpoise sightings, comprising 166 individuals. These include an impressive 89 individuals seen on one boat trip on the 27th July. The majority of the rest of the sightings were reported between Port St Mary in the south of the island and on the west coast between Niarbyl and to the north of Peel.

There were two sightings of common dolphins in July, both in the south of the island and both containing between 20 and 30 individuals.

Risso's dolphins finally became more frequently sighted in Manx waters, with a total of 12 sightings being reported. Group size ranged between four and 12 individuals, with most sightings being made from the east coast. There was also an increase in the number of minke whale sightings compared to June, with a total of 12 sightings. All sightings were of single individuals except two, which contained two individuals.



Although July represents a marked increase in sighting numbers of Risso's, common dolphins and minke whales, there has been a worrying lack of sightings of these three species in Manx waters in 2011. Hopefully, this is as much to do with the sea being too rough to see them throughout the summer as opposed to a change in numbers or distribution.

NORTH WEST ENGLAND

Written by Dave McGrath

June

June started well with a harbour porpoise, perhaps two, being seen off Formby on the 2nd, the first June record for the stretch of coast between the rivers Mersey and Ribble since at



least January 2007. June is the month during which we get the least sightings along the north-west coast but we don't know if that is down to the lack of effort or a real trend in cetacean distribution. This sighting didn't herald any improvement as no more porpoises were seen all month until the 27th when two were seen together from the cliffs at Bispham, Blackpool.

However, there was an unprecedented number of bottlenose dolphins seen in June. A shipboard observer saw a pod of 20 at the Mersey Light at the entrance to the channel leading into Liverpool, on the 6th. A few days later, on the 10th, four were seen from Blackpool's Starr Gate feeding in the outer mouth of the Ribble. Later in the month, on the 26th, a pod of 10 was spotted by watchers at Hilbre Island Bird Observatory in the mouth of the Dee estuary. These sightings might be all part of a larger group, possibly originating from North Wales.

July

July isn't a good month for cetacean records in the North-West either. This year, however, saw some improvement on recent years, starting off early in the month with three porpoises seen by a regular observer at Bispham cliffs, Blackpool on the 2nd. The same observer saw a single porpoise from the southern end of Blackpool at Starr Gate on the 9th. Two days later, a porpoise was reported stranded dead near Fleetwood. Live sightings continued later in the month with two again at Starr Gate, Blackpool on the 23rd and two off Hilbre Island on the 27th. With four sightings of eight animals, July 2011 is the best July since regular recording began, equalling the total number of animals seen in July since 2007.

SOUTH WEST SCOTLAND

Written by Rowan Fraser, Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park

What a great couple of months with exciting sightings being submitted by observers on land and sea. Thanks to you all for keeping your eyes peeled and telling the Sea Watch Foundation what you have seen.

On 11th of June, Calum Shepherd recorded 12 bottlenose dolphins at McInroy Point, Gourock. This particularly interests me as local knowledge has it that bottlenose dolphins were seen fairly frequently around Dunoon and the Holy Loch until six years ago. Are bottlenose dolphins coming back? Or were they a small break-off group of animals travelling from some of the bigger congregational spots in Wales and Scotland? I say this because on 14th July, David Henry had a fantastic sighting that made me green: 50 bottlenose dolphins in Kirkcudbright Bay. On the same day, the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) recorded 45 animals in the same bay.

Alistair Rankin, Keith Norman and Steve Williamson recorded sightings of a single minke whale around Arran, Lower Loch Fyne, and Tighnabruaich respectively. From the spread of the dates recorded, it could either be the same animal hanging around or visits from different minke whales.

Short-beaked common dolphins were also recorded by Nigel Sanger, Iain Murray and Stuart Baines at the Garvallachs, Fairlie. North Ayrshire, between Big Cumbrae and Largs and the Upper Clyde on the way to Isle of Bute.

During June and July, Iain Murray, Mike Beard, Alex Bisset and Stuart Baines, Terence Johnstone, and Roger Brook had sightings of one or two harbour porpoise off Little Cumbrae, Corryvreckon, Kilcreggan, St Catherine's (Loch Fyne), and Loch Goil.



