

sea watch FOUNDATION



Editorial

The first couple of months of the summer season (and my involvement with Sea Watch as Sightings officer) have been very successful despite the usual challenges posed by our ever unpredictable weather. May, especially, hit the whole of the UK with high winds and rain and made field work close to impossible and sighting numbers are notably decreased in quite a few of our regions. This was a blessing in disguise for me as extra hours in the office are always useful in a new job! On that note, I would like to thank everyone for their warm welcome and on-going patience while I learn the ropes of the sightings position!



Hopefully the worst of it is behind us (weather-wise) and we will have sunshine across the board for National Whale and Dolphin Watch on 5th to 7th August this year. This event is a work in progress and we will be recruiting new watchers up until the last minute. Watches are now on the website <http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/events.php> so please spread the word and let's hope that the 10th NWDW will be the biggest! Please don't hesitate to get in touch with me with any questions or queries on the sightings scheme or National Whale and Dolphin sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk.

NEWS

Recent Sea Watch Reports

April and May were busy months for Sea Watch publications. A number of reports were published on a range of topics and these are all available either on the Sea Watch website <http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/publications.php?uid=10> or on request at sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk.

Cetacean ship strike in the ASCOBANS Region has been a hot topic at Sea Watch throughout April and May. An initial report was produced by Sea Watch (Risk Assessment of Potential Conflicts between Shipping and Cetaceans in the ASCOBANS Area; Evans, P.G.H., Baines, M.E., Anderwald, P.). In this report, the main areas and seasons for potential conflict between shipping and cetaceans are identified by overlaying sightings data from the ASCOBANS region to AIS (Automatic Identification System; an automated tracking system used on ships and by Vessel Traffic Services

for identifying and locating vessels) and VOS (Voluntary Observing Ship scheme; an international programme that recruits ships to record and transmit weather observations whilst at sea.) shipping data. The report identifies the English Channel, southernmost North Sea, Kattegat, Danish Belt Seas and Western and Central Baltic as having the highest densities of vessel traffic. Large whales are the most at risk from vessel strike and are thankfully scarce in these areas. On the other hand, small cetaceans are frequent in the Western English Channel as are harbour porpoises in the Southern North Sea and Danish Belt seas. The areas identified as having highest risk of ship strike upon large cetaceans were the western Bay of Biscay and NW Spain.

This report was followed by a further publication by Sea Watch commissioned by Worldwide Fund for Nature for WWL (Decision Support System for Cetacean Avoidance: "Ship Strikes"). The principal recommendation made by this publication is the implementation of speed restrictions by shipping companies in areas of high whale density. A third document has also been produced in the form of a "Question & Answer" on the rationale behind the WWL ship strike mitigation.



Another area of current interest is offshore renewables. Sea Watch was contracted by Scottish National Heritage to produce a report on the cetaceans and basking sharks in the Pentland Firth and Orkney waters. In the light of proposed offshore energy development, this paper makes recommendations for baseline cetacean and basking shark surveys and impact monitoring.

The report can be found on the Sea Watch website (Evans, P.G.H. (2011) Baseline Survey Recommendations for Cetaceans & Basking Sharks in the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. (iBids and Projects ID 1052). 54pp.), and SNH is now also using this for other areas of Scotland.

Sea Watch has also been working in collaboration with CREEM (Centre for Research into Ecological and Environmental Modelling, University of St Andrews) on costing a UK surveillance strategy for JNCC. The associated report details costs for a UK wide scheme of cetacean monitoring including a survey protocol (aerial and boat-based surveys), C-Pod arrays in Special Areas of Conservation and photo-ID on major coastal bottlenose populations (Evans, P.G.H. and Thomas, L. (2011) Estimation of costs associated with implementing a dedicated cetacean surveillance scheme in UK. Joint Nature Conservation Committee Commissioned Report. 45pp.).

SIGHTINGS SUMMARY, APRIL - MAY 2011

Sightings in April and May were dominated by the usual suspects. Bottlenose dolphins ranked highest in sightings frequency followed by harbour porpoise and minke whales. Killer whales, short-beaked common dolphins, Risso's dolphins, long-finned pilot whales and white-beaked dolphins followed in descending order of sightings frequency.

There were also a few rarer sightings in April and May of which Ireland had more than its fair share. There were three sperm whale sightings in April and a stranding in May. One animal was spotted off the Shetland Isles on 7th April and two animals were seen on two separate occasions off the coast of Ireland. The last day of May saw a sperm whale stranding take place in the early hours. The 30 ft animal was discovered at 6:10 am on Redcar Beach in Cleveland and was still alive. Despite the best efforts of local fire brigade and members of British Divers Marine Life Rescue, the whale died later in the morning.

A single Atlantic white-sided dolphin was also spotted in the south west of Ireland. Finally, at the end of May, 21 fin whales and a humpback whale were sighted in the Celtic Deep and off Cork respectively.

The main areas of bottlenose dolphin sightings were North East Scotland and the Moray Firth, West Wales and Anglesey, Dorset and various parts of Ireland. These areas coincide with known populations of this species and good sightings coverage. However there were a few reports from other areas with sightings of bottlenose coming in from Southern England, North and South Devon, Cornwall and North West Scotland and the Hebrides.

Sea Watch staff and volunteers had the rare opportunity to see a very well preserved body of a bottlenose dolphin on 14th May. Stranded bottlenose dolphins are few and far between and generally fairly damaged so this was an unusual occasion in both respects. The animal was found stranded on Aberaeron beach (north of New Quay, Ceredigion) and had no obvious signs that indicated the circumstances of the stranding.



The body was sent to London for a post mortem examination. The dolphin was a young female and had a well marked fin. Hopefully, the results of the post mortem will lead to a good understanding of what led to this unhappy event.

By comparison to bottlenose dolphin sightings, harbour porpoise sightings were a lot more evenly spread across the British Isles. Porpoise were well sighted throughout

both April and May although bad weather meant sightings numbers dropped in May. County Dublin, the Isle of Man, North Wales, Lincolnshire, North Devon and Grampian had the most porpoise sightings. Smaller numbers of sightings of this species were also reported from the Moray Firth, North East England, Yorkshire, East Anglia, Suffolk, Kent, Dorset, West Wales, North West England, West Scotland and the Outer Hebrides.

Minke whale sightings were reported exclusively from Scottish and Irish waters during April and May, Co. Kerry, Moray Firth and Co. Cork coming out on top with 29, 14 and ten sightings respectively.

The Shetland Isles and North Scotland had the majority of killer whale sightings but this species was also spotted once in each of the following regions: South West Scotland, North West Scotland, Ireland and a possible sighting off Kent.

There were 18 sightings of short-beaked common dolphins in Irish waters in April and May from a wide variety of locations: North and North West Scotland, South England, Dorset, and West Wales.

Most Risso's dolphin sightings during the period under review came from North Scotland. There were seven reports of long-finned pilot whales throughout April and



May one in Shetland, another in Dorset, four in Ireland, and the very well publicised sighting in the shallow waters of Loch Carnan in the Outer Hebrides. The pod was discovered on 24th May and members of the British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) and the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SSPCA) worked hard to coerce

the animals back into deeper waters. As it turned out, there was a sick female animal in the group and, due to their strong social bonds, the remaining individuals had followed her into shallow waters. The pod moved on two days later, following the death of this individual.

There was a scattering of white-beaked dolphin sightings across the British Isles during April and May with sightings in each of the following regions: the Outer Hebrides, North and North East Scotland, North East England, and Southern England. White-beaked dolphins are commonest in the West of Scotland, around the Northern Isles and the northern North Sea, but sightings continue to occur in a relatively small area of southern England where a small and apparently isolated population occurs.

