

National Whale and Dolphin Watch 12-20 August 2006

The fifth annual National Whale and Dolphin Watch, organised by the Sea Watch Foundation, took place between 12th and 20th August, 2006. Despite the dismal weather in most parts of the UK, the Watch Week turned out to be a great success.

Seventy-seven manned sites were advertised to the general public, although watches were carried out at more than a hundred locations around the UK. A total of 596 sightings (totalling 2208 indivs) of whales, dolphins and porpoises were reported during the week, comprising nine species. The harbour porpoise was the most frequently seen cetacean with 335 sightings (858 indivs), followed by bottlenose dolphins, reported 141 times (711 indivs) during the week. The third most commonly reported species was the minke whale with 39 sightings (45 indivs). Other species spotted included short-beaked common dolphin (21 sightings, 311 indivs), Atlantic white-sided (16 sightings, 134 indivs.), Risso's dolphin (13 sightings, 29 indivs), white-beaked dolphin (9 sightings, 30 indivs), killer whale (two sightings, six indivs) and humpback whale (one sighting, one indiv). There were also 19 reports (83 indivs) of unidentified dolphins and large whale species, probably either fin or sei whale.

The results were comparable to previous years with harbour porpoises being widely distributed around the British coasts, with concentrations mainly in the north and west, although there were an unusually high number of sightings reported from the south east, namely from Suffolk and Essex, probably due to increased observer numbers. A notable hotspot for porpoise this year was found in Ilfracombe in North Devon.

Bottlenose dolphins were also widely distributed, reported as far up north as Shetland all the way down to the Channel Islands, but scarce in Eastern or South-east England. The Moray Firth, the Tay Estuary, south-west Cardigan Bay and south-west Cornwall were the most common locations to see bottlenose dolphins. A notable group of up to 100 dolphins was reported from Caernarfon Bay, and there were few individuals spotted off Isle of Man and North West England as well as unidentified dolphins (possible bottlenose) were reported in the Blackwater River Estuary, in Essex.

Short-beaked common dolphins, on the other hand, occurred not only in their normal haunts of South-west England, West Wales, and West Scotland, but also off the north coast of Scotland, and, in the North Sea, along the east Scottish coast south to the Moray Firth.

For the second consecutive summer, minke whales were relatively scarce off the west coast of Scotland but common on the east coast, particularly in the Moray Firth; they were also present in small numbers in the Irish Sea south to South-west England.

Atlantic white-sided dolphins were seen mainly off North Scotland - their normal range, although they were also sighted in Aberdeenshire. White-beaked dolphins were seen in the North Sea mainly off North and North-east Scotland. As in recent years, Risso's dolphins were recorded in the northern North Sea off North and North-east Scotland, as well as within their usual range along the west coasts of Britain including the Isle of Man. Killer whales were sighted in Dumfries and Galloway and off the north Aberdeenshire coast. The rarest sighting was that of a humpback whale between the Channel Islands and France.

The region with the highest reported number of sightings was the Inner Hebrides, with 144 sightings. North-east Scotland and West Wales had 89 and 82 sightings reported respectively. Other regions with a high number (20 or more sightings) of sightings were: North Devon, Cornwall, South Grampian, Cumbria, Shetland, and North Grampian (in descending order of frequency of sightings). North East Scotland and South Grampian had the highest diversity of species, with seven species seen during the week.

Just after the watch week, there were sightings of fin whales in the Irish Sea, close to the West Wales coast, a group of four killer whales in the Bristol Channel, two Sowerby's beaked whales sighted in the Moray Firth, and three northern bottlenose whales spotted in the Inner Hebrides.

Notable sightings from this year's watch include:

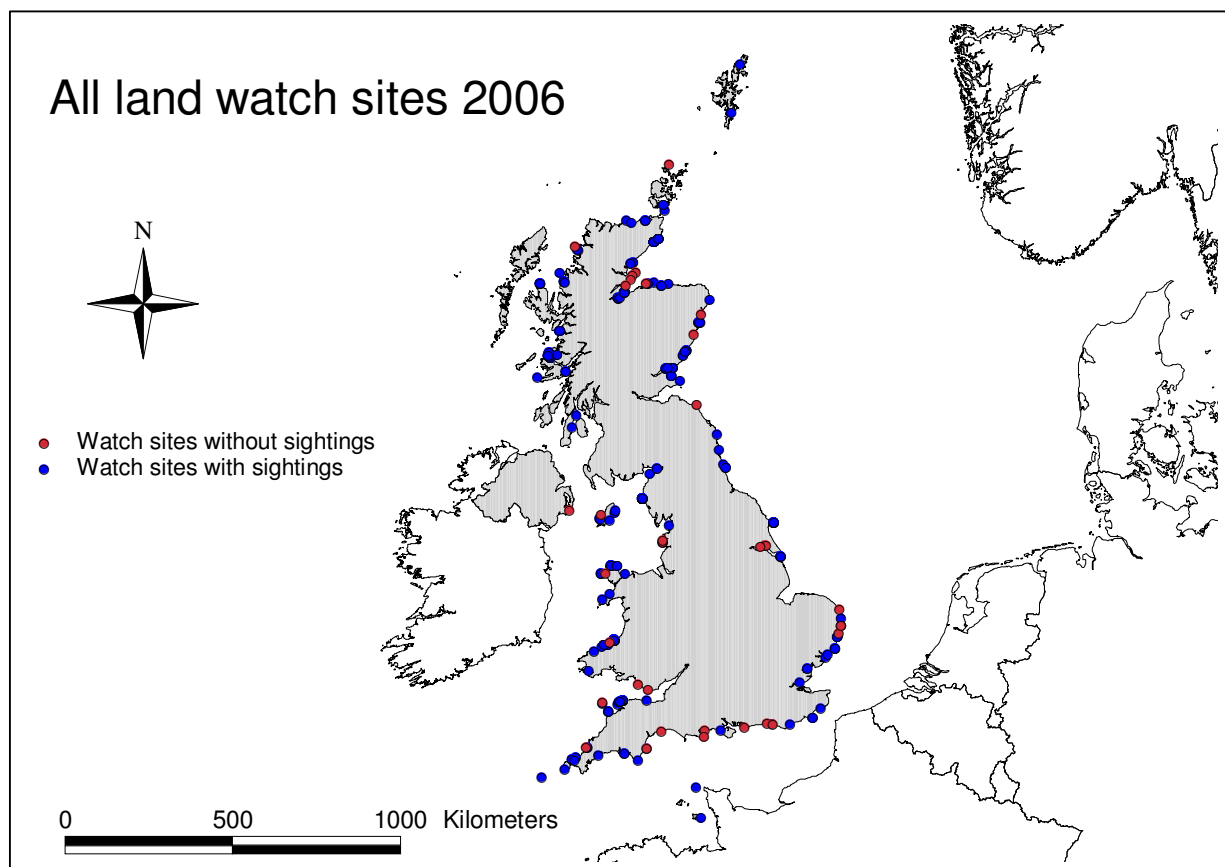
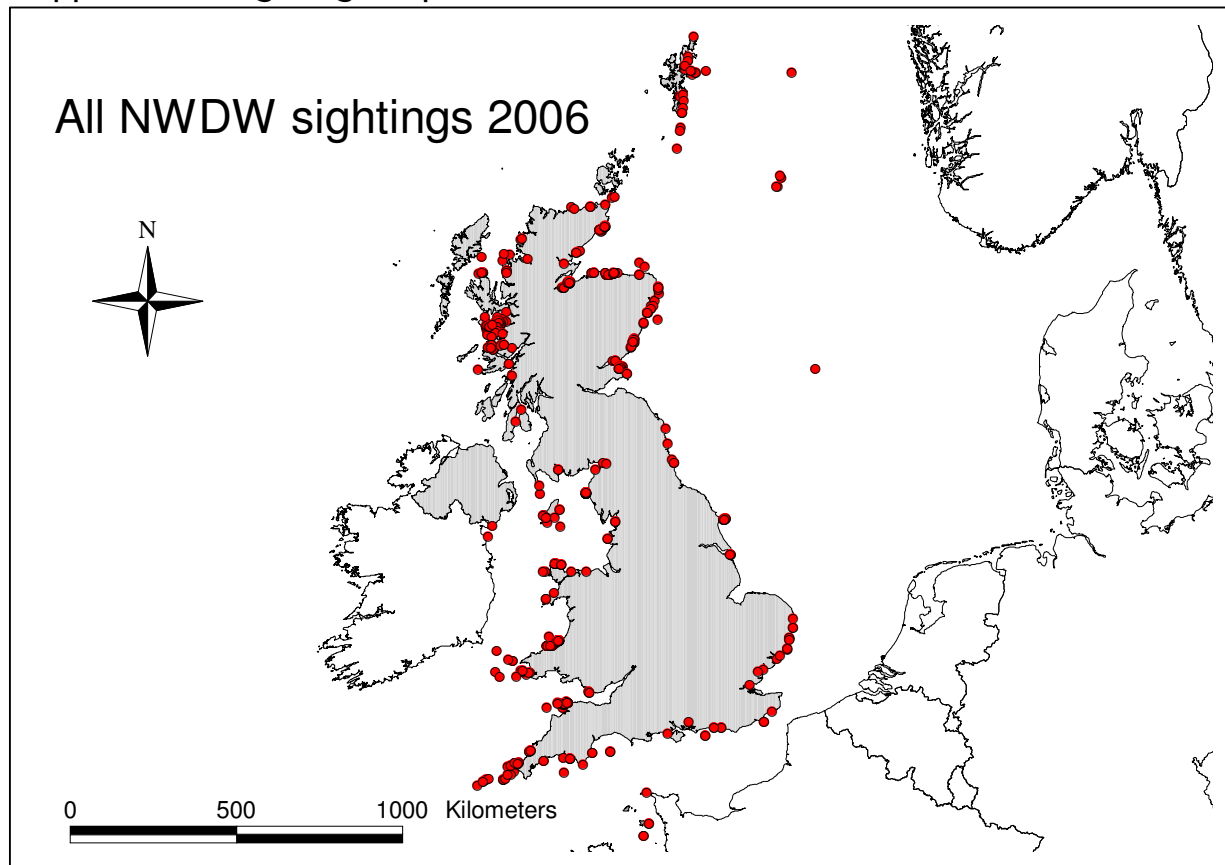
- A dolphin species spotted in the Blackwater Estuary, Essex
- Large groups of harbour porpoise off Cresswell, Northumberland
- Common dolphins within Cardigan Bay
- Killer whales off the Mull of Galloway
- An abundance of harbour porpoises in Cumbria and Yorkshire
- A humpback whale near Alderney, Channel Islands.

