



News sheet - June 2004

National Whale & Dolphin Watch, 28-29 August 2004

The National Whale and Dolphin Watch weekend which has been so successful in 2002 and 2003 will be repeated at the end of August this year. However, this time we aim to encourage watches also from the previous weekend and week leading up to it, so please post all sightings obtained as soon as you receive them from 21 August onwards to the end of the month.

Last year, we had 326 sightings reported over the Watch weekend including - minke whales, bottlenose dolphins, harbour porpoises, common dolphins, Atlantic white-sided dolphins, white beaked dolphins, Risso's Dolphins and a fin whale. For full details of what was seen in National Whale and Dolphin Watch Weekend 2003, please consult the Sea Watch web site.

The aim is to provide Sea Watch with a valuable snapshot picture of the numbers and variety of whales, dolphins and porpoises to be seen around the British Isles, but equally important is to raise public awareness about UK cetaceans, to involve as many people as possible in watching for them, and therefore to give the Event a high media profile. We are looking to key persons throughout the British Isles to serve this function. The contact details of those persons would be posted on the Sea Watch web site.

Prime Sites

As in previous years, we have selected a number of sites around the UK which are amongst the best in that region from which to spot. A list of these (from last year) is posted on the Sea Watch web site. Please review these and contact us if you would like any additions or changes made.

Manned Sites

A number of the prime sites have been manned in the past by National Whale and Dolphin Watch co-ordinators/observers. A list, as used last year, is available on the web site, along with contact details for all these. Please also check these and inform us of any changes you would like to make.

Marine Wildlife Operators

A list of marine wildlife operators who operate throughout the season and who generally take part in the National Whale and Dolphin Watch is posted on the web site, along with details of the species most commonly seen with each operator. If there are any changes to this list to be made, please let us know.

Peter Evans.

West Scotland: Report by Tom Gaillard, Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust

Harbour Porpoise Sightings of the coastal harbour porpoise were mainly reported in the Sound of Mull and some in the area between Iona and Tiree. 19 sightings were recorded with a total of 65 individuals. That is 10 sightings and 44 individuals more than in the months of March and April. Three sightings of 7 and 8 individuals were recorded. A group of seven or eight individuals was recorded on the first and the ninth of May swimming around in the northern part of Loch Linnhe. The third sighting of a large group was on the 21st of May in the sound of Mull between the villages of Salen and Craignure.

Bottlenose Dolphin The largest group of bottlenose dolphins was recorded on the 22nd of June swimming around in the sound of Mull nearby Kilchoan. The group consisted of about 12 individuals. In the month of April a fairly large group like this one was also recorded in the same waters, but it is not certain this is the same group. Some individuals were recorded around Coll, Tiree and Ulva. A total of seven sightings were recorded.

Common Dolphins A total of eleven sightings of common dolphins were recorded. The largest group of approximately 35 individuals was recorded near Tiree, Hynish Bay. Another large group, approximately 19 individuals, was recorded at the east side of Eigg.

Minke whale There were 25 sightings of minke whales recorded in the months of May and June. Most of these sightings were recorded around the Isle of Mull, Coll and Tiree. Caliach point and the lighthouse of Ardnarmurchan are two important sites for recording sightings. However, some sightings are recorded near the Isle of Skye and Barra.

North-west Scotland: Report from Ian Birks – regional co-ordinator for North-west Scotland

May / June

2nd May gave me my first whale sighting, a probable minke, single lunge feed among gannets mid Loch Gairloch at 8pm. At the time we had westerly F5 giving a rough sea in frequent heavy showers. The temperature? 8 centigrade! Where is spring? During the rest of May we continued to see increasing harbour porpoise activity whenever the wind dropped enough, usually two to three times a week and close inshore. My next minke sighting was mid loch about one mile in from the open sea lunge feeding with a dozen harbour porpoise, seals, auks and gannets, 29th May. By June the weather was grim again and sightings fell because it was just so poor. A local camp-site on the shore of the loch was flooded by the torrential rain and closed. We were getting unconfirmed reports of other sightings by boat, but with little certainty. Ian French at Gairloch Marine Life Centre was having more regular and consistent sightings of Harbour Porpoise from "Starquest", but the conditions made it difficult even for him.

On 24th June an unfortunate event was the report of a dead female Harbour Porpoise at Loch Tournaig with a half-born calf. These were in extremely poor condition but very sad to see this happen and the first such event in my experience here.

Unfortunately I then suffered an injury leaving me with bones broken and so pretty immobile. Ian French continued to have reasonable, sometimes very good if patchy sightings of harbour porpoise through to the end of the month with others reporting dolphins and whales, but again uncertain of detail. We hope both my bones and the weather improve soon.

North Scotland: Report from Andy Summers - senior ranger, NW Scotland; and Iain Macdonald – regional co-ordinator for North-east Scotland

In May orcas started to grab the headlines with a number of reports round the coast being reported right into July. The highlight was on 9th June when kayakers were "joined" by a pod of orcas just 300m off the shore in Sinclair Bay. A number of excellent photos were taken. Mary Legg the Senior Ranger in Caithness has heard reports that the numbers of seals off the Caithness coast appears to be lower, particularly on the island of Stroma in the Pentland Firth. Harbour porpoise numbers also appear to be lower this summer off Caithness, with suggestions that both seals and porpoises might be affected by the local movements of orcas.

Mary Legg received a number of minke whale records and was able to witness at first hand amazing views of feeding / travelling minke whales off the Caithness coast. On 10th June Mary had difficulty keeping a count of the whales off Skirza Head, the total being between 20 and 50. The whales appeared at a time when there were large flocks of feeding seabirds off the coast. Sadly a dead minke whale was washed ashore near Forss, Caithness in the first half of June. Also seen off Caithness were a couple of long-finned pilot whales, but details regarding the sighting have not been obtained.

In recent years, May has provided the earliest reports for both white-beaked dolphins and common dolphins off the west coast of Sutherland. This year the west coast lived up to expectations with both species recorded. On the east coast the coincidental timing of sightings became almost spooky with one of five minke whales seen off Brora on 21st June being seen at 21.12, approximately 9 miles distant on a bearing of approximately 90 degrees. Two years ago on 5th July 2002 a minke whale was seen surfacing twice off Brora at 21.12, less than 10 miles distant on a bearing of 90 degrees!

In June a leaflet was launched illustrating some of the best locations from which to see cetaceans from the shore in the Highlands. The leaflet is a joint production between the Sea Watch Foundation, Highland Council Ranger Service and the Highland Biodiversity Action Plan Project.