In June, the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) recorded a long-finned pilot whale off the Kyles of Bute. They also recorded harbour porpoise, a possible minke whale around Arran, and had a possible humpback whale sighting at Little Cumbrae in the Firth of Clyde. It's been a few years since we have a possible sighting of humpback and it just goes to show that some of the larger species do venture up the Firth of Clyde.

A big thanks to the local volunteers who record as part of the National Parks whale, dolphin and porpoise monitoring project; Elizabeth Blair, Roger Parramore, Jackie McKenzie, and Bob Jardine. We collected 99 harbour porpoise sightings in June and July around Blairmore / Strone and the Holy Loch on the Firth of Clyde. Groups were largely made up of small pods of three or four but we had one pod of seven or eight animals.

Elizabeth Blair, a local artist working from home, frequently takes time to look out of her window and her prolific casual sightings are yielding some potentially interesting results. For example I had thought that the presence or absence of harbour porpoise at different times of the day might be due to a tidal influence on prey availability; however, Elizabeth's records suggest that harbour porpoise can be seen at all times of the tidal cycle and I look forward to investigating this further.

If you are interested in taking part in our Sea Lochs and Firth of Clyde whale, dolphin and porpoise monitoring project, please get in touch with me by phone 01389 722106 or email me at rowan.fraser@lochlomond-trossachs.org

Happy spotting.

HEBRIDES

Written by Sandra Koetter, HWDT (Including sightings data kindly forwarded by HWDT)

June and July have been the busiest months so far with a total of 180 sightings through the HWDT community network and Sea Watch Foundation sightings network for this region.

Bottlenose dolphins have been reported on thirty occasions including one sighting recorded from our research vessel *Silurian*. Two sightings stood out within the last two months. The first one was reported from the Firth of Lorne, between Duart Castle and Kerrera on 20th June. Forty animals were present during this encounter. On the same day, 30 animals were reported from the Gulf of Corryvreckan.

Basking sharks were reported on 38 occasions. Additionally 10 shark sightings have been recorded from *Silurian* which complements the data of our community sightings network. Sightings that had more than 10 animals present have been reported for 11th June off

Hyskeir. Four encounters over two days (12th and 13th of July) off Coll, Tiree and Barra had between 10 and 21 animals present.

Common dolphins seem to be the most common species this summer. There were 29 sightings including two from the SWF in the last couple of months. *Silurian* has recorded another 33 sightings. Six sightings recorded between 30 and 50 animals present, two sightings recorded between 51 and 100 animals present and three sightings counted between 100 and 250 animals. The areas of the Sound of Raasay, Gairloch, Lewis, Coll, Lochmaddy and Barra were hot spots to see this species.

Apart from common dolphins, harbour porpoises have also been sighted regularly. Sixty-one encounters have been reported through the HWDT and SWF websites and *Silurian* reported another 173 encounters, many with calves being present which is great news. Reports were made from all over the Hebrides.

Minke whales have been recorded 34 times on HWDT's and SWF's websites, and 52 encounters have been recorded on *Silurian*. Sightings have been recorded throughout the Hebrides - especially Raasay, Skye, Coll, Gairloch, Lewis, Jura, Corryvreckan and from the ferry between Stornoway and Ullapool have all been areas with minke whale sightings.

Killer whales have been reported nine times. Areas with reports were Skye, Ardnamurchan



© S Webber – Killer Whale

Lighthouse, Lewis, Barra, Lunga, Ness and South Uist. One sighting was closer to home. On 29th June, a group of four killer whales were reported off Glengorm Castle, North Mull. Luckily, passengers onboard Silver Swift and Gemini Charters forwarded photos to us. Preliminary photo-ID results indicate that John Coe, Moneypenny and Puffin were present. The fourth animal might have been Comet.

Risso's dolphins have been reported on five occasions (twice in June and three times in July). Areas with sightings were Lewis, Barra, Islay and North Uist.

White-beaked dolphins have been reported once through our website whilst 27 encounters, with calves present in most of the encounters, were reported from *Silurian*. Areas with sightings included Barra, the Minch area, and Lewis.

Sunfish have been sighted once off Canna in June. One sighting of Atlantic white-sided dolphins was reported off Canna.

A leatherback turtle was sighted by volunteers on *Silurian* while crossing the Minch, between Skye and Harris, on 5th June. Photos were taken and the sighting sparked interest from various news agencies and the BBC.

