

The Cetacean Monitoring Unit

# Sea Watch foundation



*Bottlenose dolphins off Aberdeen.*

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If you would like to know more about the legal

structure and management and would like to consider applying to become a member of the Company, please contact us by email or by post, and we will send you an application form.

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## Editorial

Welcome to the February 2005 edition of the Sea Watch news sheet! Typically for the winter months, sightings have been fairly scant compared to earlier in the year, but these records are vital so that we can gather data on the year round distribution and abundance of the UK cetacean populations. So many thanks to those of you who donned your woolly hats and sowesters and braved the icy winds and rough seas to contribute to this news sheet. I hope the rewards were worth it!

If you would like to contribute to future issues, please contact me at [lorihandley@mac.com](mailto:lorihandley@mac.com) and I would be very grateful for your input or feedback.



Best wishes, Lori.  
Lori Handley, editor

## NATIONAL WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCH - AUGUST 13-21 2005

**It's time to dig out your binoculars for the Sea Watch Foundation's next National Whale and Dolphin Watch!**

From August 13-21, members of the public and trained observers will scan coastal waters all round the UK to record sightings of dolphins, whales and porpoises.

This event, organised by the Sea Watch Foundation, aims to gather information on the 28 species of marine mammals known to visit Britain's seas. There were more than 500 sightings in the 2004 National Whale and Dolphin Watch including humpback and minke whales seen from several regions of Scotland as well as Cumbria, and both bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises widely distributed around Britain,

including the south coast of England where both have been scarce until recently. Killer whales, white-beaked dolphins, Atlantic white-sided and Risso's dolphins were also reported.

Sea Watch Foundation uses the sightings to underpin research into the effects of marine pollution, noise disturbance, and intensive fishing on cetaceans.

Anyone can join in the National Whale and Dolphin Watch, whether they live on the coast or are just spending a day at the seaside with the family. Last year over 2,000 people took part, including sailors, divers, walkers and bird-watchers.

You can report sightings from anywhere along the coast or in British waters, or you can go along to any of the Sea Watch Foundation's manned sites and join volunteer co-ordinators and trained observers from regional groups who will be on watch. A number of boat operators will also be organising trips during the week.

Details of regional groups and approved boat operators can be found on the website [www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk](http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk) where you can also download forms to report sightings and species guides to help you with identification.

You can also sign up for a weekend training course or run by the Sea Watch Foundation in conjunction with the Mammal Society to learn more about whales, dolphins and porpoises and how to identify them. The courses are run at New Quay in Ceredigion, West Wales where there are resident bottlenose dolphins and porpoises, on July 16-17 and August 20-21 (with an extended course on September 3-6). There may also be local training opportunities available in the south Moray Firth/Grampian region of Scotland. Further details can be found on the Sea Watch website or by calling Sea Watch on 01865 717276. Bookings are taken by the Mammal Society (Tel: 020 7350 2200).

## Regional Roundup November 2004-February 2005

### Shetland Islands

#### From Shetland Sea Mammal Group

- 1 minke whale seen from land at Bluemull Sound at 12:00 on 08 February 2005
- 2 harbour porpoise seen from land (Quendale Bay) at 12:00 on 05 February 2005

### Orkney Islands

#### From Chris Booth, regional coordinator for Orkney and North Scotland

Here are some cetacean sightings from Orkney, rather quiet so far this year but it seems that there have been recent Killer whale sightings.

- 1 minke whale in Scapa Flow on 21st February
- Several hundred harbour porpoise in Cantick Sound off Hoy on 1st November. This is exceptional at this time of year.
- 2 orcas off Tresness, Sanday 12th February
- 1 long finned pilot whale off Herston, South Ronaldsay on 12th February

### North East Scotland

#### From Iain Macdonald, regional co-ordinator for North-East Scotland

(Cromarty Firth- Duncansby Head)

Due to short days, poor weather, fewer observers and possibly fewer cetaceans, it was not surprising that cetacean sightings were not frequent during November and December. The last reported sighting of 2004 was made by Liz Johnstone when she saw 2 bottlenose dolphins heading west off Balintore, Ross-shire on 29<sup>th</sup> December.