The following are reports of cetaceans from Sutherland between 1st May and 30th June:

2nd May - two bottlenose dolphins seen at Nigg.

9th May - 2 harbour porpoise seen at Brora

11th May - single orca seen from Stoer; also reports of minke whale and orca from Handa about that time.

26th May - four, and later, six orcas at Sango Bay, Durness

30th May - basking shark seen at Scourie more

30th May – 11 white-beaked dolphins, approximately 60 short nosed common dolphins, approximately 4 harbour porpoise and one minke whale seen from beside Stoer Head lighthouse.

31st May - six orcas seen at Cape Wrath.

By early June, millions of moon jellyfish appearing as well as lots of sea gooseberries all along the north-west coast. On the north coast a large number of sea hares came ashore resulting in a fair bit of head scratching regarding their identity.

9th June - 10-12 orcas, Sinclair Bay, only 300 m from the coast. Seen by Bill Roslyn.

10th June - 5 harbour porpoise off Brora.

10th June - 20-50 minke whales off Skirza Head, north of Wick.

12th June - 3 harbour porpoise off Brora.

13th June - approximately 10 orcas seen from the Caithness/ Orkney ferry near Berwick, Orkney.

13th June - 6-8 minke whales off Duncansby Head, seen by Bill Roslyn.

21st June - 5 minke whales off Brora.

30th June - 1 minke whale close inshore at Duncansby Head

Outer Hebrides: Report from John Macleod in North Uist, Western Isles

In April and May, we had occasional pairs of porpoises. The minke whale that used to visit Angus John Macinnes in “Sea Breeze” when hauling his prawn creels about two miles south of The Maddy Mor, has not been seen for many months. My supposition is that the dying calf that came ashore last year at Cheese Bay, was hers and that she had died and was the corpse that was found near Stornoway about two weeks after that. This fitted reasonably well with Angus John’s last sightings.

On 25th June, as we headed out to the Minch, Angus John was returning and reported that there were dolphins at the mouth of Lochmaddy Bay. Lorna and I did not see them as we went out, but a couple of hours later, while dipping for mackerel north of Lochmaddy Bay, we saw them steaming along the coast and feeding intensely. There were 11 or 12 individuals, thought to be Atlantic white-sided dolphins. They were moving briskly close to the shore and did not divert to greet us. We have not had any other sightings of note although the weather has been poor these last few weeks.

North Grampian: Report from Peter Macdonald – regional co-ordinator for North Grampian

Sightings along the Outer Moray Firth on the whole have been excellent. At least four different species have been encountered, and the sighting of a basking shark in June shows the Moray Firth has lots to offer the would be cetacean watcher. Once again orca were seen in various locations - Cullen Bay and Findhorn Bay off the Culbin sands. As ever, the bottlenose dolphins are the main species being recorded, and with sightings at the earlier part of the year at Aberdeen and along the Inner Moray Firth you would have to say the population is as healthy and growing as it has been over the last 10 years I have been watching.

March came in with a Cauld blast and watching was very difficult at times, anyone that knows our area will know full well the effects of a NE wind from a cliff top. With the help of the local group friends of the Moray Firth Dolphins, watches are being conducted on a regular basis with a local watch on the 1st Sunday of the month and an all coast watch each 3rd Sunday, this has been taken on board by the GSWG so if it all works we can have people watching from 2-4 on that Sunday afternoon from Inverness to Edinburgh.

Sightings in March were mainly being recorded along the areas of Burghead to Lossiemouth and Spey Bay to Cullen bay and eastward to Banff. The first show of Gannets was seen in Cullen bay on the 8th and harbour Porpoise was also seen milling and feeding in the bay. Over at Balintore, a group of dolphins were seen close into shore that same day.

April saw a lull in our sightings, despite undertaking some great watches, at times in fine weather and on one occasion at the Findochty Viewpoint in a force 8 gale, no surprise to have recorded no sightings, but you never know. About the second week harbour Porpoise were back in Cullen Bay and off Findochty after that sightings were recorded nearly every day up until the 27th with a minke whale being sighted off Findochty on the 25th May has to be recorded as one of our best year for recording cetaceans from bottlenose dolphins to orca.

Only five days in this month did we not see anything, with bottlenose dolphins of course being the top animal encountered. Sightings were being reported to us from Inverness to Fraserburgh, we saw more Harbour Porpoise in this month than the whole of last year minke whales were sighted at Whitehills and Chanonry Point and over at Brora. On the 15th the day that 6 orcas were being encountered off Iona 3 orca were seen in Cullen Bay and again on the 16th off Lossiemouth, heading into the Firth, this is now the 4th year we have seen killer whales in the Firth at this time.

Bottlenose dolphin activity was excellent off Findochty with the caravan site offering the best view. Most sightings were early morning and between 6-8pm.

During this time as of last year squid were being caught in large shoals, 16+ boats were working off an area Findochty to Gardenstown at times so close in to shore. This type of fishing is not very healthy for any cetacean living in these waters, rumours about 6 dolphins and ten harbour porpoise being killed in the nets were being heard, various local groups and national bodies were informed about our concern, but it seems the boats were in there right to fish as no quota was enforced, but if you had seen the number of boats as we had seen pair trawling in Cullen Bay then something has to be done, meetings are proposed for September so I hope we can get the fishermen to at least be banned from entering Cullen Bay.

It was strange last year that all our sightings dropped due to the number of boats but it seems that our sightings are up. Maybe it was the fact the boats only numbered 16 and not the 45+ as of last year.

At present the squid are too small but the boats will be back in even larger numbers, so we will have to keep a close eye on the boat situation.

On 4th June, orcas were seen off Findhorn - 2 adults and a calf, and for the next three weeks, dolphins were seen in various areas in small and at times larger groups. We had some great sightings on the 6th June with dolphins and porpoises being recorded, feeling fine until Kevin Hepworth reported his humpback whale sightings, green with envy but pleased for him.

The weather started to crash in now and sightings were well down but around the 3rd week large numbers of dolphins were being seen 60+ one day off Portknockie. Out on the boat we were seeing large groups of 20+ off Portknockie at the same time 30+ were seen off Hopeman, a lot of feeding must have been coming into the firth. The 27th saw the basking shark recorded off Findlater Castle.

Half way through July and our sightings have again been fantastic, large groups of dolphins off Lossiemouth, Findochty and Banff; minke whales off Port Soy and Burghead; and small encounters with harbour porpoise in Cullen bay. The 16th saw in one set hour from 7-9pm over 70 dolphins along our coast from Spey Bay to Cullen Bay. For ending in an amazing sunset with five calves on our bow and large animals all breaching close to our boat.