I would like to extend thanks to all Sea Watch Regional Coordinators, boat operators and volunteers who conduct regular watches and submit sightings. Thanks also to

our colleagues from collaborating organisations who contribute to the sightings database and provide on-going support to Sea Watch's work. All of your contributions are invaluable and highly appreciated!

Send in all cetacean sightings to sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk or via our online reporting form found at <http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk>.

Danielle Gibas, SWF

REGIONAL ROUNDUPS

SHETLAND

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

A total of three different species were recorded off Shetland in April and May, April being particularly notable for regular killer whale sightings and the rare observation of a sperm whale in British coastal waters.



April was off to a strong start with a sighting of three killer whales heading north past Grutness, south Shetland, on 2nd April, and a further two animals being sighted in the same area later that day. Killer whales continued to dominate the sightings for the rest of the month with a bout of observations in the third week of

April. Five killer whales were observed around Sumburgh Head on the 12th and a further four individuals were spotted three days later in the same area. Another group of seven was recorded in Yell Sound on 13th April. On 15th April, two killer whales were sighted in the Fair Isle area and the following day, a further two in Mousa Sound in the evening. On 22nd and 24th April, there were two sightings of single killer whales around Sumburgh Head, just a week after the first sighting in this area. Finally, near the end of the month on 27th April, two killer whales were observed feeding around the Brent Charlie Oilfield, north-east of Lerwick.

There was only one other species sighted in April; a sperm whale was recorded near Eswick. Although sperm whale sightings are not a common occurrence, sightings of this species are regularly reported throughout the British Isles.

May saw a drop in the number of sightings with only two species being recorded; a long finned pilot whale near the Houb of Scatsta and three sightings of killer whales; on 27th May, four killer whales were sighted in Yell Sound and another two individuals were observed near Papa Stour from a ferry. Lastly, a group of four killer whales was sighted on 29th May in South Nesting Bay.

NORTH SCOTLAND AND ORKNEY

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland

In April, there were 19 reports of four species along the north coast of Scotland; some of which came with very exciting stories.

Harbour porpoise was the most frequently spotted species with a total of four reports. Kevin Davidson spotted two animals from the Thurso Lifeboat while on exercise in Dunnet Bay, Caithness. I also spotted a further two from Duncansby Head, Caithness on the 15th and then saw two groups of two individuals at Strathy Point, North Sutherland on the 24th.

Risso's dolphins also made an appearance along the north coast with a sighting of 11-20 individuals at Thurso Bay, Caithness on the 10th by Karen Munro and my own sightings of two groups of three animals at Strathy point, North Sutherland on the 24th.



There was a single sighting of five white-beaked dolphins off Holborn Head, Thurso, Caithness by Karen Munro on the 10th.

An unidentified dolphin was spotted at Duncansby Head, Caithness on the 21st.

There were four sightings of single minke whales in the

Orkney Islands during April. The first took place on the 19th off Sanday Island. The next three all took place in Scapa Flow on 28th although it is unclear whether these are three different animals.

This year, killer whales made an early appearance on the northern coast of Scotland with a sighting at Tang Head Scarfiskerry, Caithness by Fiona Watson on the 20th. This was just the second sighting of the year off the Scottish mainland. Fiona had arrived home at 6.30 pm and while parking her car she had spotted three orcas prowling the coast at the bottom of her garden. Then, she told me, all the washing, cleaning and cooking she had intended to do went right out of the window as she rushed to the bottom of her garden and spent the next one and a half hours watching the orcas hunting down the seal that inhabit her piece of coastline.

Killer whales were also reported on four different occasions in the Orkney Islands. The first report of the month was of two animals in Eynhallow Sound on the 5th. There were also two reports of a group of five animals off Swona on 21st. A further report of a group of seven animals was made three days later, again off Swona.

There were 20 sightings of five species reported during May along the north coast of Scotland.

As in April, there were four harbour porpoise sightings. Paul Castle reported a group of four animals off Scaraskerry, Caithness on the 11th and one off Strathy Point, North Sutherland on the 17th. Karen Munro reported one animal on the 10th in Thurso Bay, Caithness, and a further group of five animals the next day in the same spot.

Risso's dolphins were again showing along the north coast with five sightings. Karen Munro spotted four at Ushat Head, Caithness on the 4th and six in Thurso Bay, Caithness on the 10th. Paul Castle had two sightings of single Risso's dolphins at Strathy Point, North Sutherland on the 17th. There was also a sighting of seven Risso's dolphins in Hoys Deep, Scapa Flow, Orkney on the 11th.

Short-beaked common dolphins made their first appearance along the north coast when spotted by Paul Castle who saw a group of between 10-15 individuals travelling west at Strathy Point, North Sutherland, on the 17th.

Minke whales also made their first appearance in May when Paul Castle saw a single individual on the 11th at Scarfskerry, Caithness. A few days later, on the 14th, Donald Oman saw one at Duncansby Head. A further two individuals were seen from the North Coast Marine Adventure rib south-west of the Island of Stroma in the Pentland Firth on the 25th.



Killer whales were reported at a number of locations along the Pentland Firth throughout the month of May. Unfortunately, I was unable to include all sightings because some lacked detail and were third party reports. I was however able to include the following reported sightings.

Karen Munro had a very good run of sightings, which started on the 1st with a sighting of two killer whales at Dunnet Head, Caithness, and a further seven in Thurso Bay, Caithness. Also on the 1st, seven killer whales were seen by the John O'Groats based North Coast Marine Adventure tour boat in the Pentland Firth near the Island of Stroma. They also had an encounter off the coast of Huna when they spotted six killer whales on the 4th. On the 19th, the John O'Groats Ferry encountered seven animals while on route across the Pentland Firth to Orkney and a group of three killer whales were also spotted in Scapa Flow.

Karen Munro had a fantastic prolonged and very close up encounter on the 30th. Karen was out with her partner Kevin exploring the coastline at Ushat Head, Caithness when she spotted between nine and ten killer whales travelling

westwards. They raced back to their car and tracked the killer whales, getting to Portskerra just before the orca. A couple of seals had spotted Karen and were so busy watching her that they did not notice the approach of the orca and paid the ultimate price. This was the nearest that Karen had ever been to orca and she said it was an experience that she will never forget. After that, Karen and Kevin got back in the car and continued to travel further west and reaching Strathy Point, North Sutherland just before the orca did. This time they were joined by a local couple who had seen a notice that I had posted on a local website. The orca again passed very close and Karen was able to get some camera phone video, it was unfortunate that Karen had lent her camera and zoom lens to a friend but as she said later: "If not having the camera meant I could be that close to these fantastic animals then I would leave it at home".

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland

April started off well with some good sightings but again the weather was to play its part in events. The North Sea surface temperature was warming up at the beginning of April, then started to slip back. April is a good month for spotting Risso's dolphins off the coast of Caithness, and they did appear on the 10th at Clythness.



They were first spotted by my daughter Jennie Bird when two appeared just 100m offshore; at the time, I was trying to find a reported net entangled seal below the cliffs nearby. When I returned and was told what I had missed, I had a quick scan around and spotted two more Risso's dolphins much further out heading north. Risso's

dolphins were spotted a further two times during the month from Swiney Hill. A group of four was spotted on the 14th and a group of seven on the 25th.