At the start of 2005 cetacean records were sparse with porpoise dominating the early sightings. A porpoise was briefly seen off Balintore in less than ideal weather conditions with a force 5 wind and force 4-5 sea. The porpoise was briefly seen heading west at speed, but due to the waves and spray, could not be relocated. Despite a relatively large amount of survey effort cetaceans were conspicuous by their absence until 23<sup>rd</sup> January when an adult and sub-adult porpoise were seen in calm water off StrathSteven, Sutherland. Another two porpoise were subsequently seen between StrathSteven and Golspie on 17<sup>th</sup> February.

Dolphin reports started to appear towards the end of February when Colin Bird spotted a single bottlenose dolphin off Lybster, Caithness on 20<sup>th</sup> February and two bottlenose dolphins were seen on 27<sup>th</sup> February approximately 1km off Tarbat Ness, Ross-shire. The dolphins off Tarbat Ness were travelling very slowly and appeared to be diving for prolonged periods. Cetaceans were initially heard in light wind

blowing to the south of the lighthouse, but could not be located due to a light to medium swell and failing light. After a few minutes two bottlenose dolphins were spotted east of the lighthouse and were subsequently heard, but not seen north of the lighthouse as light disappeared.

### **Eastern Scotland**

#### **From Kevin Hepworth, regional co-ordinator for South Grampian**

*November* – This month saw a dramatic rise in sightings with 21 out of 26 records being of bottlenose dolphins. An unusually late sighting of minke whale occurred on the 27<sup>th</sup> off Collieston, lunge feeding and then heading south, although flat calm seas made excellent viewing conditions. A reported whale species on the 26<sup>th</sup> off Johnshaven was probably a fin (or sei) whale and represents what could be the first fin whale off this coast since 1997. The 3 remaining records were of harbour porpoise on the same day the minke whale was seen and was probably a reflection of the glassy sea state, when 3 off Buchan ness, Boddam were quickly followed by a group of 12 feeding off Collieston an hour or so later with the other record being 1 in Stonehaven Bay on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Of the bottlenose dolphin sightings, half came from Stonehaven where large groups again dominated, with 40+ on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> and 35 on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

*December* – records increased from November with a larger proportion coming from Aberdeen (nearly two thirds of the records) compared with the Stonehaven bias in the previous month. Of the 33 records, 4 were of harbour porpoise, with a lone porpoise on the 11<sup>th</sup> in Nigg Bay followed by 3 later the same day at Girdleness, 1 in Nigg Bay on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 2 at Collieston on the 5<sup>th</sup>. Bottlenose dolphin group sizes were generally of 15-25 animals and animals often remained around the harbour entrance for several hours feeding, leaping and splashing.

Between August 2004 and December 2004, vessel based surveys kindly sponsored by British Gas were carried out to monitor cetaceans off the coast of Grampian, primarily covering the area between Aberdeen and Montrose and up to two kilometres offshore. In all, 8 surveys were undertaken when adequate sea conditions allowed, providing almost 35 hours of dedicated effort. Three cetacean species were recorded from the vessel based surveys, primarily harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphins, but also a couple of white beaked dolphin encounters. Tide conditions and sea states meant that all but one of the surveys were between Stonehaven and Aberdeen.

### **South West Scotland and Inner Hebrides**

#### **From the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust**

The following sightings of harbour porpoises were reported. All sightings were seen from land.

- 4 Dunrod Point at 10:36 on 21 February
- 2 Southernness Point (W) at 07:34 on 20 February
- 6 Balcarry Heugh, Kirkcudbrightshire at 08:44 on 16 February
- 6 Cailiness Point, The Rhins at 12:18 on 10 February
- 4 Ayrshire at 10:16 on 07 February
- 3 (milling) 150 m off Pennygown, Isle of Mull at 15:15 on 20 November 2004, reported by Andy Tait & David Woodhouse.
- 2 (normal swim) 2 miles south of Pennygael, Isle of Mull at 13:30 on 20 November 2004, reported by Andy Tait & David Woodhouse.

### **North-west Scotland**

#### **From Ian Birks**

During the winter months Sea Watching has been very hard, as usual, in the North West of Scotland, except on the night of 11<sup>th</sup> January when shore stations around us recorded wind speeds in the 120mph plus area and an offshore station 7 miles away recorded 170mph as a peak gust. Why was it not hard to watch the sea that night of all? Well, as the heavy spray was breaking clear over my sea front home, we had sea water coming down the chimney. I have to admit we wondered that night why we live here. The weather throughout this period was very wet and very stormy, so even on days when the wind dropped, the visibility was poor due to rain, 170mm in one 24 hour period, 15 continuous days in January. So, I regret, no sightings or reports. The only sighting in this period was of 4 harbour porpoise, viewed from land at Strath, Loch Gairloch at 10:35 on 23 January 2005.