I hope that you are having the sort of sightings we are having. Even when we do not see anything, watching on various cliff tops has been great fun, that's what watching is all about and meeting like-minded people that are keen to learn much more about the cetaceans that are seen around our shores.

For further Information on our sightings and news of our group, go to www.loupers.com

Report from Kevin Robinson from Conservation Research & Rescue Unit (CRRU)

During the months of May and June, bottlenose dolphin activity has been relatively high in the southern outer Moray Firth and comparable to previous years – with several encounters with many of the well-known individuals commonly recorded in this area of the firth. However, sightings of the other two most regularly sighted coastal cetacean species, namely the harbour porpoise and the minke whale, have been considerably lower thus far in 2004.

Encounters involving bottlenose dolphins have mainly comprised of larger group sizes of 20+ animals, although these groups have shown a strong altruism between affiliates, with the recapture of a large number of the same animals during these months. The behaviour of these groups has also been atypical – with widely separated subgroups travelling together, from the shoreline to as far as 1.5 km offshore, c.f. the more typically recorded gregarious schools expected. This behaviour and group structure would seem to suggest a patchy distribution of prey in the area during this time, the dolphins taking advantage of conspecifics to lessen the difficulties in locating and controlling such patches. Cooperative feeding is very much a behavioural feature of the animals in this area of the outer Moray Firth; once prey are located by the sparsely separated groups, aerial displays are used to call other members for assistance. Furthermore, considerably higher numbers of calves per group have also been recorded than in previous years – although no neonatal calves have been observed to date.

The occurrence of harbour porpoises along this coastline over the last few months has been considerably lower than in previous years this far, with the majority of encounters being recorded by the CRRU in deeper, offshore waters, and with only a few individual encounters being recorded close to the shoreline between the ports of Lossiemouth to Fraserburgh. Group sizes between 1 and 5 animals have been recorded during these months, and only the odd mother-calf associations noted. Research work by the CRRU to date has shown a high level of abundance of harbour porpoises in this area of the Moray Firth throughout the summer months. With an estimated abundance level of 0.752 animals per square kilometre, the study area has one of the highest abundance levels yet recorded in UK coastal waters.

No encounters with minke whales have been recorded whilst on dedicated minke surveys during these months. However, a couple of public sightings of these rorquals have been reported to us via the CRRU's public sightings scheme – the individual animals being reported off the coastline of Findochty, Lossiemouth and Gamrie Bay. The determining force in the distribution of almost all cetaceans is the accompanying distribution and abundance of target prey species. However, prey items such as fish, squid and crustaceans are all usually affected by a range of physical oceanographic factors themselves, such as bathymetry, water temperature and nutrient availability, for example. Current CRRU studies of these small rorqual whales using the NE coastal waters aims to correlate the potential relationship between feeding-related activities and the physical oceanographic factors such as bathymetric depth and slope, water temperature and phytoplankton density using *de-novo* remote sensing techniques.

South Grampian: Report from Kevin Hepworth – regional co-ordinator for South Grampian

The months of May and June have been very busy months despite poor weather in June which is probably reflected in the number of reported sightings in June being approximately half of these in May. The number of vessel based surveys also dropped in June with only two out of nine getting out compared with three out of six getting out in May due to prevailing south easterlies. This time period is traditionally the time when bottlenose dolphin sightings drop at the end of May and there is a small peak of harbour porpoise sightings followed by a two week lull before white beaked dolphins begin appearing for their three month break off the shores of Grampian. This year has been no different although the transition has been less marked with bottlenose dolphins seeming to be around longer (albeit much more mobile and less guaranteed inside the harbour) and an apparent lack of the harbour porpoise peak. This may or may not be a reflection of nationwide talk of North Sea seabird colonies failing due to depleted fish stocks although the evidence at Bullars of Buchan and Fowlsheugh seems to reflect a buck in the National trend with more puffins than I can ever remember and early movement of shearwaters and kuas into the area. The highlight of the two months must surely be a humpback in our area for the second consecutive year with one 500m off Nigg Bay/Girdleness heading north on 6th June only half an hour or so after Peter Evans had disembarked from the Shetland ferry and headed south.

Bottlenose dolphin - another bumper end to the season with 75 (40 in May and 35 in June) reported sightings during May-June. The lion's share of sightings comes from Aberdeen Harbour with nearly 50 sightings and the remainder split between Stonehaven, Montrose and Newtonhill although this may reflect where effort is concentrated as much as anything else although the animals do use Aberdeen Harbour heavily for feeding on the salmon running the River Dee and once present can be expected to be about for several hours. Notable sightings include 25 on the 2nd May

(Stonehaven), 30 on the 7th May (Aberdeen Harbour), 20+ on the 21st May (Montrose), 20+ on the 25th May (Montrose), 25 on the 28th May (Aberdeen Harbour), 20+ on the 3rd June (Aberdeen Harbour), 20 on the 15th June (Stonehaven) and a reported 30-50 off Aberdeen Beach on 28th June. A large number of recognisable animals have also been spotted, with old favourites such as Black and Decker, Runny Paint and Cutter putting in an appearance.

Harbour porpoise - a quieter than usual period, with only 15 reported sightings. All were in the usual porpoise strongholds of Aberdeen Harbour, Nigg Bay, Donmouth and Collieston. Only two came from June although this may represent the poorer June weather with rougher than usual seas a contributing factor and also due to an 'extended stay' from the bottlenose dolphins. The most notable sighting was of four animals heading north past Collieston on the 15th May. Sightings otherwise were of single or pairs of animals.

White-beaked dolphin - once again reports came in towards the end of June with the first inshore record from 26th June (26 south past Muchalls) although six further offshore from the Shetland ferry were reported on 6th June off Peterhead area. Sightings came in from Aberdeen Beachfront on 28th (two records - one of 10 and one of 14 - some of the reported 50+ bottlenose dolphins may actually have been white beaks although this remains unsubstantiated). This is the third year running that whitebeaks have arrived in the third week of June, all occurrences within 5 days of each other and activity has been high with a huge amount of leaping and splashing making it easy to pick the animals up even though they tend to be approx. 1 mile offshore, only occasionally coming in closer when travelling or feeding off the entrance to Nigg Bay. Since the beginning of July, whitebeaks have been regularly spotted between Balmedie and Cove in good numbers due to the huge amount of feed around.