Harbour porpoise made at least nine appearances during April at their usual sighting locations with one at Lybster on the 9th, one at Whaligoe Steps, Ulbster on the 10th, one at Clythness on the 10th. Two groups of two and three animals respectively were also seen at Lybster on the 14th, two groups of two on the 24th and a group of 3 on the 25th.

With the arrival of May, I thought that we would start to get some good sightings. The surface water temperature had returned to the early April position so this should have meant a lot of sightings. Wrong! At this point the weather turned against us again; this time it was the wind and rain. Wind was the main problem blowing from the east and south-east right across the open water of the Moray Firth

giving few days when it was possible to sea watch due to the heavy swell and choppy sea.

Nevertheless, there were three reported sightings. The first was a sighting of 20 bottlenose dolphins from the South Sutor of Cromarty on the 17th. The following sighting on the 28th was unexpected and looked as if it would be a rescue rather than a sighting. I received an e-mail from my good friend Charlie Phillips stating that there had been a white-beaked dolphin in trouble near Tain, East Sutherland. Charlie reported that the dolphin had been seen struggling in shallow water by members of the public who assisted the dolphin back into deeper water. It then swam into the nearby harbour at Portmahomack where it remained until the tide ebbed and it made its way safely to open water; the dolphin was not seen again. The third sighting for the month was a single harbour porpoise seen on the 30th near the open air Sea Pool at Trinkie Wick.

MORAY FIRTH

Written by Alan Airey, Regional Coordinator for North Grampian

I was overseas for most of April but in the last five days of the month when I was back, I personally had 18 sightings. It makes you realise what good weather we had at the end of April compared to May which I think was the worst May I can remember.

After having a minke sighting at the end of March, we did not have too long to wait into April for another sighting, when one was seen off Portknockie by Ken Whyte on the 2nd. Three other minkes were seen in the distance off Burghead, two on the 27th and one on the 29th.



The local bottlenose dolphins were reported 33 times along the coast. The usual hotspots produced the most sightings such as Burghead, Lossiemouth, Spey Bay, Findochty and Portknockie with Ken Whyte and the Gemini Explorer in particular having good sightings. The largest group of bottlenose dolphins seen was by the Gemini Explorer on the 25th when they had approximately 50 animals around the boat. Several

calves were seen with most groups, which is always an encouraging sign.

Harbour porpoise were reported on 11 occasions, usually singly but sometimes a pair. Three sightings of porpoise were in Cullen Bay, one off Covesea and the remainder off Burghead.

On the 27th, I was going to stay at Burghead in the afternoon but decided to go out on the Gemini Explorer instead, I later heard of a possible orca sighting there but as I write this report I am still trying to confirm this.

May, I thought, was an awful month, especially as far as the wind was concerned being sometimes gale force. Luckily there were enough lulls in the weather to get some watching in.

Minkes were seen six times off Burghead, Buckie and Covesea, but the best sighting came on 22nd when I watched three minkes feeding back and forth for over 90 minutes off Burghead.

Slightly more sightings of bottlenose dolphins were reported in May with 37 sightings. They varied from a single dolphin foraging in the River Ness past the marina entrance to groups of four to 30 feeding and leaping along the coast at Alturlie Point, Chanonry Point, Burghead, Strathbeg, Hopeman, Spey Bay, Buckie, Findochty and Portknockie. The Gemini Explorer again had good sightings as did Ken and Anna Whyte from their cottage window at Portknockie.

There were only three sightings of porpoise, which is not too surprising given the weather. Two porpoise were seen off Strathbeg on the 4th and Cummingston on the 15th and a good sighting of seven off Covesea took place on the 17th.

SOUTH GRAMPIAN & SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND

Cetaceans were sighted across the region throughout April and May. The majority of sightings were of bottlenose dolphins, but Risso's dolphins and harbour porpoises were also reported.

The 17th saw many cetacean sightings across the region, including the only sightings of harbour porpoise and Risso's dolphins in April. A solitary harbour porpoise was seen surfacing off the Bullers of Buchan and a group of six Risso's dolphins were seen feeding in the same location later that day. An unidentified large cetacean was reported surfacing off Fifeness, but the exact species could not be confirmed. The majority of sightings in this region were of the now ubiquitous bottlenose dolphin, with 11 separate sightings throughout April. The sightings were mainly at the region's dolphin hotspots: with five sightings at Torry Battery, three at Stonehaven and one at Fowlsheugh and Girdleness



respectively. Groups ranged in size from two to 30 animals, with calves sighted on four separate occasions. Behaviour was reported mostly as feeding and jumping, but a sighting of 11 animals at Fowlsheugh on 10th April documented fast swimming.

Harbour porpoise and Risso's dolphins were also only sighted once in the region in May. A solitary harbour porpoise was seen surfacing at Ythan mouth on the 1st, and a group of three adult Risso's dolphins was reported in Cruden Bay on the 13th. Unidentified dolphin species were seen on the 1st at Ythan mouth, and on the 16th off Inchcolm Island; the exact species could not be confirmed. Bottlenose dolphins were reported 11 times across the month of May. They were sighted 5 times feeding off Torry Battery, in groups of between three and 25 animals. Nearby Aberdeen harbour saw two sightings in May, with groups of three and ten animals on the 7th and 31st respectively. The 14th brought two groups of four totaling 14 animals near to Girdleness, both including calves. Mid-month, two sightings were recorded at Stonehaven; a group of 10 adults jumping on the 15th, and 12 animals fast swimming, including one calf, on the 17th.

NORTH EAST ENGLAND

There were only two sightings in North East England in April and May, comprising two cetacean species. On 20th April, three harbour porpoises were spotted from a sail boat in Teesport, Northumberland, heading north-east, and in the early morning of 30th May, 10 white-beaked dolphins including two calves were recorded moving east, seven miles off Amble.

EASTERN ENGLAND – NORTH AND EAST YORKSHIRE

Written by Robin Petch, Regional Coordinator for Eastern England



Harbour Porpoise ©Mick Baines/Sea Watch Foundation

April and May has again been a quiet month from a personal point of view. Unfortunately our visits to Whitby have mainly coincided with poor weather and sea conditions which have been typical at weekends and holidays for the whole period! Local fishermen have suggested there have been porpoises further out

but we have very few logged sightings around the area where Whitby Coastal Cruises operate pleasure trips. One porpoise was seen by Lewis Hobson from Esk Belle II on 23rd April and we logged two sightings there on Sunday 24th, five animals in total. The next sighting on 2nd May was logged by both Bryan Clarkson on Specksioneer and by Michelle on Esk Belle II, three porpoises just ½ mile NW of the harbour. We have yet to confirm any other sightings until we made repeated observations of three or four groups of two to four porpoises between 12:37 and 13:11 on 30th May.

Stuart Baines has again been very busy on Marine Drive in Scarborough having made 16 separate sightings of a total of 17 porpoises, another two being seen by Laura Popely of the RSPB. This clearly continues to be an important location for porpoise sightings and a good spot to visit for a land watch. Three porpoises were also seen by Chris Rumbold at Teesport on 20 April.



Finally Michael Collins observed 10 white-beaked dolphins, seven miles NE of Amble on 30th May, just in time to claim the accolade for the most exciting encounter of the period!

If I could end on an appeal for help ...? For the first time in 10 years we will be abroad during National Whale and Dolphin Watch Weekend (5th-7th August). If anyone would like to run a watch event anywhere on the Yorkshire coast, or man our display and chat to visitors to The Deep that weekend, please get in touch – robin@dolphinspotter.co.uk /07768 592306.