### **Miscellaneous sightings in the Minch from Iain MacDonald**

*Seawatching during a naval exercise*

Although periods when naval exercises are underway are not always ideal for watching cetaceans, weather conditions were fair on 22<sup>nd</sup> February so half an hour was spent at Stoer head lighthouse looking out into the Minch. Things did not look promising when quite quickly a military fighter aircraft was seen in close proximity to a periscope sticking out of the sea several kilometres off-shore. Although no cetaceans were expected, after about 20 minutes a single porpoise was seen about 1km off-shore, with another 10 porpoise seen a few minutes later in a different location about 1.5 km off-shore. As the submarine headed south at high speed with only its periscope visible, it crossed the field of view in which the group of porpoise were moving. At one point the periscope of the submarine could be seen with 4 porpoise in the foreground, an interesting contrast in size and speed.

There were no sightings for the winter months in West Sutherland (Andy Summers)

### **South east Scotland/North-east England**

**From Andy Tait regional co-ordinator for Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Julie Wilson, P. Collins and P. Dagg**

- 2 harbour porpoise milling 400m of Lizard Point at 13:25 on 28 February
- 3 harbour porpoise milling 500m of Lizard Point at 13:25 on 28 February
- 1 harbour porpoise milling 200m of Lizard Point at 13:25 on 28 February
- 3 harbour porpoise foraging off Lizard Point at 12:30 on 27 February
- 2 harbour porpoise swimming north 250m of Lizard Point at 09:15 on 27
- 1harbour porpoise swimming north 250m of Lizard Point at 12:41 on 21 February
- 1harbour porpoise swimming south off Whitburn Point at 10:30 on 21 February
- 3 harbour porpoise swimming south off Whitburn Point at 08:10 on 19 February
- 1harbour porpoise swimming north 400m off Lizard Point at 13:56 on 18 February
- 1harbour porpoise milling 200m of Lizard Point at 13:42 on 18 February
- 6 harbour porpoise milling off Souter Light at 14:50 on 17 February
- 1 harbour porpoise fast swim north 300m east off Lizard Point at 14:30 on 17 February
- 1 harbour porpoise swimming south off Whitburn Point at 14:10 on 17 February
- 3 harbour porpoise milling 400m north of Lizard Point at 13:50 on 17 February

### **Eastern England**

**From Kate Sutton**

One harbour Porpoise seen in the Middle of the Wash at 12:00 on 01 November 2004.

### **East Anglia**

**From the Essex harbour porpoise survey 2004 (Essex Biodiversity Project, Mark Iley)**

The latest sighting in 2004 was of two harbour porpoise swimming together at Colne Point on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2004. There are no records for October through to December.

### **Southern England**

**From Robert Clark, Fishery Officers, Durlston Marine Project and David Walker**

- 1 bottlenose dolphin, Looe Channel at 11:30 on 24 February
- 1 bottlenose dolphin, Looe Channel at 10:45 on 16 February
- 1 bottlenose dolphin, Looe Channel at 14:00 on 11 February
- 1 bottlenose dolphin, Looe Channel at 11:30 on 11 February
- 1 bottlenose dolphin, Southampton Water at 10:30 on 11 December
- 7 white-beaked dolphins off Dungeness, Kent at 15:00 on 08 December

**From Stephen Savage, regional coordinator for Sussex**

As usual only a few sightings occurred between November and February and these were offshore sightings. All three sightings for this period were of what appeared to be the same bottlenose dolphin in the Looe Channel (50°45.70N 000°49.00W) near Selsey Bill in West Sussex. Amongst the anecdotal reports of this dolphin were three sightings forwarded by the Sussex Sea Fisheries Vessel 'Watchful' which occurred on the 11<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup> February.