Minke whale - three records of minke whale were reported on the 2nd June twice (Johnshaven and Lunan Bay) although these animals were described as probable minke whales as they were observed apparently lunge feeding whilst travelling south and may actually have been the same animal. The other individual was reported on 30th June off Girdleness after which time animals have regularly been sighted through early July often very close inshore and systematically working from raft of birds to raft to birds often with white beaked dolphins in association.

Humpback whale - as mentioned earlier, this period's highlight was a single humpback whale observed travelling north at approx 8am on 6th June. The animal surfaced off Greg Ness at which point it wasn't clear on id. After surfacing a couple more times and passing Nigg Bay it proceeded to give a spectacular view as it lifted the tail flukes and dived before becoming lost to view although it may have been seen briefly passing the marker buoy opposite Aberdeen Harbour although there were also a number of dolphins around the harbour entrance that morning and the distance from the observation point was too great to confirm anything beyond a short stubby fin.

July is looking like it is going to surpass May and June for number and variety of sightings and the seas have calmed enough that we may get more boat surveys in, with two scheduled each week until the end of August.

[North-East England: Report from Andy Tait – regional co-ordinator for Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, plus other records submitted to Sea Watch central office](#)

Porpoises were seen regularly throughout the period. The 11th started the May sightings with a white-beaked dolphin travelling in Marsden Bay at lunchtime, with a porpoise also going north at Lizard Point in the early afternoon. Two days later on the 13th, a single porpoise was seen heading north-east of Lizard Point in a heavy swell mid morning. At 19:50 on a quiet evening on 16th, a single porpoise was seen in King Edwards Bay, Tynemouth. There were two sightings of two porpoises (the first of one adult and a calf) in early morning at Cresswell, foraging only five metres off the reef, and in early evening with two adult porpoises again only five metres off the reef on the 29th. On the 31st May, a porpoise seen at Cresswell going south, only ten metres off the reef, finished the May sightings in the area.

The most notable sighting in the entire region was of a humpback whale that graced the North Yorkshire port of Whitby over the May bank holiday weekend. It swam alongside yachts and pleasure boats just offshore from the town. White-beaked dolphins and long-finned pilot whales were also seen during the period under review. The following is a summary of those sightings:

Sun 30th - Mon 31st May – a humpback whale remained throughout both days close to Whitby, seen by Barry Sneddon and others

Mon 31st May – 11:00 – one long-finned pilot whale seen 0.75 mile north of Whitby by Hugh Jackson

Tues 1st June – 13:00 – two long-finned pilot whales seen 0.75 mile north of Whitby by Hugh Jackson

Wed 2nd June – 19:01 – one harbour porpoise observed foraging 5m off reef at Cresswell by Andrew Tait

Wed 2nd June – 18:35 – three harbour porpoises seen foraging 20m off reef at Cresswell by Brian Smith

Sat 5th June – 11:22 – one harbour porpoise seen off Hauxley by Julie Elliot

Sun 6th June – 09:37 – one harbour porpoise off Embleton Bay by Julie Elliot

Sun 6th June – 20:41 – one adult and a calf harbour porpoise seen foraging 5m off reef at Cresswell by Andrew Tait

Sun 6th June – 11:32 – two harbour porpoises seen at Boulmer by Julie Elliot

Wed 9th June – 18:36 – one adult and a calf harbour porpoise seen foraging 5m off reef at Cresswell by Andrew Tait

Sun 13th June – 14:20 – one white-beaked dolphin seen 0.5 mile east of Boulmer by Linda Lane Thornton

South-east England – reports from regional co-ordinators Jon Bramley and Stephen Savage, and to Sea Watch central office

Sightings have been lower than in previous years. However, as usual, the group was active raising awareness locally. We took part in two local annual events during May and June, Low Tide Day Eco-fare on May 8th and Adur's World Ocean Day Festival on 5th June. We have taken part in these events for many years and provide a good opportunity to raise awareness locally. We took the Sea Watch Display Stand, my life-sized inflatable bottlenose dolphin, museum artefacts and children's activities.

On 22nd May, we also ran a cetacean ID training workshop for the volunteer Beach Wardens (similar project to the pond warden scheme) at Worthing Museum. The event was planned by the BTCV as part of the wardens overall training programme and will hopefully lead to an increase in sightings from the Worthing Area. Further training is planned later this year, this time for Hastings from where we have received some interesting reports over the last couple of years through Andy Phillips, the manager of the Hastings Nature Reserve.

A large dead whale, possibly a pilot whale was reported south of Beachy Head on 7th June at 50°32.02 N, 000°07.30 W by Robert Clark, Senior Fishery Officer.

Stephen Savage

Sightings:

Thurs 13th May – 17:45 - two BND seen at Glyne Gap Hastings by Ian Standivan

Sun 16th May – 08:45 - ten BND seen between Hengistbury Head and Hurst Beach, and reported by Durlston Marine Project

Sun 16th May – 15:00 - twenty BND seen off Bournemouth beach by Mark Duff

Fri 21st May – 10:00 - four BND seen off Hastings Pier by Andy Phillips

Sat 22nd May – 10:30 - three BND seen off Galley Hill, Hastings by Ian Standivan

Sun 6th June – 14:00 - two BND observed off Rottingdean, near Brighton by an un-named fisherman

Sun 6th June – 18:00 - two BND observed five miles south of Brighton marina by Jul Carson

Wed 9th June – 19:00 - one BND seen 60 metres off Dungeness, Kent by Christian Murphy

Dorset: Report from Jo Wharam (Durlston Marine Project) – Regional Co-ordinator for Dorset

March winds and April showers brought forth a dolphin extravaganza in Dorset. May day arrived with an early report of seven bottlenose dolphins seen 300 m offshore of Hurst Beach, Hants. The group included 1 youngster and 1 calf and was heading west...the dolphins took their time to arrive but by lunchtime a pod of approximately 12–15 bottlenose dolphins was seen from Old Harry rocks, heading across Swanage Bay. The dolphins spent the afternoon

in Swanage Bay, vying for attention amongst a sailing regatta and nudging a few boats along the way. The following day the pod had moved westwards to Kimmeridge and made its way back to Durlston in the afternoon. Things went quiet for a few days with the only report coming in of a grey seal attempting to haul out in the middle of the night onto a diving platform on the stern of a yacht in Keyhaven, Hants. The animal gave up after a few failed attempts! Thursday 6th May saw the dolphins entertaining off Canford Cliffs beach as they fed around an angling boat. A report of two common dolphins seen from a fishing boat four miles west of Durlston Head was also received. By the 7th May the dolphins had headed further east and were seen breaching around a pleasure boat off Hengistbury Head. They then spent the weekend off the Purbeck coast feeding at every opportunity. There were large numbers of mackerel and bream around at this time and the dolphins seemed keen to exploit this.