As mentioned in the sightings summary, there was also a particularly interesting sighting of a sei whale between Gigha and Islay on 11th July. The animal was seen from the air by Danny Kerr who reported his sighting to the Sea Watch Foundation.

Unfortunately, we also had two stranding reports in July. The first, a Risso's dolphin, was found in the waters off Coll by *Silurian*. The crew took samples to send to SAC for analysis. The carcass was later found at Croig, Isle of Mull. The second stranding was reported by Scottish Sea Farms. A juvenile harbour porpoise had been found floating between the cages at the fish farm in Bloody Bay on 25th July. The site manager kindly took a blubber sample and measurements which were sent to the SAC as well.

NORTH WEST SCOTLAND

June

With 44 sightings totalling 67 individuals, minke whales were the most commonly sighted cetacean in June. Nick Davies with Hebridean Whale Cruises reported 34 of the sightings. Between 3rd and 26th June, he had 29 sightings at North Minch, mostly individually or in pairs, with one group of three whales seen on the 16th. He also reported five sightings at the Sound of Raasay between 11th and 20th June, made up of two individuals, two groups of two, and one group of three.



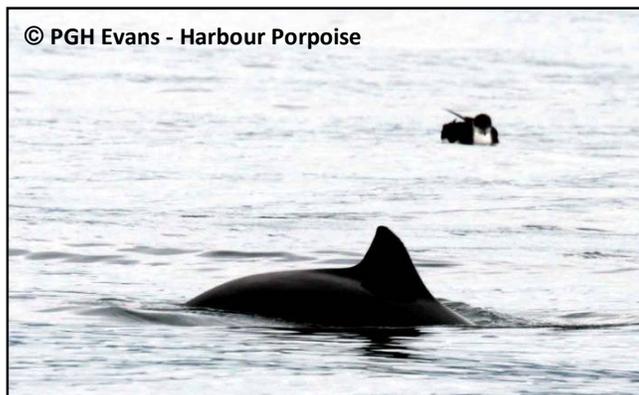
David and Avril Haines also had two sightings off Stoerhead Lighthouse, Assynt, of one minke whale each on 12th and 16th June. Next, Christopher Milligan reported a sighting of one minke whale at Rona on 18th June.

Finally, Jody McNeil of North West Cruises reported two minke whale sightings: an individual whale south-west of Carr Point, Gairloch, on the 15th, and two whales at Torridon, Achnasheen, on the 24th.

Two killer whale sightings were reported for the month of June. HWDT reported one whale at Berreraig Bay, off the Isle of Skye, on the 10th. Donnie MacLeod of HWDT also reported seeing one individual at the same location on the 18th.

There were plenty of harbour porpoise sightings in June, beginning with a group of eight seen by Stuart Baines on the 11th at Upper Loch Torridon. David Haines also had several sightings from Assynt. He reported seeing two porpoises on the 12th off Stoerhead Lighthouse; two porpoises on the 20th southeast of the Point of Stoer; and three sightings on the 16th of four porpoise off Rubh'an Dunain, two off Culkein Bay, and two off Stoerhead Lighthouse.

Jan Storie, with the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, reported several sightings from onboard ferries on 14th June. Three separate sightings were reported off Armadale, Isle of Skye, with three, two and two porpoises, respectively. Four porpoises were seen in the Sound of Sleat, Mallaig, and two sightings of two and three porpoises were reported between Mallaig and Armadale. From land,



she saw two porpoises in Armadale Harbour on the Isle of Skye. On 15th June, she had a

sighting of two porpoises off Lochcarron, Strathcarron, from land. Back on the ferry, she saw one porpoise in the Sound of Sleat, Mallaig, on the 24th.

June also saw 36 sightings of short-beaked common dolphins. Nick Davies with Hebridean Whale Cruises reported 19 sightings in the North Minch between 5th and 26th June, with most groups ranging from two to 100 dolphins, plus one very large group of c. 500 on 17th July. He also had four sightings in the Sound of Raasay, with 100 short-beaked common dolphins on the 7th, 20 on the 16th, 60 on the 21st, and 40 also on the 21st. On 11th June, he had two separate sightings each with 100 short-beaked common dolphins in the Inner Sound, and also a group of 40 on June 8th two miles west of Longa Island, Gairloch. Brigadoon Boat Trips also contributed one common dolphin sighting of a group of 20 on 20th June, at Eilean Trodday, Isle of Skye. On 24th June, David and Avril Haines reported two sightings of 15 and 40 individuals respectively west of Clachtoll Bay, Assynt.