Even with only a few sightings and the usual poor visibility at this time of the year, there was still plenty to be done. With the aid of funding from the Wildlife Trusts, which has allowed us to produce some very useful awareness materials for volunteers and potential watch sites including a local Sussex Cetacean awareness poster to encourage reports by e-mail or our local hotline number. We have also produced some awareness materials about

our local group and how to report a sighting, Sussex cetaceans ID, bottlenose dolphin biology and seals, which we are making available to watch sites. We also plan to distribute laminated copies of this to the local water tours and charter boats for use by the owners and passengers. To provide on going support and feedback to volunteers I have set up a Sussex Cetacean recorders e-group. This is a private group and membership is restricted to volunteers, watch sites and similar. This is in part to avoid the misuse and junk mail problems that often accompany open discussion groups. This has meant that when anyone sends in a sighting message, everyone will receive it at the same time (which apart from all the other obvious benefits is also a great time saver). This has also allowed more regular feedback, promotion of forthcoming events that volunteers can participate in and again provide feedback on these.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> February we ran a special Cetacean Identification Day for a new group I have now established at Hastings. This has been done through Andy Phillips manager of the Hastings Nature Reserve. Andy has sent us some very interest sightings of bottlenose dolphin and porpoise over the last few years and he had been interested for some time in running a formal training day. This took the form of a classroom session at the RSPCA Malladams Centre in Hastings and a cliff top watch from the Fire Hills site at the nature reserve. As I am based near Brighton, the e-group will be a valuable way in supporting this group. On the 19<sup>th</sup> February I attended the annual Sussex Biological Recorders Seminar in my joint role as Sussex County Recorder for Sea mammals. I had been invited for the third year running to provide a contribution to the annual journal 'Aadastra' produced for the seminar, which provides a selection of biological recording projects that took place the previous year.

### South West England - Dorset

#### From Jo Wharam, Project Officer, Durlston Marine Project.

(BND = bottlenose dolphin)

#### November

- 5<sup>th</sup> November – 3 BND seen from Portland Bill.
- 7<sup>th</sup> November – 3 BND (inc. 1 juvenile) seen from Cheyne Weare car park, Portland.
- 8<sup>th</sup> November – 3 BND seen off Portland Bill.
- 9<sup>th</sup> November – 3 BND seen off East Cliffs, Portland Bill.
- 10<sup>th</sup> November – 3 BND seen from Cheyne Weare car park, Portland.
- 10<sup>th</sup> November – 5-7 dolphins seen off Portland Bill.
- 11<sup>th</sup> November – 3-4 BND seen from Cheyne Weare car park, Portland.
- 11<sup>th</sup> November – 1 BND seen breaching in Poole Bay.
- 15<sup>th</sup> November – 1 BND seen in Poole Bay.
- 15<sup>th</sup> November – 7 BND seen off Portland Bill.
- 16<sup>th</sup> November – 1 BND seen in Poole Bay.
- 16<sup>th</sup> November – 5 BND seen off Durlston Head, Durlston Country Park.
- 27<sup>th</sup> November – 3 BND seen bow-riding 'Barfleur' ferry in Poole Bay.
- 27<sup>th</sup> November – 4-7 BND seen from Dancing Ledge, Purbeck.
- 28<sup>th</sup> November – 3 BND seen off Portland Bill.
- 30<sup>th</sup> November – 4 BND seen from Globe, Durlston Country Park.

#### December

- 6<sup>th</sup> December – 1 dolphin seen from Hengistbury Head.
- 15<sup>th</sup> December – 2 BND seen from Durlston Country Park.
- 17<sup>th</sup> December – 6 BND seen from Durlston Country Park.

#### January

- 20<sup>th</sup> January – 6-8 BND seen off East Cliffs, Portland.
- 21<sup>st</sup> January – 'small group' of BND seen off Portland Bill.
- 30<sup>th</sup> January – 6 BND seen in Durlston Bay.
- 31<sup>st</sup> January – 6-7 BND seen off Portland.

#### February

- 3<sup>rd</sup> February – 15-20 common dolphins and 1 pilot whale seen 30 miles south of Lulworth.
- 11<sup>th</sup> February – 2 BND seen off Durlston Head.
- 20<sup>th</sup> February – 2 BND seen off Coast Path, Durlston.
- 21<sup>st</sup> February – 2 BND seen off Dancing Ledge, Purbeck.
- 25<sup>th</sup> February – 1 BND seen in Poole Bay.

- 27<sup>th</sup> February – 6-7 BND seen in Lyme Bay.
- 27<sup>th</sup> February – 7 BND seen off Portland Bill.

### South West England - Devon

#### From Gavin Black, Dolphin protection project officer, Devon Wildlife Trust

Few sightings of cetaceans were reported in this period, all of these being seen between the end of November and the end of January. Most Devon winter sightings of cetaceans took place off the south coast although harbour porpoises were seen regularly from Morte, Bull and Baggy Point near Woolacombe, when the weather was suitable.