Sightings distribution maps are appended below to give a fuller picture of what was seen all around the UK. These include a map of all sightings, a map of all watch sites with and without sighting reports, and then species maps. Bottlenose dolphin, harbour porpoise, minke whale and common dolphin sightings are plotted on separate maps. The remaining species are included in the 'Other species' map.

Sea Watch would like to acknowledge our funder, the BG Group for making the National Whale and Dolphin Watch possible. We would also like to thank all of you who supported us and took part in the event: the regional coordinators, local organisations, manned site organizers, volunteers and each and every single person who contacted and reported their watch results. Whether or not you were successful in sighting animals, your information and efforts helped make the National Whale and Dolphin Watch a great success.

Hanna Nuuttila
Sightings Officer
Sea Watch Foundation

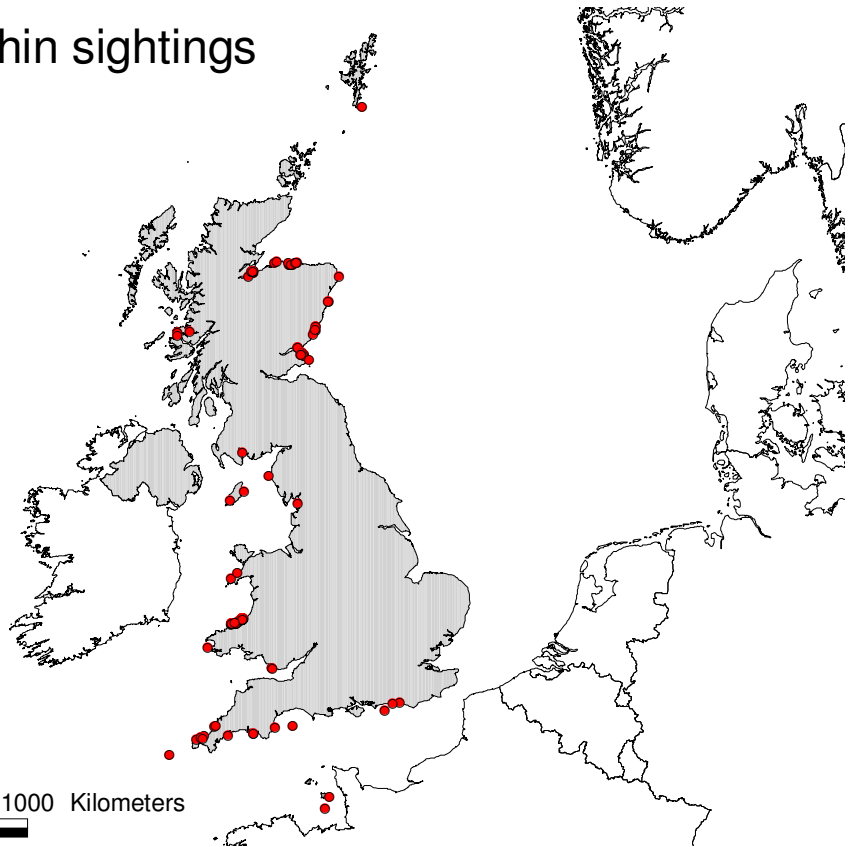
Appendix 1. Sightings Maps from the NWDW 2006