The remainder of the common dolphin sightings came from members of the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust. Fionn McKee reported a sighting of 50 dolphins on the 11th between Tarbert and Uig, and a group of four was also reported on the 13th between Mallaig and Armadale, from onboard a ferry. Jody McNeil submitted two sightings: a group of 250 dolphins on the 12th at Red Point, Gairloch, and a group of 40 on the 16th at the mouth of Gairloch. Also on the 16th, Nick McKeown saw four dolphins off the Isle of Soay. Finally, two sightings were reported for 18th June: 20 common dolphins off Red Point, and 25 at Loch Dunvegan, Isle of Skye.

Only three sightings of bottlenose dolphin were recorded in June. On the 13th, Gelda MacGregor saw five dolphins on the ferry crossing from Calmac Lochmaddy to Uig. On the 20th, Marion Affleck had a sighting of seven dolphins in Mallaig Harbour, Highland. HWDT also reported a sighting of 10 dolphins on the 28th at Eilean Aird nan Gobhar, Raasay.

One white-beaked dolphin was also reported by Nick McKeown of HWDT on 8th June in the North Minch. Additionally, three sightings of unknown dolphin species were reported. On the 21st, Bruce Wickens had a group of 100 by Armadale Harbour, Isle of Skye. Jan Storie reported a sighting of nine at Loch Ainort, Isle of Skye, on the 29th. On the 25th, Clare and Steve Lock reported a sighting of five unidentified dolphins at Stoer Lighthouse. Finally, Stuart Baines had a sighting of three unidentified cetaceans in Upper Loch Torridon, Highland, on 11th June.

July

Fewer sightings of minke whale were reported in July, with only eight sightings reaching a total of nine individuals. Iain MacDonald saw two whales from onboard the ferry between Ullapool and Stornoway on 30th July. They were first seen individually and then two were seen together, suggesting that they may have joined up.

The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust reported five minke whale sightings, starting on 2nd July, with one whale at the Sound of Raasay. Two separate individuals were seen on the 9th at the Isle of Skye, one in Uig Bay, and one at Valtos, Trotternish. Finally, one whale was seen at Trotternish on the 23rd, and another at Corryvreckan, Loggie, on the 24th.

One killer whale sighting was reported to HWDT, on 11th July from onboard a ferry between Barra and Oban.

Seven sightings of short-beaked common dolphins were reported in July to HWDT. Three sightings came from onboard ferries: a group of eight dolphins on the 7th between Canna and Eigg; a group of 20 on the 13th near Elgol, Isle of Skye; and a group of 10 between Tiree and Barra on the 14th. From land, there were four common dolphin sightings from the Sound of Raasay, with the largest being a group of 80 dolphins on July 5th.

Bottlenose dolphins were reported five times to HWDT in the month of July. Six dolphins were seen on 1st July between Kyleakin and Kyle of Lochalsh, and six more were seen on the 3rd in Churchton Bay, Iverarish, Raasay. Two



© PGH Evans – Bottlenose Dolphin

sightings came from onboard ferries near the Isle of Skye: a group of three dolphins at Sconser on the 4th and three more dolphins at Elgol on the 12th. Another group of three was seen at Portree Harbour, Isle of Skye, on the 26th.

July had 22 harbour porpoise sightings. David and Avril Haines saw two porpoises on the 4th off Rubh'an Dunain, Assynt, followed a few minutes later by an interesting sighting of a basking shark! They also saw five porpoises on the 13th off Clachtoll Bay and one more at Culkein Bay on the 15th. At the end of the month, Iain MacDonald reported three sightings from onboard the ferry between Ullapool and Stornoway. On 30th July, he saw two separate individuals plus a group of 10 porpoises. Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust received the rest of the harbour porpoise sightings. Between 2nd and 26th July, sightings came from ferry routes between Armadale and Mallaig, the Ascrib Islands and Trotternish, Sleat Peninsula and Mallaig, and others around Sleat, Isle of Skye. Groups ranged from two to five porpoises. From land, two porpoises were seen off Brochel, Raasay, on the 2nd; one was seen between Kyleakin and Kyle of Lochalsh on the 26th; and five were seen at Portree, Isle of Skye, on the 27th.