Harbour porpoises were also seen on the south coast, particularly off Berry Head near Torbay. Bottlenose dolphins were seen twice between mid-December and New Year, both times in Tor Bay, although one was a lone individual and the second sighting a group of seven. Common dolphins were also seen only twice. A group of 25 were seen by fishermen in Start Bay in early January and then on Christmas Day a group of approximately 500 were seen from Berry Head, heading south. Finally, six unidentified dolphins were seen at the end of November at the west end of Plymouth Breakwater and another group of six large dolphins were reported at the end of January in the mouth of the Yealm estuary.

There were only 23 strandings of dead cetaceans in Devon in this period (12 common dolphins, 8 harbour porpoise and 3 unidentified cetaceans). This is substantially less than the two previous winters in the same period (35 and 49), perhaps reflecting the unusual, prevalent wind direction we had this winter. A study is currently underway to look at the correlation between stranding numbers and wind direction and strength.

### South West England - Cornwall

#### From David Ball, Silver Dolphin Centre, Porthleven

The winter was a quiet time with 11 sightings of harbour porpoise before Christmas. These were mostly on the north coast at Bottalack but we did get two other porpoise sightings one in mounts bay and one by Lamorna cove. We did have a couple of sightings of Bottlenose dolphins as well, both in Falmouth bay. Things continued the same into the New Year with bottlenose dolphins becoming more regular in Cornish waters. There was also one sighting of a pod of common dolphins at the end of February. The weather has not been good for sightings.

|            |     |                      |                       |
|------------|-----|----------------------|-----------------------|
| • 02/02/05 | 1   | Dolphin              | St Ives               |
| • 04/02/05 | 6-7 | Dolphins             | Botallack             |
| • 04/02/05 | 6   | Harbour Porpoise     | Botallack             |
| • 06/02/05 | 5+  | Common Dolphins      | St Anthony, Falmouth  |
| • 16/02/05 | 4-5 | Bottlenose Dolphins  | Porthleven            |
| • 22/02/05 | 6   | Bottlenose Dolphins  | Falmouth Bay          |
| • 23/02/05 | 8+  | Bottlenose Dolphins  | Falmouth Bay          |
| • 23/02/05 | 5+  | Bottlenose Dolphins  | Sennen Cove           |
| • 28/02/05 | 12  | Bottlenose Dolphins  | Whitesand Bay, Sennen |
| • 28/02/05 | 20+ | Common Dolphins      | Falmouth Bay          |
| • 26/01/05 | 2   | Harbour Porpoise     | Widemouth, Bude       |
| • 28/01/05 | 3   | Bottlenosed Dolphins | Sennen Cove           |
| • 30/01/05 | 20  | Dolphins             | Harlyn Bay, Padstow   |

### Wales

#### From Helen Bates, Education Officer & Kosmas Chatzivasiloglou, Sightings volunteer Sea Watch Foundation Cymru, New Quay, West Wales

Over the winter, the Sea Watch Foundation moved the Welsh research and education activities out of the Cardigan Bay Marine Wildlife Centre and established new offices in New Quay creating Sea Watch Foundation Cymru. The move was very successful and more time can now be spent undertaking the education and research activities and we look forward to a productive year.

Groups of bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises were seen in Cardigan Bay during November and December. However, the bad weather accompanied by very strong storms throughout January and February has prevented much of the land survey work in Wales.

**HP:** The majority of harbour porpoise sightings were reported from Strumble Head, including two extraordinary days of sightings on December 7<sup>th</sup>, when 27 individuals were sighted and on January 1<sup>st</sup>, when 20 individuals were sighted. Harbour porpoise were seen also from Aberystwyth and New Quay

during November, December and January. Two pairs of harbour porpoise were detected on December 12 off Mwnt. One adult porpoise was seen inside Fishguard Harbour on December 19.

**BND:** bottlenose dolphins were observed from New Quay pier during November and December when the visibility was suitable for locating them. In addition, 10 bottlenose dolphins were seen in New Quay on January 15. bottlenose dolphins were spotted off Ynyslas and Barmouth in early December. More than 24 bottlenose dolphins including 3 juveniles were seen across the north coast of Anglesey, particularly in Red Wharf Bay, where they probably remained during November.

**Other Species:** A significant number of short-beaked common dolphins were recorded in St. George's Channel in November during a Sea Watch Survey. Finally, Risso's dolphins were detected from a ferry ten miles off Strumble Head the first two days of December and on January 18.