This lengthy residence (for Durlston at least!) allowed us to do some photo ID work on this pod. 'No-nose' was amongst the pod, as was Freedom, and Tilly who was first seen at Durlston as a young calf in 2001. The new calf (only about 3 months old) was named Samuel by our youngest dolphin watcher. It is interesting to note that the only boats the (safety conscious?) mother let the calf bow-ride were the local lifeboats! One of the most interesting discoveries was that a number of the fin tracings taken from this new pod matched those of Lumpy (one of the original Durlston Five). One member of this pod is a large male and the feeling is that Lumpy has left his old bachelor group and started a family! Has anyone seen Nick, Bob, Spot or Echo?

The following week the dolphins divided their time between the Swanage and Bournemouth areas. The mother took advantage of the sheltered waters of Durlston Bay to teach her calf how to fish. The weekend of 15th and 16th May saw the last bumper days of dolphin sightings and also a number of cases of disturbance to the animals from boat traffic. The Marine Police were called in to move the boats away and the dolphins headed off westwards. Just over a week passed before the final sighting of the month when a local fisherman reported a 'large group' of bottlenose dolphins 8 miles east of Peveril Ledges. The sole report for the month of June was of a single bottlenose dolphin seen of Portland Bill early in the month. What delights will the summer bring?

The following is a summary of sightings of bottlenose dolphins in Dorset made during May:

Fri 7th May - eight BND seen from Christchurch

Thurs 13th May - 07.30 - 07.55, nine BND seen off Boscombe Pier

Fri 14th May - five BND seen from Christchurch

Fri 14th May - 07.10, six BND seen in Poole Bay from Sandbanks Hotel, heading east towards Bournemouth

Fri 14th May - 15.00 - 15.10, five BND seen 300 yards offshore from Southbourne beach, heading slowly eastwards

Sat 15th May - one common (?) seal seen from Dancing Ledge, Purbeck

Sat 15th May - 12.00 - 12.15, four BND seen 300m offshore from Southbourne promenade. Leaping and heading west, followed by 3 boats

Sat 15th May - 13.00, six BND seen offshore from Fisherman's Walk, Boscombe

Sat 15th May – between 17.40 and 18.00, seven BND (inc. 1 juv and 1 calf) seen at Hook Sands, Poole Harbour entrance. Milling about and bow-riding boats. Large number of boats on the scene including one who put a wake boarder in the water to ski around fast, very close to the animals!

Sat 15th May – between 18.45 and 19.00, eight BND seen by mid Poole Bar buoy, leaping and breaching.

Sat 15th May - 19.40, eight BND seen offshore from Tilly Whim caves, Durlston, heading west

Sat 15th May - 20.00, three BND seen in Swanage Bay

Sat 15th May - 20.30, seven BND (inc. 1 calf) seen 100 yards off Dancing Ledge, Purbeck, heading west

Sat 15th May - eight BND (including one juvenile and one calf) seen feeding in Swanage Bay, 500m offshore. They left the area when approached by a number of large motor boats

Sat 15th May - four BND seen from Christchurch

Sun 16th May - 8-10 BND (including one calf) seen between Hurst Beach and Hengistbury Head

Tues 18th May - 11.30, seven BND seen feeding at the entrance to Weymouth Harbour - have they gone west again?

Tues 18th May - 07.45, 6-9 BND (including one calf) seen off Portland Bill, feeding, then came close into shore and then followed shoal of fish out into the races.

Cornwall: Report from David Ball – Silver Dolphin Centre, Porthleven

Sightings seem to have been a bit slow this year. This could be due to the fact that the sea temperature appears to have gone colder over the past couple of months. We did reach 16 degrees in May, but then bad weather took the temperature back down to 13 degrees. At the moment it is struggling to reach 14 degrees whereas in July last year it was a tropical 18 degrees. There has also been less plankton around, and not so many fish to be seen, so it could be a case of no food, no dolphins.

Bottlenose dolphins were spotted in St Ives Bay but no one was able to say if the recognisable Benty was amongst them. We have had reports of a young dolphin in the bottlenose pod swimming around Mounts Bay with spots on its underside. One observer picked out the Atlantic spotted dolphin from an ID book! We would be interested to know if anyone else has reported this sighting.

When we have been out recording data on the dead dolphins washed up on local beaches, usually the result of by-catch, we have found a couple of specimens that definitely looked different. When they were taken for autopsy, they were identified as a possible cross between common dolphin and striped dolphin. We have three definite identifications and are now looking through all our past pictures and data to see if we have any other reports of possible hybrids.

Large pods of common dolphins are still being spotted off the south-west coast. It would be interesting to note if these pods have been recorded further up the English Channel since they have not been reported on Sea Watch's recent sightings section of the website. Some of the most interesting sightings around Cornwall this year have included three minke whales, three orcas, two pilot whales, eight Risso's dolphins, and five fin whales.

Most of the sightings seem to have been early in the year and this takes us back to where we started, that the weather today is more like winter than midsummer.

Recent Sightings for South-West England from Ray Dennis, Sea Quest and David Ball – Silver Dolphin Centre, Porthleven

Mon 3rd May – one harbour porpoise seen at Hayle by Dave Jarvis

Thurs 6th May – one recently born harbour porpoise seen at Hayle via Dave Jarvis

Fri 7th May – four bottlenose dolphins seen swimming slowly back and forth at the Helford River by John Trout

Sun 9th May – two harbour porpoises seen at Porthgwarra by Jean Lawman

Fri 14th May – eight common dolphins seen at Porthgwarra by Rob Pring via Rory Goodall

Fri 14th May – 12:30 – 6-8 common dolphins seen at Lamorna by Anon

Sat 15th May – seven harbour porpoises seen at Bolt Tail by Robert Matusiewicz

Sun 16th May – 12 bottlenose dolphins seen offshore at Goodrington via Nigel Smallbones

Sun 16th May – a large school of c. 60 common dolphins seen in Fal Bay by Steve Holyer

Mon 17th May – seven bottlenose dolphins seen in Kennack Bay by Mike Lord via Tricia Nicholson

Thurs 20th May – a school of 25+ bottlenose dolphins seen one mile off the Manacles

Fri 21st May – seven bottlenose dolphins seen off Torbay Marina by Clare Howard via Nigel Smallbones

Sat 22nd May – two bottlenose dolphins seen at Carn Glouce by John Swann via Jean Lawman

Tues 25th May – 16:30 – three long-finned pilot whales seen heading west in Mounts Bay by Marcia Webb