Two other dolphin species were sighted in July as well. HWDT reported a group of 20 white-beaked dolphins at Uig Bay, Isle of Skye, on the 8th. An individual Atlantic white-sided dolphin was seen from a ferry near Point of Sleat, Isle of Skye, on the 13th. Also, a sighting of one unknown cetacean was reported on 26th July south of the Sound of Sleat.

NORTHERN IRELAND

[\(sightings data kindly forwarded by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group\)](#)

There were eight sightings reported from Northern Ireland in the months of June and July. Four different species came from five different locations, with minke whales and harbour porpoises dominating the reports.

There were only two sightings for the month of June. Rathlin Island, Antrim played host to two killer whales on 9th June, whilst on the 14th, Jackie Burns observed a humpback whale off Bangor, County Down.

Harbour porpoises and minke whales were seen several times throughout the month of July. Harbour porpoises were observed in groups of either two or three on the 1st, 5th and 29th July off Portrush, Co. Antrim; Castlerock, Co. Derry; and Bangor, Co. Down, respectively. One minke whale was seen in Rathlin Sound, Co. Antrim on the 15th; two in Sheepland Harbour, Ardglass, Co. Down on the 22nd; and one around Rathlin Island, Co. Antrim on the 29th.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

(sightings data kindly forwarded by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group)

June

Seven species were recorded during June., These included bottlenose dolphin (32 sightings), short-beaked common dolphin (8), Risso's dolphin (2), harbour porpoise (18), killer whale (1), minke whale (13), and fin whale (1). There were also three sightings of unidentified cetaceans and eight of unidentified dolphin species.

Bottlenose dolphins were seen throughout the month in groups of two to 30 in counties Dublin, Wicklow, Cork, Clare, Galway, Mayo and Donegal. There were sightings of two to three dolphins on 13 days in county Dublin, most within Killiney Bay, although a handful of the sightings occurred at Dalkey. Larger groups included 15 dolphins in Blacksod Bay, Co. Mayo on 3rd June, 13 dolphins off Loop Head, Co. Clare on the 11th, 30 dolphins at Carrigan Head, Co. Donegal on the 13th June, and 30 dolphins in the southwest region of Co. Cork on 22nd June.



Short-beaked common dolphins were seen in groups of five to 25 on a number of occasions during June, with one sighting from Co. Cork on the 4th, two sightings from Co. Galway on the 2nd and 27th, and five sightings from Co. Kerry on the 2nd, 4th, 10th, 19th and 27th. Risso's dolphins were seen twice in the first week of June – five animals were seen feeding at Codling bank, Wicklow on 3rd June and one animal was seen from the air in the offshore area west of county Cork on 6th June.

Harbour porpoise were seen regularly throughout the month, with sightings in counties Cork, Kerry, Donegal, Derry Dublin, and Wicklow. Although generally seen in groups of one to four, up to 12 individuals were seen during a ferry crossing by Stephen McAvoy at Kish Bank, Co. Dublin on 3rd June.

One killer whale was seen from the air by Ciaran Smith at Kish Bank, Dublin on 30th July. Species ID was confirmed by a series of aerial images taken at 200ft altitude, which were forwarded to IWDG from the SAR helicopter.

Minke whales were seen off counties Cork, Kerry, Dublin and Waterford on a number of occasions in groups of one to four animals. There were four sightings in Co. Cork on 2nd, 3rd, 10th and 11th; Co. Kerry on 2nd, 6th, 19th and 27th; four sightings from Co. Dublin – two on 3rd

and two on 6th and four sightings from and one sighting from Co. Waterford on 28th. One fin whale was seen in the Celtic Sea off of Wexford by Kieran Breen on the 2nd June.

July

July was even better than June for cetacean sightings,, with eight species recorded: bottlenose dolphin (27 sightings), short-beaked common dolphin (23), Risso's dolphin (4), harbour porpoise (29), killer whale (1), minke whale (19), fin whale (15) and humpback whale (5). There were also six sightings of unidentified cetaceans and ten sightings of unidentified dolphin species.