EASTERN ENGLAND – LINCOLNSHIRE

Written by Dave Miller, Regional Coordinator for Lincolnshire

Earlier this year, I heard on the grapevine Robin Petch's plea for sea watchers for Lincolnshire as he was covering a vast area of the east coast. As Coastal Ranger for Lincs Wildlife Trust, I definitely thought this was a project we could help with. I was very fortunate to have onboard a recent Marine Biology graduate, Helen Craven, as a volunteer who had also heard the plea and was very keen to get involved. I had done some cetacean watching before as a volunteer for the MCS on Anglesey whilst studying at Bangor University, and also on the Dorset coast at Durlston Country Park where I had worked previously. The Durlston project is extremely well manned with many dedicated volunteers and a nice warm hut on top of some glorious cliffs.

The project fits in well with the RSWT's Living Seas programme. We already do regular surveys along the tideline as part of the Shoresearch project. This beachcombing in a scientific manner gives a good indication of the biodiversity to be found in our seas without the need for expensive diving training and equipment.

After contacting Robin, he kindly offered to run a training course at Gibraltar Point NNR near Skegness where we are based. A great day was attended by ten staff and volunteers, and we all learned identification and survey method skills.

The next task was to find suitable areas from which to watch the sea. At Anderby Creek there is a viewpoint at the top of some sand dunes which is part of the Lincolnshire Coastal Country Park. During the launch event of the LCCP on April 7th, two porpoises were spotted feeding just offshore. Even better, they turned up at the same time as the funding body representatives and local dignitaries! We have also been very lucky in being given permission by the National Coastwatch Institution to use the watch tower at Winthorpe. This gives us a fantastic vantage point and will allow watches to be carried out during inclement weather as it is inside with tea and coffee!

So, we have started a programme of effort-based watches, with a harbour porpoise being spotted on one. We are going to be setting up a volunteer recruitment programme since, at the moment, this is our constraint on doing watches. Part of this recruitment is running an event during the National Whale and Dolphin Watch weekend, where we will be running watches along the Lincolnshire coast and advertising this in the local media.

So, we are up and running along the Lincs coast and looking forward to recruiting volunteers and hoping the cetaceans show up.

EAST ANGLIA

Written by Dave Powell, Regional Coordinator for East Anglia



Single harbour porpoise were seen from Mundesley sea front on 14th and 28th April by Mick Fiszler. On 29th April, two harbour porpoise were seen feeding 500m off the lighthouse at Hunstanton by Dave Powell. On 8th May, Mick Fiszler had a single harbour porpoise on an early morning watch again at Mundesley. These were the only sightings reported for the period.

Once again it is the stretch of coast with cliffs between Weybourne and Happisburgh that provided most of the sightings. There are many areas along this coastline that offer vantage points for observing cetaceans. The coastal path between Weybourne and Sheringham should be rewarding, with effort. Harbour porpoise have been seen from Cromer Pier. From there the coastal path continues through to Overstrand. Next, Mundesley provides both easy access and a café for refreshments. At Walcott sea front, it is possible to observe cetaceans from the car and, again, refreshments are available. There is parking at Happisburgh lookout station, and the coastal path runs back to Walcott. This is a very pleasant walk on a fine day.

Other areas where cetaceans are reported are Hunstanton in the north-west of the



county; again, access is easy here but an early start in the summer months is advisable as it is a popular area for water sports. Blakeney Point can be rewarding for the hardy, as a long walk is needed to reach the Point.

Unfortunately, Norfolk remains a very under-watched county for cetaceans and this is strange as it is probably the most watched county

in the country by bird watchers. There are nature reserves all along the Norfolk coast that boast thousands of visitors every year, including the RSPB reserves at Snettisham and Titchwell. Norfolk Wildlife Trust has reserves at Holme and Cley. Natural England has wardens at Scolt Head Island and Holkham. The Norfolk Ornithologists Association also has an Observatory at Holme, and yet sightings have never been received from any of these, despite requests.

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

There were two sightings across the region in April. A harbour porpoise was seen fast swimming off Kessingland Beach, Suffolk on 8th April. A possible orca sighting was reported on 15th April, with four adults seen off Dungeness in Kent.

May only had a single sighting. On the 14th, a harbour porpoise was reported surfacing outside Bradwell Marina on the river Blackwater. Surprisingly, no sightings were reported in Essex or North Kent.

SOUTHERN ENGLAND

Written by Steve Savage, Regional Coordinator for Southern England

A few dolphin sightings were reported for April and May. These are mainly the bottlenose dolphins that we would expect to see this time of the year. On 16th April a solitary bottlenose dolphin was observed off the coast at Littlehampton, West Sussex. Another single bottlenose dolphin recorded on the same day, 3 miles east of Selsey Bill in West Sussex, was almost certainly the same dolphin.



Bottlenose Dolphin

© Steve Savage

Four bottlenose dolphins were observed on 19th April off the coast at Eastbourne, East Sussex. There was also a further report of six unidentified dolphins on 24th April in the same area. Three days later, on the 27th, two bottlenose dolphin sightings were reported off Brighton: sightings of a group of 10 animals and a group of 10 to 15 dolphins observed feeding less than a mile from the shore. A sighting of 6-8 adult bottlenose dolphins and what appeared to be a juvenile were observed at a popular dive site 'Mixon Hole' Selsey, (West Sussex). The dolphins were observed by the Mulberry Divers. The dolphins were reported to be swimming around, jumping and playing, until the divers started to get into the water. This is quite usual behaviour. Dive groups occasionally encounter dolphins, which always move on as soon as divers enter the water.



Three bottlenose dolphins were observed during the Sussex Yacht Regatta 250m off Shoreham Harbour on 1st May.

On 22nd April a group of five white-beaked dolphins were reported in the English Channel between Eastbourne and Dieppe, and seven short-beaked common dolphins were spotted in the Looe Channel near the Street Buoy, West Sussex on 29th April.

I have continued to record the seals as part of my role as Sussex County Recorder for Sea Mammals. The common seal seen off Hove beach, East Sussex on 9th and 10th April may be the tagged seal, Twinkle, that we have been following since November 2010. The seal was only a few metres from the beach. A common seal was also seen 50 metres off the same beach on 16th May. A grey seal was observed off the coast of Worthing in West Sussex on 26th May. Grey seals prefer rocky coastline so they are only rarely seen in Sussex.

As Sussex County Recorder, I also contribute a yearly round-up for the Record Centre's journal for biological recorders called *Adastra*. For anyone who might be interested, back editions (2001 – 2010) can be downloaded from the website at <http://sxbrc.org.uk/biodiversity/publications/>

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

DORSET

(Including sightings data kindly forwarded by Durlston Marine Project)

There were cetacean sightings across April, comprising at least three species. A solitary harbour porpoise was spotted off St. Adhelm's Head on 9th April. There were ten reports of unidentified dolphin species seen across Dorset in April, with group sizes ranging from two to 10 animals. All other sightings in April were of bottlenose dolphins, with 16 sightings reported by the Durlston Marine Project through the month. The first sighting came on 11th April, with seven animals spotted fast swimming around Anvil Point, and shortly afterwards around Durlston Head. Eleven animals were sighted twice in Durlston Bay on the 13th, and five animals were seen in Weymouth Bay on the 14th. The region saw lots of activity towards the end of the month, with 12 animals seen on the 22nd and three separate sightings of four, five and nine animals respectively on the 23rd in Swanage Bay. There were reports of dolphins off Ballard Point, Old Harry Rocks, Studland and Durlston Bay with groups of ten, ten and four animals respectively. Twelve animals were seen at nearby Anvil Point and seven animals at Durlston's Mile Markers on the 24th, as well as 10 animals at Peveril Ledge, Swanage later that afternoon. April's last sighting was of ten bottlenose dolphins seen at Old Harry Rocks, Studland.