Tues 25th May – two long-finned pilot whales seen at Low Lee by Rory Goodall

Tues 25th May – six harbour porpoises seen off Gurnards Head by Dave Appleby

Wed 26th May – one orca seen six miles south of the Isles of Scilly via Vince Smith

Wed 26th May – four harbour porpoises seen at Gwennap Head by Jean Lawman

Wed 26th May – one long-finned pilot whale was seen six miles south of the Isles of Scilly via Vince Smith

Wed 26th May – 21:30 – three harbour porpoises seen in Falmouth Bay heading west by Phil Jarvis

Wed 26th May – three harbour porpoises seen heading west off Gyllyngvase Beach by Clare Baker

Sat 29th May – nine bottlenose dolphins seen at Porthkerris Cove heading north in the morning and south at 16:00 by Mike Jeffery

Tues 1st June – one minke whale seen 500 metres off Porthgwarra by Jean Lawman

Wed 2nd June - 20:30 - 5-10 bottlenose dolphins seen at Porthtowan by Philippa Hoskin

Wed 2nd June – two harbour porpoises seen 300 metres off Lizard Point by Jean Lawman

Thurs 3rd June – two harbour porpoises seen at Pendeen Cliff by John Swann via Jean Lawman

Sun 6th June – 12 bottlenose dolphins seen in Watergate Bay by Stephen Marks

Mon 7th June – eight bottlenose dolphins seen in Sennen Bay via Sennen Cove web site

Mon 7th June – six bottlenose dolphins seen at Botallack Head by Roger Fry

Mon 7th June – 14:50 - 8+ bottlenose dolphins seen in St Ives Bay where it swam north around the island and then headed west close inshore. Last seen disappearing around Clodgy Point (SW507413) at about 15:25 hrs, by Caroline Curtis and Gary Hawkins

Tues 8th June – eight bottlenose dolphins seen off Pentire Point by Mike Scawen

Mon 14th June – one bottlenose dolphin seen at Doyden point by Sian Fletcher

Sun 20th June – 12 bottlenose dolphins seen in Mounts Bay by Frances and Tracy Upchurch

Sun 20th June – one minke whale seen 2 km south of Eddystone Lighthouse, from Plymouth - Roscoff Ferry, by Jean Lawman

Thurs 24th June – one harbour porpoise seen 700 metres south of Porthgwarra Cove by Jean Lawman

Fri 25th June – 12:00 - five bottlenose dolphins seen off Rock, Padstow, by Stephanie Erlich

Fri 26th June – 16:30 - 13+ bottlenose dolphins (including one possible juvenile breaching and tail slapping) in Newquay Bay for at least an hour slowing heading toward Lusty Glaze and then out to sea, seen by Caroline Curtis and Gary Hawkins

Note that there were several other sightings of unidentified dolphins over this period

Report from Norman Hammond – Regional Co-ordinator for NW England and Dumfries & Galloway

A WHALE OF A DAY IN THE BAY

Sunday May 16th 2004 was a typical calm fine sunny spring day in **Morecambe Bay**, over Saturday night seas were calm and with light variable winds plus widespread sea fog several inshore yachting folk and fishermen were out all night. A few shoreline-fishing enthusiasts also spent the night at their favourite haunts and as the sun came up and sea mist burnt away dedicated bird watchers and walkers came down to the shore for a good days field work.

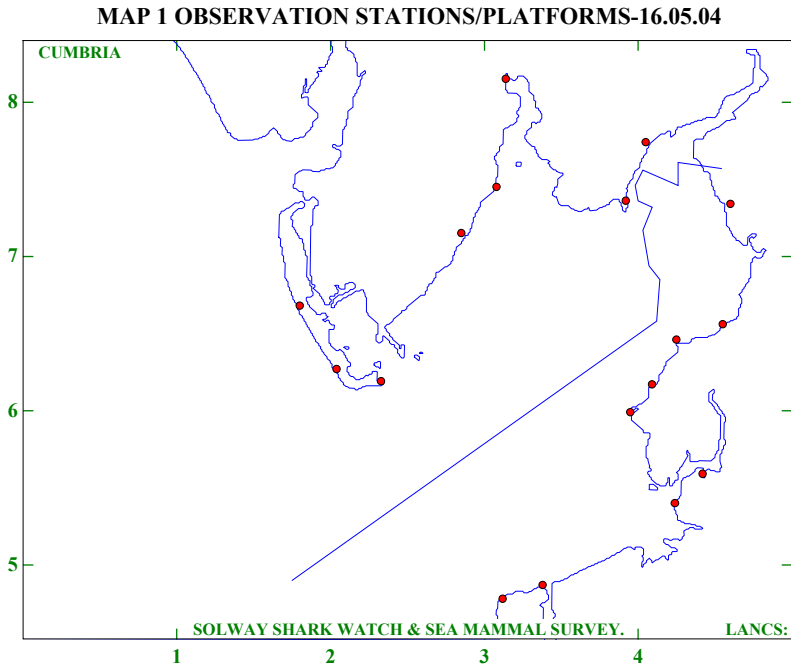
Sea water temperatures in the **Irish Sea** outside **Morecambe Bay** were generally 10° C whilst in the bay itself 11° C were found in a few places and even 12° C at times. High water at main Bay ports was around 10.32 hrs, with local variations at 8.8m with the following low water at around 17.15 hrs at 1.7m, again with local variations.

A light swell was evident to the west of **Fleetwood/Barrow** otherwise the Bay was to all intents and purposes flat calm all day.

At 05.00, Cloud cover, at 2, with much sea mist became Cloud cover 0 and wall-to-wall sunshine by midday. With visibility across the Bay good to excellent apart from some sea haze at times.