Bottlenose dolphins were seen throughout July in counties Cork, Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Donegal, Dublin, Wicklow and Wexford, with numbers ranging from two to five in most areas. Larger groups of ten to 60 individuals were seen in counties Mayo and Sligo, with most of these larger groups being seen in the latter half of the month.



© P Anderwald - Short-beaked Common Dolphin

Short-beaked common dolphin sightings were more prevalent in July with one sighting off Co. Wexford on the 4th, 15 sightings from Co. Cork spread throughout the month, five sightings from Co. Kerry between the 14th and 28th, one sighting in Co. Clare on the 8th and one sighting from Co. Mayo on the 22nd. Most groups consisted of three to 50 animals, but G Miles observed around 100 individuals from the Kinsale Platform on 14th July, and another 200 were seen by Colin Barnes, offshore from west Cork on 26th July. The dolphins seen by Colin Barnes were seen in several areas close to fin and minke whale activity off the Deep Hole area. A few of the sightings from Co. Cork were unusual in that common dolphins were seen unusually close to shore. A group of up to 20 common dolphins was seen for five days between 7th and 11th July in the inner harbour at Crookhaven by Wayne King, Ralph Gunne and John McMahon. Three common dolphins were also seen at the mouth of Bantry harbour on 3rd July by Donal O'Donovan and in the River Lee on 11th July by Fergal Dennehy.

Risso's dolphins were seen in groups of two to seven individuals on July 1st at Carnsore Point, Co. Wexford, twice on the 26th at the Blasket Islands, Co. Kerry and near Keem, Achill Island, Co. Mayo, and in the Celtic Sea, off Co. Wexford on the 30th.

Harbour porpoise were seen in groups of one to three individuals throughout July in counties Wexford, Cork (particularly around Cape Clear Island), Donegal, Kerry and Dublin (especially Killiney Bay). Niall Keogh managed to get good photos of a mother and calf that were seen 50m from the shore by the Breaches, near Kilcoole, Wicklow on 27th July and Michael McGovern got images of a porpoise breaching in Killiney Bay, co Dublin on 1st July.

A group of four killer whales was seen by Caroline Tuffly from Downpatrick Head, Co. Mayo on 4th July. These were observed during Caroline's first effort watch at this site and were close enough to secure photo ID images which confirmed that they were some of the Scottish "West Coast" community group, with John Coe and Comet being present. Interestingly, there was a group of four animals seen off the west coast of Scotland on 29th June which also included John Coe and Comet (cf. Hebrides Regional Round-Up).

The 15 fin whale sightings were exclusively from county Cork, in particular offshore from west Cork, with animals mostly seen in groups of one to seven. A couple of the sightings included mother-calf pairs – Conor Ryan reported three fin whales offshore from west Cork on 13th July including a calf, and another mother-calf pair was reported on 21st July by T. Feen and Colin Barnes to the south-east of Galley Head. Bigger groups of fin whales were also spotted, including a group of 24 seen by Dave Wall on seismic survey vessel *Polarcus Samur* around five miles off Old Head of Kinsale on 11th July. This sighting heralded the inshore arrival of large whales for the summer 2011 season. A group of around 11 fin whales was also seen by Robert Falkner at Union Hall on the 29th and a group of ten fin whales was seen by Pete and Rachel Wolsenholme at Seven Heads, on the 31st.

Minke whales were seen nine times off the Cork coast, twice off counties Donegal, Mayo and Wexford, three times off co. Kerry (including a group of ten that was seen by Nick Massett at Dingle Bay on 22nd July) and once off Co. Dublin. Most groups were of one to three individuals and were recorded feeding.

One humpback whale was seen by Julia Baer from a sailing boat off Lambay Island, Co. Dublin on 14th July. Two to four humpback whales were seen off Clogher Head/Slea Head on four occasions during July – once by Isabel Bennett on 14th July and three times by Nick Massett on 13th, 21st and 22nd July. Images secured by Nick Massett on the 13th confirmed these to be a repeat sighting of HBIRL10 and a new animal HBIRL15.



Unless otherwise stated, regional roundups were written by SWF volunteers Rachel Lambert, Kate Blackwell, Paula Redman, Cara Appel. Many thanks to them and all regional coordinators for their contributions to this issue.

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. Keep those sightings coming in!!

See them... Report them... Save them!

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