



## How to complete SWF Recording Forms: instructions

### *Introduction*

Sea Watch uses several recording forms divided into two categories 1) **Sightings** and 2) **Effort**.

**Sightings Forms** are used to record details of animals sighted whether from a chance observation or during a timed watch. **Effort Forms** keep account at regular intervals of the time spent watching whether any animals are seen or not.

**NOTE:** Wherever possible, please record the time you spend watching, i.e. the effort you put in. Effort information is critical to our analyses: If we do not know how many hours were spent watching, we do not know if the absence of animals at a particular time of year simply means that no watching was conducted. Likewise, during watches at sea the need for recording distances travelled is very important. However, all sightings are extremely valuable, so please send in your sighting anyway.

The forms are listed per category here below:

### **1) SIGHTING Forms**

**Cetacean Sighting Form (SWF/RF1):** For detailed recording of a single sighting  
**Vessel-based Sightings Form (SWF/RF2):** For brief recording of multiple sightings

### **2) EFFORT Forms**

**Land-Based Form (SWF/RF4):** For land-based timed watches  
**Vessel-Based Effort Form (SWF/RF5):** For boat-based timed watches

## ***Which recording forms to use***

When conducting a timed survey, you should have the relevant Effort and Sightings forms to hand. The Effort form will be used whether animals were seen or not, but the Sightings form will only be used if animals were seen.

Data that tell us that no animals were present during a timed watch, are equally important as data that tell us there were many. Sightings forms can be used on their own to record chance observations when your situation prohibits the recording of effort.

**AT SEA:** If you expect to see many animals of the same species or have very little time for recording (i.e. watch duties at sea), use the Boat Sightings Form (SWF/RF2). If, however, you expect smaller numbers of sightings or a variety of species and time is not at a premium, then use Cetacean Sighting Form (SWF/RF1).

If you can conduct a timed survey at sea, use the Vessel-based Effort Form (SWF/RF5) for recording effort and the Boat Sightings Form (SWF/RF2) for related sightings data.

**ON LAND:** The sighting form you use is largely down to your situation and the area in which you are observing. For all land-based watches use the Land-based Recording Form (SWF/RF4). This is a useful form as it records the effort and sightings on a single sheet. For a single opportunistic sighting use the Cetacean Sighting Form (SWF/RF1).

## ***Guidelines for data collection: all forms***

*Please complete as many fields as you can. Do not be discouraged if you can only complete a few fields. All data are helpful!*

**WHO:** Please give us your **Name, Address, Telephone Number** and **E-mail address** when you submit your forms. You may need to be contacted for more information about your sighting.

**WHEN:** State the exact **Time** (24hr-clock) notifying whether BST or GMT, and complete **Date** (day/month/year) of your sighting or effort. If recording timed watches, cruises or long-term encounters, be sure to record both **Start Time** and **End Time**.

**SPECIES SIGHTED:** The most important information is **Species Identification**. Although Sea Watch is primarily interested in cetaceans, please also record sightings of seals, sharks, sun fish or turtles.

Record what species you see, but also provide relevant description details so that we can confirm your identification. Sea Watch has a number of Field Guides and Identification Charts available to help you learn the key characteristics of the species you are likely to see.

For more information please write or telephone: Sea Watch Foundation, Paragon House, Wellington Place Tel/Fax: 01545 561227.

Email: [sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk](mailto:sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk)

Visit our Website: <http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk>

However, sometimes you will find yourself in situations where you simply cannot be sure of what species you've seen. Depending on how sure you are about the species, record the confidence you have in your identification as **Definite**, **Probable** or **Possible**. In all cases, please give us information (on the form or via email) of the key features which you did see. There are several general categories about **Head & Beak Shape**, **Body Length**, **Position & Size of Dorsal Fin**, **Flank Markings** and **Blow Size & Shape** which help verify the species. **Photos** or **Drawings** will also help, including notes of any **Distinguishing Features** (e.g. fin tip missing, etc.) to help recognize individual animals. If, however, you are unsure of the identification then you can record it as "dolphin sp." for example.

**GROUP SIZE:** Getting an accurate count of the numbers of whales, dolphins and porpoises in groups is difficult. The animals rarely come to the surface at the same time. For this reason, record your judgment of the **Minimum** and **Maximum Group Size**. Minimum group size is the greatest number of animals you see at the surface all at once. Maximum group size could be your estimate from the number of surfacing over a five or ten second period. This period would be long enough to allow all animals travelling together to surface, but not so long that the same animal will be counted several times. Also, very large groups of dolphins may be estimated as "100+", for example. Always try to give us your **Best Estimate of Group Size**.

**AGE CLASS:** Dolphins and whales are assigned to four age classes (**ADULT**, **JUVENILE**, **CALF**, **NEONATE**) by estimating the relative body length of each individual, by association with conspecifics, and on colouration in some cases.

*JUVENILE:* length is about  $\frac{2}{3}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of adult length, and swimming independently or associated with an adult.

*CALF:* Length is  $<\frac{2}{3}$  of adult length, and consistently escorted by an adult

*NEONATE:* length is  $<\frac{1}{2}$  of adult length, usually with foetal folds or pale foetal lines resulting from the folds and predominantly swimming in echelon position by an adult's mid-lateral flank

If there are immatures (JUVENILE, CALF, NEONATE) in the group, try to record their numbers separately. For this it is best to count the number of juveniles first and then estimate the total. The number of adults will then be found by subtracting the number of immatures from the total.

**WHERE:** It is preferred **Locations** in degrees and decimal minutes of **Latitude** and **Longitude**. However, the following are also acceptable if decimal degrees are not available: degrees, minutes and seconds, or if land-based, National Grid co-ordinates. If these are not available, give a verbal description of the location, referring to the nearest landmarks. Whatever system you use please be very clear.

*Please do remember that Latitude and Longitude are for the location where your sighting took place NOT from the location you conducted your watch. So, Latitude and Longitude need to point in the water not on land.*

Please do leave information about how far (in meter, Km, miles etc.) from the coast your sighting took place, in the **Comment box**.

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**BEHAVIOUR:** Assessing behaviour can be difficult. Animals must be watched for a short period before behaviour can be interpreted. A few behavioural categories are listed and defined on the Sighting Recording Form. If these categories don't fit, describe what you saw in the **Other Behaviours** category.

Please contact Sea Watch's Sightings Officer (SO) to know more about behaviour, who will share publications with you to help you learn how to identify behaviour of whales and dolphins in the wild. The SO email address is [chiara.giulia.bertulli@seawatchfoundaiton.org.uk](mailto:chiara.giulia.bertulli@seawatchfoundaiton.org.uk).

**ENVIRONMENTAL CONDICTIONS:** Weather and sea conditions at the time of observation are extremely important to us. Poor weather affects observer ability to see and identify cetacean species. Recording the weather data helps us to assess the "sighting efficiency". A record of other environmental values at the time of a sighting can tell us the type of habitat in which a species occurs. If you can record **Depth, Water Temperature** and **Salinity**, at the time of sighting, it will give us better data than those obtained from oceanographic records and charts.

**REMEMBER:** *The best way you can help is to join your local Regional Coordinator and his Regional Group of volunteer observers. This will be the most efficient way to develop local support for your whale-watching activities. Everyone can make an important contribution!*

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