All of May's sightings were of dolphin species, with nine bottlenose dolphin sightings, five sightings of unknown dolphin species, and one report of short-beaked common dolphins, with two adults and a juvenile seen wave riding in Lyme Bay on the 8th. Dolphins of an unverified species were sighted three times on the 15th, with four animals off Portland Bill in the morning and five and 11 animals sighted later that afternoon in Durlston Bay. Two sightings of an unknown dolphin species were reported off St. Adhelm's Head on the 20th. Early May saw only one bottlenose dolphin sighting, with two adults seen off Anvil Point, Durlston on the 1st. The remaining sightings occurred mid-month, with groups of five and four animals seen off Peveril Ledge, Swanage on the 15th and 20th respectively, six animals at Old Harry Rocks, Studland on the 16th, sightings of six and one animal in Durlston Bay, of five animals off Tilly Whim, Durlston on the 17th and 20th, and of nine adults seen jumping just off Canford Cliffs, Poole Bay on the 19th. The last sighting of the month was of three bottlenose dolphins off Portland Bill on the 21st.



CHANNEL ISLANDS

Written by Bertram Bree, Regional Coordinator for the Channel Islands

For the months of April and May, the Channel Islands reported a total of just six bottlenose dolphin sightings.

Two separate bottlenose dolphin encounters occurred on 24th April. A ferry crossing to Jersey yielded a sighting of eight adult bottlenose dolphins whilst forty individuals were observed off Minquiers reef on the same day.

The beginning of May was an exciting time around the Channel Islands for sightings, with one hundred bottlenose dolphins being observed off the Baie du Mont St Michel, Normandy on 2nd May. Also on 2nd May, two bottlenose dolphins were seen at Minquiers. Two bottlenose dolphin sightings were reported in Grouville Bay, Jersey through the month of May, With seven individuals recorded in the 5th and three on the 17th.

SOUTH DEVON

Written by Lauren Davis, DBRC (Including sightings data kindly forward by DBRC)

There were only five sightings in April for South Devon. Three sightings of bottlenose dolphins were reported on 10th April. A group of eight adults was seen in Wembury Bay, a group of 12 adults was sighted off Shag Stone in Plymouth Sound and another group of six animals was reported separately off Plymouth breakwater. The following day there was a report of a possible sighting of 12 long-finned pilot whales of Prawle Point but this is not yet a confirmed species identification. The final sighting of the month came in on the 23rd, and was of two white-beaked dolphins in the middle of Lyme Bay.

No sightings at all were recorded during the month of May.

CORNWALL

By Dan Jarvis (sightings data reproduced with kind permission of Ray Dennis/Cornwall Wildlife Trust's Seaquest Southwest project www.erccis.co.uk/wildlife_recording/seaquest_southwest.htm)



Short-beaked common dolphin

©Giovanna Pesante/Sea Watch Foundation

A notably quiet spring for sightings with only three cetacean species identified and not many reports for each of them.

In April, harbour porpoises were seen on two occasions from Gwennap Head, near Porthgwarra; a single animal on the 15th and a group of eight the following day. That was all for that species (I told

you it was notably quiet!). Reports of common dolphins fared little better with only three sightings. Pods of 30 and 16 respectively were seen at Gwennap again, and a pod of 30 a bit further east off Porthcurno. Both sightings of 30 animals came within a short time frame so it could well have been the same group that was seen. Bottlenose dolphins were not reported from many of the locations where they are normally seen, instead turning up at Carn Dhu, St Anthony's Head and Rame Head in groups of five, three and ten animals respectively. There were two sightings of a group of 12 bottlenose dolphins on 7th and 19th April off Falmouth and Pendennis Point.

In May, there was a single sighting of a group of two harbour porpoises in Sennen Cove on the 7th. Bottlenose dolphins were seen twice on the 27th; a group of five off Cape Cornwall and a group of four animals in Newlyn Harbour. Six animals were also seen off Nare Head on 27th May; another unusual location for this species.

Unidentified dolphin pods were seen at Marazion and Porthcurno, most likely to be either commons or bottlenoses.

On the brighter side, the basking sharks are back! Only small numbers so far, but they are starting to spread out, as sightings were received from Porth Ledden, Cape Cornwall, Porthgwarra, Porthcurno, Carn Dhu, Gribbin Head and Lizard Point. With the warmer weather it shouldn't be too long before ocean sunfish start to appear also and maybe a leatherback turtle or two...

News and events

British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org.uk) volunteers were called out to a live stranded harbour porpoise at Sennen on the evening of 7th May. Medics were quickly on scene to find a neonate (newborn) still with the umbilical cord attached struggling in the shallows amongst rocks after members of the public had put it back in the sea. The distressed animal was picked up and given first aid but a search of the area could not locate its mother, upon whom it was entirely dependant for it to survive. Sadly the little porpoise died before anything further could be done and it was transported to AHVLA Polwhele at Truro for post mortem examination.

The National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn1.html) has now released almost all the seal pups rescued from the winter months back into the wild again and is now getting ready for the summer season. In the meantime, Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) members have been treated to a common seal, a species that isn't normally seen in Southwest England, hauling out with the grey seals at one of their local colonies. Surveys by CSG in recent years have occasionally turned up a common seal or two, especially in the last couple of years, as there would appear to be at least one 'living' over at the Isles of Scilly! Last but not least, Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings Network (www.cwtstrandings.org.uk) volunteers have dealt with a handful of dead stranded grey seals, harbour porpoises and common dolphins that were fairly scattered

around the county, at locations including Bude, Polzeath, St Agnes, Porthleven and Falmouth.

Hopefully there will be a lot more sightings to write about next time!

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 not to 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

April and May continued with fairly regular sightings of harbour porpoise by Dave Jenkins from Morte Point and Bull Point, and from Chris and Sharron Blackmore from Capstone Point.

April had a total of 15 reports of 78 porpoises from all three locations, including one notable sighting of 22 animals from Morte Point on the 30th. At Capstone, the local anglers both on-shore and in pleasure boats were taking the first mackerel of the summer and this coincided with the first sighting this year of gannets and porpoise feeding together off the Point. A grey seal was also recorded at Capstone on the 16th, bottling 300m off the Point.



Harbour porpoise

© Mick Baines/Sea Watch
Foundation

May had a total of five records of harbour porpoise. A group of three animals was sighted at Bull Point on the 1st. A group of two was sighted on the 5th from Capstone and the following day two groups of two animals and a single animal were spotted in the same area.

No other species were reported from North Devon during these two months.

BRISTOL CHANNEL & SOUTH WALES

There was a single sighting offshore in this region. Twenty one fin whales were seen by Marine Life in the Celtic Deep, Celtic Sea on 28th May.

WEST WALES

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

April had relatively few sightings this year: a total of fourteen sightings including one common dolphin sighting east of Grassholm, Pembrokeshire on the 6th, and one sighting of six harbour porpoise in Ramsey Sound on the 15th. The remaining 12 reports were sightings of our faithful New Quay bottlenose dolphins with group size ranging between a single animal and seven individuals.

The 26th April was the start of our research season here at the Sea Watch New Quay office, and the arrival of our volunteers heralded an increase in the number of land-watches and boat surveys and good contribution to the west Wales sightings data.