Bottlenose dolphin sightings NWDW 2006



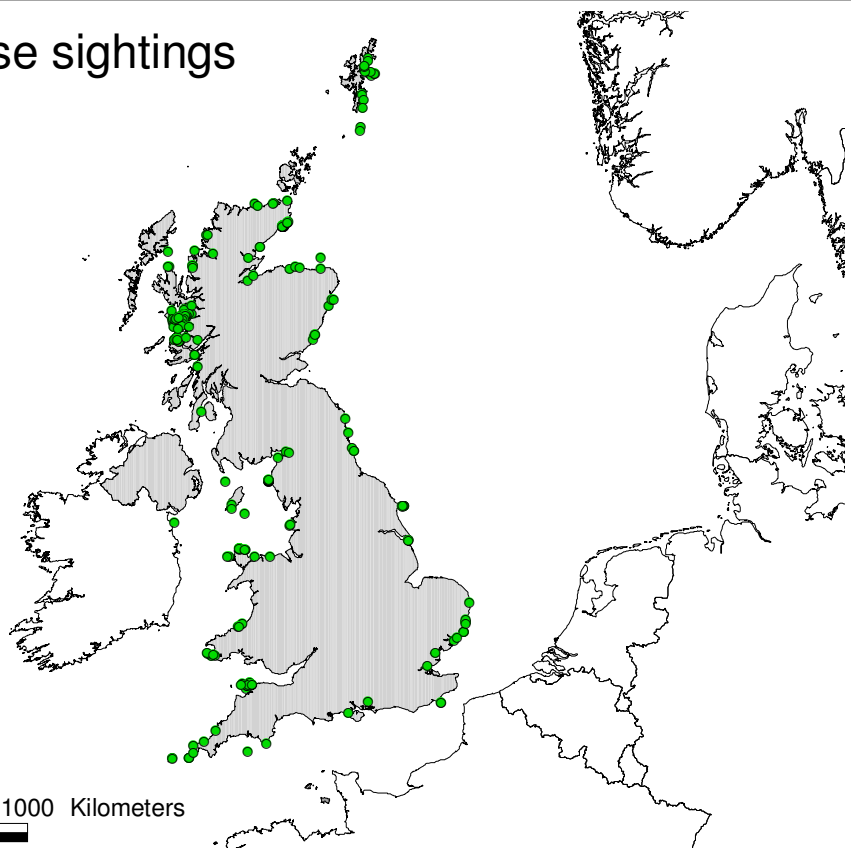
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Harbour porpoise sightings NWDW 2006



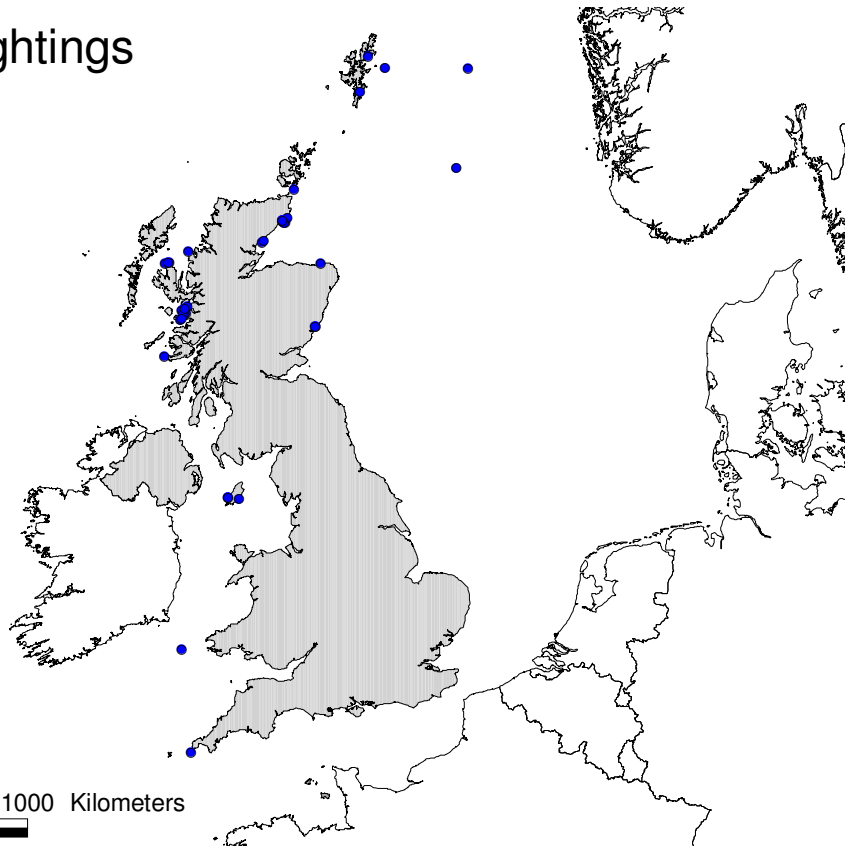
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Minke whale sightings NWDW 2006



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Common dolphin sightings NWDW 2006



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