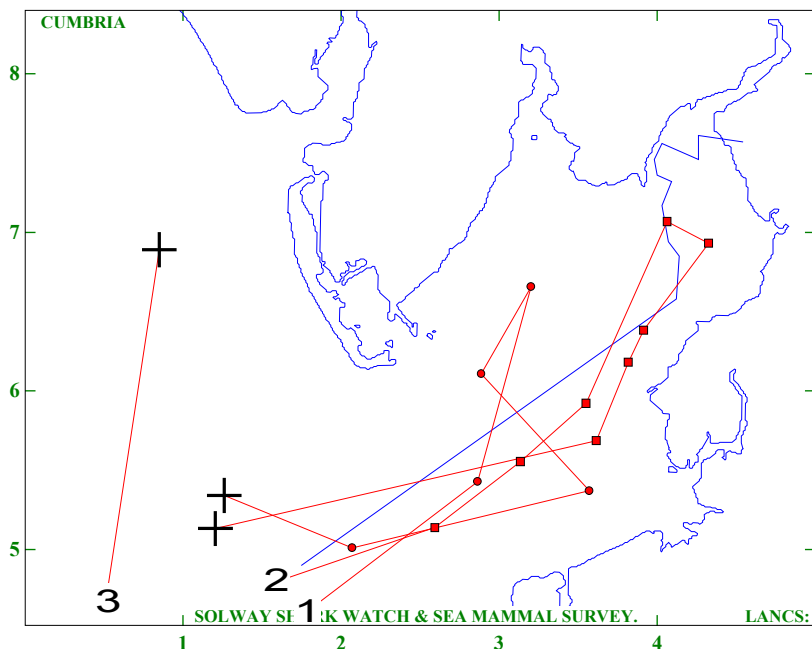
Prior to Sunday it was known that at least three small pods of northern bottlenose whales were at sea to the west of **Blackpool**, that small pods of bottlenose dolphins were also widespread in the area and small numbers of harbour porpoises were active all around the Bay.

It is not our policy to arrange co-ordinated surveys at weekends or on holidays and that was the position for 16.05.04. however from eight Observation Stations/Platforms along the Cumbrian north shores and nine along the Lancashire south shores, generally bird watchers or shore line fishermen, plus other interested observers at sea sailing, fishing or sea paddling etc, either telephoned or e-mailed me, during the day, direct with sighting data and/or queries. Positions of these shore stations/platforms are shown on Map 1.



Map 2 shows known positions of three northern bottlenose whale pods during the day.

MAP 2 MORECAMBE BAY-CASUAL WATCH-16.05.04-NBW



1, 2 & 3 indicates known positions as at dawn on Sunday.

Pod 1 of two animals shown with round dots moved into the Bay with the rising tide up into **Lancaster Sound** south across the Bay into **Heysham Lake** and then with the outgoing tide west to position + at about 17.55 hrs.

Pod 2 of three animals shown with square dots, moved, swiftly east well into the Bay, assisted by the incoming tide, and was seen from both **Humphrey Head**, **Jenny Brown's Point** plus **Scalestones Point** for some 40 minutes or so before moving west with the outgoing tide to position + at about 18.05 hrs. Both pods were also seen at various positions during the day by a number of boating enthusiasts out on the water.

Pod 3 tended to drift around and with some help from the tide gradually moved north during the day. This pod was shadowed for most of the day by a fishing party who kept between 1 & 2 km away at all times.

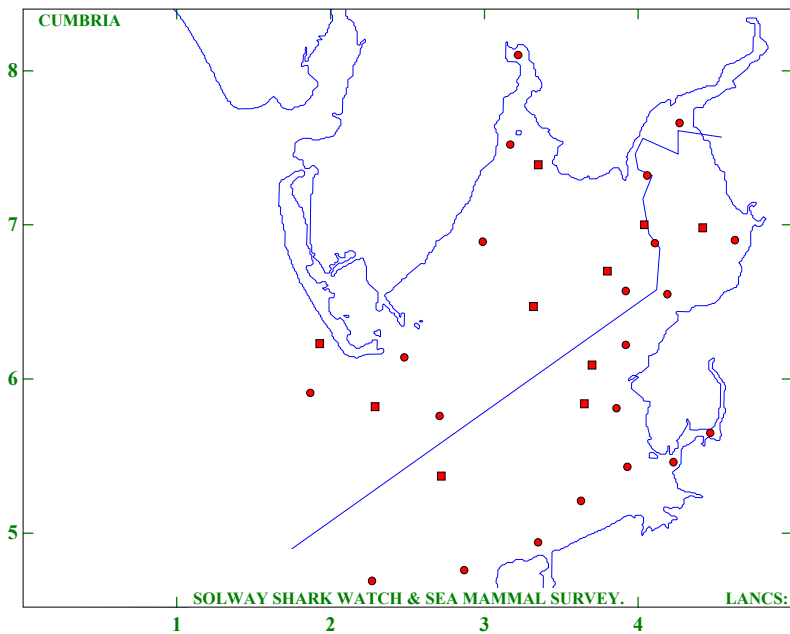
It would seem that Pods 1 & 2, plus a food source, were assisted into the Bay by the incoming tide, and in general kept to the main channels, although at times were in very shallow water which had drained by about 15.30 hrs. Two 'sea paddlers' offered to explore exposed sand banks adjacent the low tide channels around **Lancaster Sound** and the **Kent** area and remains of squid were found on the exposed sand in roughly the areas used by the northern bottlenose whale earlier that day. As far as we are aware neither Pod 1 or 2 was seen to breach, possibly due to them being in shallow water. Pod 3 was seen to breach by the fishing party, which generally drifted with them north during the day. People along **Biggar Bank**, **Walney Island** also saw this breaching, although they were not able to recognise the species.

Long-finned Pilot Whale. Within the eastern sector of the Bay almost all observations of the northern bottlenose whales were via state of the art bird watching optics in good light, but with some slight haze, at distances of km and some concern was expressed that these could have been long-finned pilot whales! Had anyone seen a 'beak'?

One of the advantages of operating a cetacean survey over the extensive area as we do is that we are able to keep an eye on what may be moving about within the area, or at least try! Whilst it was known that northern bottlenose whales had been in the area prior to May 16th, no sighting of long-finned pilot whale had been reported in recent weeks. That in itself would not rule out a pilot whale being so far into the Bay for a first recording, however that **Bulbous forehead**, the hooked fin some 2/3rds along the back plus the 'Gizz' was the first indicator whilst from **Scalestones Point** these and the short dolphin like beak changed a 'probable' sighting to 'definite'.

Map 3 shows positions of both bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises during the day. Square dots are bottlenose dolphin and round dots are harbour porpoise.

MAP 3 MORECAMBE BAY-CASUAL WATCH-16.05.04-BND-HP



Morecambe Bay Cumbrian waters resulted in six bottlenose dolphin sightings plus ten harbour porpoise sightings; **Morecambe Bay Lancashire** waters recorded four bottlenose dolphin sightings and eleven sightings of harbour porpoises.