As a result, May reached a total of 94 sightings despite the bad weather and the subsequent lack of full day boat surveys. All of these sightings are of bottlenose dolphins with the exception of five sightings of harbour porpoise all from Strumble Head, Pembrokeshire. Three of these reports are of single animals and the remaining two are of a group of three individuals and group of two individuals on the 19th and 27th respectively.

At the beginning of the month, Sarah Bebb reported a total of six bottlenose dolphin sightings from Aberporth, Ceredigion. Group size ranged from a single animal to a group of six. The sightings of larger groups of four, five and six animals respectively included two juveniles on all three occasions. Sarah also spotted two groups of animals from Mwnt on the 11th. Her first sighting was of eight animals, including two juveniles and two calves. This sighting was shortly followed by another of an adult dolphin accompanied by a juvenile.

Fairly unusually, a group of nine bottlenose dolphins including one calf was reported off Strumble Head, Pembrokeshire on the 20th.

Through the month of May, our New Quay land watches gave us a total of 76 sightings, with groups ranging from one individual to a maximum of 11 animals, as was the case on the 13th. Calves were present in a large proportion (34 out of 76) of these sightings, and groups sometimes included as many as 3 calves at once. Two separate sightings of a single dolphin were also reported off Ynys Lochtyn on the 19th.

Interestingly, we had no harbour porpoise sightings around New Quay for either April or May.

NORTH WALES

There were 40 sightings reported during April in North Wales. As in West Wales, bottlenose dolphin and harbour porpoise featured almost exclusively in the sightings with the exception of a group of three unidentified dolphins in Cemlyn Bay, Anglesey, on the 17th.

There were also 11 sightings of harbour porpoise, ten of which were reports from Anglesey. There was a notable sighting of nine harbour porpoise including two juveniles on the 16th but other than that group size ranged from one to four animals. The eleventh sighting of this series took place in Porth Niegwl and was of another relatively large group comprising seven adult animals.

Out of the 28 bottlenose dolphin sightings in April, eleven were reports of large groups of animals. 40 animals were reported twice on the 3rd off Point Lynas, Anglesey. Another group of 40 was sighted off Rhoscolyn Head, Anglesey on the 24th. On the 28th, 35 animals were seen off Caernarfon, Gwynedd, and around 30 animals were seen on the next



Bottlenose dolphin

©Gemma Veneruso/Sea Watch Foundation

day off Trwyn Porth, Dinllaen. A group of twenty animals was seen off between Cemlyn and the Skerries, North Anglesey on the 10th. Dulas Island was where two other large groups of dolphins were spotted: a group of 14 on the 14th and a group of 15 animals on the 28th. A group of 16 animals was also seen off Trwyn Porth, Dinllaen on the 9th.

Other groups of dolphins that were reported ranged from a single animal to 10 individuals spotted either off Gwynedd (Pwllheli, Porth Ceiriad, St Tudwals Islands and Abersoch) or Anglesey (Wylfa Power Station and Dulas Island).

May was remarkably quieter in term of sightings. There were two sightings of bottlenose dolphins on the 8th, two adults were sighted off Nefyn, Gwynedd and 12 animals near the West Hoyle buoy, off Rhyl. The 13th and 16th May both brought sightings of single harbour porpoise in Bull Bay, and there was a further sighting of two animals on the 20th off Llanbadrig, Anglesey. There were two sightings of a group of four bottlenose dolphins on 28th and 30th off Nefyn (Gwynedd) and Point Lynas (Anglesey) respectively. The month came to an end with two harbour porpoise sightings: a group of 12 individuals including four juveniles off Point Lynas, Anglesey, on the 30th and a group of three adults feeding off Menai Bridge on 31st.

ISLE OF MAN

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

There was a total of 27 sightings during April, comprising just a single species, harbour porpoise. This is a particularly low number of sightings for April; the average number in the previous three years being around 80. In addition there was also a lack of Risso's dolphin sightings in 2011; again we would expect 40 or 50 sightings of Risso's during April. Unfortunately, we do not know the reason for the lack of Risso's sightings, but hopefully we will see them in good numbers during the summer.

Most of the harbour porpoise sightings were of relatively small groups containing less than five individuals. However, there was one sighting of between 10 and 20 individuals in the south of the island. Although there were a handful of sightings all around the island, the majority were between Port St Mary and the Calf of Man, in the south of the island.

The month of May in the Isle of Man was absolutely terrible in terms of weather, with an average daily wind speed of between 20 and 30 knots. It was in fact the worst May, meteorologically, since 1973. Due to the appalling weather, there was a measly two sightings during May, both of small groups of harbour porpoise.

NORTH WEST ENGLAND

Written by Dave McGrath

April emulated March's good run of harbour porpoise sightings, making it the best spring since regular recording along this coast began in 2005. There was a two week gap between the last sighting in March and the first April sighting of a group of three harbour porpoise, seen from Starr Gate in Blackpool on the 10th. A group of two animals was sighted on three other occasions on the 14th, 15th and 18th, again from Starr Gate. A group of four animals was seen early morning from Walney Island on the northern edge of Morecambe Bay on the 17th. During a Fylde Bird Club pelagic boat trip on the 25th, a group of two individuals was also observed off Blackpool's north shore as well as a pod of seven a little further to the north, off Fleetwood. These sightings indicate that there have been a larger number of animals in the inner bay than we normally get. Fishermen reported catching whiting throughout April which could be linked to this increase in sightings.

Sightings normally decline in May after the spring peak, and May 2011 was no exception with only a single harbour porpoise recorded. It was seen in the river Mersey from the ferry on the 10th. Later in the month, a dead porpoise was reported from Blackpool South Beach after an unseasonal fierce storm. So maybe they were still in the bay but too far offshore to be visible from land.

SOUTH WEST SCOTLAND

Written by Rowan Fraser, Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park

In terms of rarity (for me at any rate), the top spot goes to Bridget Carrington who spotted two killer whales from land on 17th April off the Mull of Galloway. How I would have loved to see them.

However, I would like to give a resounding cheer for those plucky little harbour porpoise that populate the Firth of Clyde, and to the wonderful people who record them. David Lilley spotted six harbour porpoise between Ardentinny and Balirmore on the 2nd, whilst Mark Ellis recorded a single harbour porpoise midway between Brodick and Ardrossan in the Firth of Clyde on the 30th.



Karen Cook sees them on an almost daily basis from her shop in Gourock and sent in records of between 1 and 3 animals. When it comes to behaviour she describes jumping. This would have surprised me up until last Sunday, when I myself saw a partial breach for the first time. I had never seen harbour porpoise do anything else but roll through the water.

I would particularly like to thank the local volunteers who record sightings as part of our cetacean monitoring project; between Kathy Harper, Amanda Joaquin, Roger Parramore and our latest and productive recruit, Elizabeth Blair, and myself, we have records of 65 harbour porpoise, largely made up of pods of three but we are beginning to see (or maybe just to notice) small pods of up to six animals. We are still waiting to see some bottlenose dolphins, minke, humpback or pilot whales, which have all been recorded in the Firth of Clyde in recent years.

If you are interested, we are holding a marine themed free family public event called "Water's Edge" on 30th July at Sheppard's Point Ardentinny, near Dunoon. We have invited organisations and individuals to come and share their knowledge, passion

and concerns for the marine environment and the animals within it. Hopefully, there will be lots of fun too, with art, stories, fancy dress and a BBQ. If you want to know anything about our cetacean project or the marine event call me on 01389 722106 or e-mail rowan.fraser@lochlomond-trossachs.org

HEBRIDES

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

Sightings are picking up after a quiet winter. Sightings of eight different species have been reported in the Hebrides for April and May.