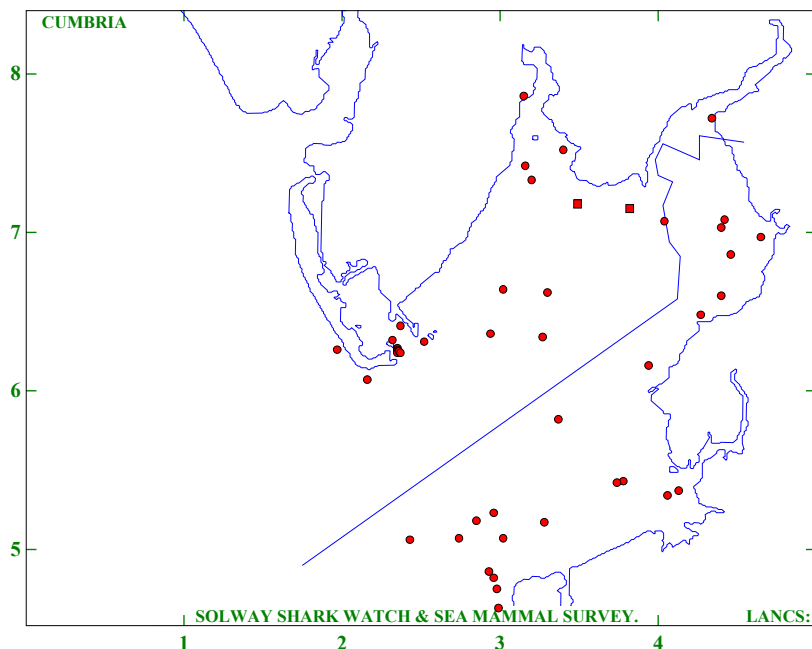
Bottlenose dolphin. Small pods and some larger groups were known to be active throughout the **North-east Irish Sea** for a month prior to May 16th and especially in Lancashire/Cumbria waters during the week before. It would seem that depending where they are around the mouth of the Bay at low water these pods lock onto a food source, which may be swept into the Bay with the incoming tide, and depending upon where this food source arrives so also may the bottlenose dolphin. Here again with the falling tide that food source will generally leave the Bay along with the bottlenose dolphins, with remnants holding on in **Heysham Lake, Lancaster Sound, and Lune Deeps** possibly returning east again with the next flood.

Harbour Porpoise. These can be seen as endemic to the Bay with a well thought out feeding pattern, which is also typical in the **Solway Firth**. Harbour porpoises are usually well spread out during the top of the tide pursuing whatever food source is available. At low water they often come together and systematically work the low tide channels for food. For this to be seen at its best you require the same weather conditions as occurred on Sunday May 16th but better tides. An 8.8m high or 2m low water as forecast that day was but a medium tide. A 10m high with 0.4m low water is well worth the effort to check out low tide channels when with luck the harbour porpoise organised hoovering as they work up against the outgoing tide is one of nature's marvels. Such is the frenzy and determination to obtain that food that on occasion's groups of harbour porpoise may move into a blind channel and can run out of water!

There are many excellent low water channels in the Bay, where with suitable tidal conditions this occurs. However remembering the tragic problems with cockle pickers a few months ago you must know what you are doing, and fully understand the tides, at all times.

Grey & Common Seals.

MAP 4 MORECAMBE BAY-CASUAL WATCH-16.05.04-GRS-COS



As a matter of interest, Map 4 shows reported positions of single **Grey Seals** (round dots) during **May 16th** plus **Common Seals** (square dots). The majority of the **Grey Seals** return to the **South Walney** haul out at dusk with the **Common Seals** to near **Chapel Island** on **Cartmel Sands**. However **Grey Seals** are known speedy long distance travellers and the sighting at midday near **Arnside** may well have been on a 'day out' from the **IOM!**

Beware the canny Cormorant!

Three observers, within the inner Bay, on May 16th reported seeing a 'tall fin' and spent some time trying to fit that fin to a cetacean with a wide range of permutations. All very interesting and part of general study but also very frustrating as 'tall fins' are not at all frequent in our cetacean world.

As noted above, the tides on May 16th were not particularly high the sand flats over a wide area will not have been covered. Seen from sea level that wide expanse of seawater will have been misleading, but seen from high ground at **Humphrey Head** 53m, **Baycliff** 50m or **Blackpool Tower**, the Bay at high water would have probably been only 2/3rds water plus extensive sand flats/bars. From near sea level an exposed sand bar at 3km or so would not be seen and a single Cormorant on that sandbar with sidelight could appear to be a 'tall fin' Two Cormorants might appear to be two fins, however a group would become obvious. Cormorants with outspread wings will be obvious, but it's the combination of side lighting the effects of heat haze and distortion that can create the vision of a fin.

Identification

The Sea Watch Foundation web site www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk will keep you up to date with species identification but be warned! Cetaceans do not stop for you to either photograph or draw, they move very quickly indeed and the diminutive **harbour porpoise** can be the most frustrating. You will seldom see that small fin in our waters; you may only have seconds to see the animal roll. With weather as it was on May 16th you would probably, if close enough, hear the 'grunt' as the animal rolls over. You may with luck see a small pod for a few minutes- they move very fast indeed. All other species will usually give you time for more detail.

The above summarises data from the 55 independent observers who were around the Bay and either made contact by telephone or e-mail on the day or within a few days afterwards. It forms a useful basis summary of cetacean activities over but a single day in the life of the Bay by enthusiasts with an eye for these spectacular animals on our doorstep. A copy is being sent to everyone who freely contributed to that day and if your views or additional information might change the story as set out then please let me know, as I am sure there is still more to this day than the very fine weather.

My thanks to everyone...

Norman Hammond,. Solway Shark Watch & Sea Mammal Survey. Tel:016973 20440. 28-05-04.

cc CWT.LWT. Cumbria/Lancashire Biodiversity. SWF.MBP.

Wales: Report from Fernando Ugarte, Cardigan Bay Marine Wildlife Centre

Most of our information about cetacean activity in West Wales comes from land and boat based surveys carried out by the Cardigan Bay Marine Wildlife Centre in the Cardigan Bay candidate Special Area for Conservation (cSAC).

Harbour porpoises and bottlenose dolphins were commonly sighted from boat-based surveys during May and June. As in 2003, harbour porpoise seem to be the most abundant marine mammal in the Cardigan Bay cSAC.

Many of the well-marked bottlenose dolphins identified in the cSAC during summer 2003 have been seen during May-June 2004. Sightings of bottlenose dolphins in the New Quay Bay became more regular than during March and April and the animals stayed for longer periods of time.

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Sea Watch Foundation's project "Encouraging Public Participation in Cetacean Monitoring" is supported by DEFRA's Environmental Action Fund. Furthermore, Sea Watch is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, BG International, Dong Efterforskning og Produktion and Atlantic Petroleum, and the Countryside Council for Wales.

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