In April, bottlenose dolphins were reported from Machrihanish on five occasions with group size ranging from six to ten animals. Two sightings of bottlenose were reported on the Isle of Mull (three, six and seven individuals on the 8th, 9th, 22nd respectively). One sighting was reported from the Firth of Lorne; a group of 15 animals on the 26th.

Areas with bottlenose sightings in May included Loch Spelve with two sightings, north east of the Eye Peninsula (Isle of Lewis), as well as Insh Sound. All sightings involved less than 10 animals.

Harbour porpoises, a regular inhabitant of the Hebrides, have been spotted on eight occasions in April and May. Animals were mainly recorded in the waters around Mull in April. Areas with harbour porpoise sightings in May included Jura, South Uist, Loch, Lunga and Ballygown on the Isle of Mull.

A single Minke whale sighting was reported during April and May. Tim Stenton observed two animals off Barra on the 2nd.

Killer whales were also seen once in May in the Hebrides. The sighting was reported off the Waverly on 1st May in the Sound of Iona, where five animals were seen.



On 4th May we received a sighting of four Risso's dolphins off the Butt of Lewis.

White-beaked dolphins have also been seen for the first time this season. At the beginning of May, four animals were spotted east of Barra.

There were two sightings of common dolphins for May. Additionally, 12 animals have been reported off Ardnamurchan a week later, followed by two animals sighted north of Drimnin on the 31st of May.

Finally there was the notable sighting of 25 long-finned pilot whales in Loch Carnan on 19th May.

NORTH WEST SCOTLAND

Written by Ian French, Regional Coordinator for North West Scotland including HWDT sightings

With the first harbour porpoise calf sighted as early as 27th March, this season



certainly seems to be an unusual one so far. Porpoise numbers within Loch Gairloch seem to have drastically declined in comparison to the last 22 years of sightings data.

Small pods of three and four adults have been sighted within the sheltered waters of Loch Gairloch with a few larger pods just outside the loch in the deeper Minch waters. A single harbour porpoise

was spotted on 24th April in Stoer Bay. Four sightings of harbour porpoise were also reported around off the Point of Sleat on 24th April.

There has been and still is a large NATO presence in the Minch and a lot of unpublicised operations, unlike the much publicised operation "Joint Warrior" exercises. Sightings of submarines, minesweepers and frigates have become an almost daily occurrence and local people believe this to be affecting cetacean sightings. Unfortunately, with little scientific data available, this cannot be proven.

April proved to be a good month for bottlenose dolphin sightings. We have had sightings of bottlenose dolphins in the past but these encounters have been brief reaching two hours at most. This year, April sightings were daily within the loch and a group of seven dolphins was repeatedly reported on the 19th off Melvaig, on the



21st and 23rd around Longa. On one occasion a pod of approximately seven dolphins put on some very acrobatic displays, rivalling the displays more akin to Chanonry Point! A lot of mating behaviour was also witnessed with what appeared to be three males interacting with one female and three younger dolphins more interested in displaying leaps than in the mating activity. There were

also two other sightings of a group of four animals on the 18th and 19th in Loch Gairloch.

Some good close up identification photographs were obtained along with more arty photographs to rival internationally renowned dolphin photographer Charlie Phillips. Reports continued to come in from as far as the Summer Isles, Loch Broom and Loch Ewe of sightings of the bottlenose dolphins and they stayed in the area for over a week before heading south.

Minke whale sightings during April were few and far between, with offshore operators reporting sightings. Single animals were sighted on 20th near Longa and 28th and 29th April in North Minch and a group of two animals was sighted the next day on the 30th in North Minch.

A small pod of common dolphins passed through Loch Gairloch also, and on 29th April, a pod of 20 commons was sighted in the Minch.

May began relatively calmly with only a few sightings of porpoise; small pods of porpoise were recorded within Loch Gairloch but a notable lack of certain seabirds seems to herald a bad year again for the birders.

Three Risso's dolphins were sighted in the Minch on 15th and a minke whale was reported just outside the loch on the 17th. Single minkes were also seen in the Kyle of Lochalsh on the 5th and then repeatedly on the 30th and 31st in the Minch. For the majority of the rest of the month, storms and rain lashed the coastline making boat-based sightings impossible. Only towards the end of the month were boats able to get out and to survey the waters. Again, submarines were in the area, with one surfacing within 300 metres of our boat whilst we were watching a minke whale just south of Longa Island in Loch Gairloch.

Shortly after this, on 25th May, a small pod of four killer whales was sighted approximately four miles west of Loch Gairloch. One operator obtained some very good identification photographs.

A few days later, I was called out (as a marine mammal medic) to attend what was described as a "killer whale circling close inshore" in Little Loch Broom. Whilst scanning the horizon at the entrance to Little Loch Broom from the shoreline we saw the pod of killer whales heading north towards the Summer Isles at quite a pace. No problem there you would think! However, the "circling killer whale" was still in the loch. This turned out to be a large basking shark tangled in creel ropes, unfortunately dead by the time we got down to the shore line. This made the local BBC news with the carcass being taken off for dissection.

A pod of five long-finned pilot whales was reported off Cape Wrath on 5th May and twelve common dolphins were reported in Loch Gairloch on 19th.

NORTHERN IRELAND

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

There were 13 sightings reports from Northern Ireland in the months of April and May, April being by far the busier month with regular porpoise sightings, especially in County Down. Overall, three different species were sighted and recorded although harbour porpoise sightings dominated the report.



April got off to a good start with sightings of large groups of harbour porpoises on 8th. A group of nine porpoise including two calves was sighted feeding off Portmuck as well as another group of five being recorded feeding near Black Head in Antrim over a two hour period. On 14th April, two harbour porpoises were briefly spotted feeding in the area

near Killough in Co. Down. There were several more sightings around County Down over the next few days. In the early afternoon of the 16th April, two groups of harbour porpoises were observed feeding at St. John's Point; a group of five animals including two calves, as well as two adults later in the day.

The following day brought the first bottlenose dolphin sighting of the month with three individuals being observed feeding near Newcastle, Co. Down. A group of three bottlenose dolphins was also observed in the same area on 28th April. Newcastle also had a harbour porpoise sighting; three adult harbour porpoises were observed travelling east past Bloody Bridge on 23rd April. On the same day, a single porpoise was sighted off the coast of Balintoy. The following day, the 24th, saw two groups of harbour porpoises, three and five adults respectively, feeding off Black Head in Antrim during a two hour landwatch. Another porpoise sighting was made in Antrim on 29th April; three adult harbour porpoise were observed feeding for five minutes off Whitehead.

There was only one report of a cetacean in May: a possible killer whale sighting of one adult travelling south in the North Channel. While the sighting was brief, the description, especially of the grey saddle patch behind the dorsal fin, indicates that it probably was a killer whale.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

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

During April and May a total of 145 cetacean sightings were reported, with the predominant species being bottlenose dolphins, harbour porpoises, minke whales and common dolphins.

April was an exciting month for sightings around the Republic of Ireland with reports of Risso's dolphins, killer whales, long-finned pilot whales, Atlantic white-sided dolphins and sperm whales. Two killer whales were seen off Ireland's Eye, Co. Dublin on the 9th April by Paddy Coughlan. Seven Risso's dolphins were reported from offshore West Cork on the 10th by Phil Dicker, and another thirteen on the 27th by Micheal Cottrell and Youen Jacob from Crookhaven, Co. Cork.

A special mention goes to Stephen Comerford who reported two sightings of sperm whale, one of Atlantic white-sided dolphin and four of long-finned pilot whales from his vessel at the end of April. Whilst on Porcupine Bank, Stephen spotted two sperm whales on the 23rd and then two offshore from the South-West of Ireland (Co. Cork) on the 24th. On the 25th, Stephen reported thirty Atlantic white-sided dolphins also off the south-west coast of Ireland. Whilst in the same region, Stephen saw ten long-finned pilot whales on the 25th around lunchtime, but later on that day reported a pod of fifty individuals. Two long-finned pilot whale sightings were made on the 26th; one of a group of 50 individuals and the second of a group of 12.



There was also a single humpback whale sighted on 16th April off Slieve League, Co. Donegal.

Harbour porpoises were observed on most days throughout April in groups of one to eleven individuals. Harbour porpoise sightings occurred off Killiney Bay and Howth Head in Co. Dublin, Arklow in Co. Wicklow, the Saltee Islands and the Keeragh Islands in Co. Wexford, Ballyhack in Co. Waterford, and Long Strand in Co. Cork, Sleah Head in Co. Kerry, Achill Head in Co. Mayo, Roaringwater Bay, Owey Island, Kedge Island, Malin Head in Co. Donegal. Sleah Head, Killiney Bay and Roaringwater Bay were the dominant locations for harbour porpoise sightings and the group sizes were also greater at these sites, between five and eleven individuals.

Bottlenose dolphins were also sighted on most days throughout April, predominantly in numbers of one to seven individuals at the following locations: Cashermore Bay, Cork Harbour and Dursey Island in Co. Cork, Dalkey and Killiney Bay in Co. Dublin, Glen Bay in Co. Donegal, Clare Island in Co. Mayo, Ailladie and Loop Head in Co.

Clare, Renvyle Point and Derryniver Bay in Co. Galway, Streedagh Beach in Co. Sligo, Kerry Head in Co. Kerry, and Carlingford Lough in Co. Louth. Killiney Bay and Cork Harbour had multiple sightings throughout the month. Notable bottlenose dolphin sightings involving groups of between ten and twenty individuals occurred at Ballycroneen Bay, Co. Cork on the 12th; Lislary, Co. Sligo on the 16th; Dooagh, Achill Island, Co. Mayo on the 22nd; Renvyle Point, Co. Galway on the 24th; Ballinakill Bay, Co. Galway on the 26th; and Toonakeragh Port, Co. Mayo on the 27th.



Bottlenose dolphin © Pia Anderwald/Sea Watch Foundation

Continuing with the dolphin species, common dolphins were sighted on a fairly regular basis throughout the month of April. Off Sleah Head, Co. Kerry, thirty common dolphins were sighted on 3rd April; twelve on the 14th, and thirty on the day as a separate sighting; twenty on the 23rd; thirty on the same day as another sighting; ten on the 25th; and 110 on the 27th. The animals were reported as suspected feeding for all the sightings at Sleah Head. Four common dolphins were also reported off Great Sole Bank on 6th April; eighty were recorded from Co. Wexford on the 9th; on the 10th, twenty were reported from Roaringwater Bay, Co. Cork; six were seen on the 23rd off Dunmore Head, Co. Donegal; three on the 24th at Inishbofin Island, Co. Galway; and seventeen from inside Dingle Bay, Co. Kerry on the 29th. On the 19th April, Jill and Ian Crosher sighted 175 common dolphins from their sail boat off Sybil Head, Co. Kerry; whilst on the 27th, Nick Massett and Sean Palmer reported 150 common dolphins from Dingle Bay, Co. Kerry.



Twenty-five minke whale sightings were reported from the Republic of Ireland in the month of April. The animals were either sighted as individuals or in groups of two or three. Sleah Head, Co. Kerry was a hotspot for minke whales in April with sightings on the 3rd, 11th, 12th, 14th, 19th, 20th, 25th and 27th. Sightings from Malin Head, Co. Donegal occurred on the 8th and 10th. A solitary individual was sighted on the 9th off Dublin. On the 16th, one minke whale was seen offshore, off West Cork. Roches Point, Cork Harbour had a sighting on the 23rd. On the 24th, two were seen off the Blasket Islands, Co. Kerry. A sighting was reported off Galley Head, Co. Cork on the 25th. One was sighted off Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork on the 26th. Three minke whales were seen off Dingle Bay, Co. Kerry on the 27th and on the 28th,

minke whales were seen off Power Head, Sherkin Islands, and Cloghna Head, Co. Cork and Dingle Bay, Co. Kerry.

There were nine reports of unidentified cetaceans throughout April. An individual was sighted on the 9th in the Celtic Deep South of Wexford. Five unidentified dolphins were reported from Clogher Head, Co. Louth on the 10th; also on the 10th, thirteen dolphins were sighted off Leckanvy, Co. Mayo. On the 12th, three dolphins were seen in Cork Harbour; thirty dolphins were seen in Sruhír Strand, Co. Mayo on the 21st. One dolphin was seen from Leverets Lighthouse, Co. Galway on the 21st. On the 24th, two dolphins were reported in Killary Harbour, Co. Galway. An unidentified cetacean was seen from Inishtrahull Island, Co. Donegal on the 27th. Finally, five unidentified cetaceans were reported on the 29th from Roonagh Point, Co. Mayo.

Bottlenose dolphins dominated the sightings reports for the month of May. Twelve individuals were counted on the 5th at White Strand, Co. Mayo and eight on the 9th from Inishmor, Aran Islands. Wicklow was a hotspot for bottlenose dolphins with sightings of either two or three individuals from Bray, Greystones or The Murrough on the 15th, 16th, 22nd, 24th, 27th, 28th, 29th and 30th of May. Three bottlenose dolphins were seen in Killiney Bay, Co. Dublin on the 17th, 19th, 20th and 31st. On the 30th, three bottlenose dolphins were reported from Kilcummin Head, Co. Mayo. Seven individuals were sighted in Cork Harbour on the 31st.

After the numerous common dolphin, minke whale and harbour porpoise sightings in April, there were only three reports of common dolphins, four sightings of minke whales and five harbour porpoise encounters in the month of May. Forty common dolphins were seen off



Slea Head, Co. Kerry on the 2nd and eight on the 7th. The third common dolphin sighting was of two individuals from Inishmor, Aran Islands, Co. Galway on the 26th. Three of the four minke whale sightings were from Slea Head, Co. Kerry. A solitary individual was seen on the 2nd and two individuals were reported on the 5th and 7th. On the 30th, two minke whales were seen off Bennet Bank, Co. Dublin. Three harbour porpoises were seen off Howth Head, Co. Dublin on the 2nd; another three on the 6th from Inisheer, Co. Donegal; two were seen from Grey Point, Belfast Lough, Co. Down on the 25th; four from Howth Head, Co. Dublin on the 25th; and one solitary individual was observed in Killiney Bay, Co. Dublin on the 30th.

There were four unidentified cetacean sightings in the month of May. Four were seen from St. John's Point, Co. Donegal on the 1st; three on the 10th from Slea Head;

one individual on the 22nd from Old Head of Kinsale, Co. Cork; and three on the 27th from Laytown Beach, Co. Meath.

There was also a humpback whale sighting on the 31st whilst offshore West Cork.

Unless otherwise stated, regional roundups were written by SWF research assistant Katrin Lohrengel and SWF volunteers Emily Cunningham, Rachel Lambert as well as by Danielle Gibas.

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.