## Isle of Man

### Synopsis of sightings from John Galpin, regional coordinator for the Isle of Man

Sea conditions were generally difficult during these months, with only 16 days when watches could be undertaken. Of those 16 watches, only 3 provided sightings, but each was impressive or spectacular.

*12<sup>th</sup> December 2004* - The watch on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December began at midday, with seas quietening to 0, no wind and reasonable visibility. Within 20 minutes, the first sighting of around 18 bottlenose dolphins were seen foraging in a generally southerly direction down the coast, about 700 metres from shore. The group contained mostly large dolphins, with the exception of 4 smaller individuals, which were more agile and somewhat paler along their flanks. The first assumption was that these were juveniles. These four were always slightly separated from the main body of the pod. The large dolphins were seen to blow strongly on exiting the water and take three or four short blows before submerging for around 3 minutes, reappearing upon the surface about 100 to 150 metres from their last recorded position. They left my field of view as they continued to head south. Some minutes later, they, or a similar pod appeared from the South, now foraging in a northerly direction. This to and fro, north then south foraging continued for the remainder of the watch, the pod appearing to increase in number with each subsequent pass. The dolphins were constantly only 500 to 750 metres from shore. As the watch progressed, the pod was seen to pass repeatedly back and forth along the shore, making excursions of roughly one mile in either direction. The watch concluded at 1340 hrs

After lunch, at 1415 hrs, upon returning to the binoculars, a yet larger pod of around 40 dolphins was seen to enter my observational area from the north. The pod halted directly in front of my house and there, in around 10+ metres of water, 600 to 700 metres from shore began the most spectacular display. For over 25 minutes we watched as the sea erupted with breaching dolphins, sometimes four or five simultaneously airborne. Dolphins were leaping over and above other dolphins already in the air, some went straight up like rockets, some curved and twisted, others reverse breached, flippers spread wide in salutation to the sun. The large bottlenose showing their pale ventral surface as they arched through the air. It was as though huge champagne corks were being popped everywhere!

It was during this extended display that common dolphins, with their fine, slender build, sickle shaped dorsal fins, longer beaks and distinctive hourglass patterned flanks, were clearly identified. So, it would now appear that those small, high-speed, agile 'juvenile' dolphins seen earlier in the day were almost certainly these few common dolphins now cavorting with the very much bigger bottlenose. When seen earlier, these few small dolphins had been at the edges of the pod, in front, in the gaps between larger sub-groups, or at the rear, appearing to be struggling to keep up with the large dolphins. That they had seemed to have a lighter colouration to their flanks had caused difficulty when trying to make the initial identification. A mixed pod of mostly bottlenose with a few commons would explain the earlier visual discrepancies.

One strange coincidence is that this breaching and leaping occurred at or about the precise location where we regularly see Basking Sharks breach and double breach on previous occasions. Later that afternoon we walked to the cliff tops and had a last sight of around 20 bottlenose heading south in the failing light of dusk.

Unfavourable weather conditions hampered sighting effort throughout December and January, there being few clear fine days with settled sea conditions. The winds remained fixed in the north or north west, rather than the more temperate south west, we would normally expect. It was not until February did things improve, but even then, few opportunities for watches occurred.

*3<sup>rd</sup> February* - A Risso's Dolphin was clearly seen foraging about 1 nautical mile from shore. This large impressive dolphin with its very white and heavily scratched and scarred front, bulbous nose and tall dorsal fin clearly seen against a flat calm sea.

*27<sup>th</sup> February* - Not a cetacean this time, but the tall black triangular dorsal fin of a large Basking Shark. This unseasonable sighting was seen from 1555hrs. to 1610 hrs., after which, it submerged and was not seen again. The fish was swimming slowly Northwards. Although having seen many hundreds of basking sharks from our shore, this was the first winter shark for me, and something special.

For more information on the Isle of Man Basking Shark survey, check out their excellent new website at [www.isleofman.com](http://www.isleofman.com) and click on the basking shark headline banner.

### **North West England**

#### **From Solway Shark Watch and Sea Mammal Survey and Simon Rhodes**

- 2 harbour porpoise, Piel Channel at 10:26 on 17 February
- 3 harbour porpoise, River Ribble Estuary at 10:12 on 17 February
- 2 harbour porpoise, Priory Point.Ulverston Channel at 09:46 on 16 February
- 4 harbour porpoise, Saltom Bay at 14:44 on 15 February
- 5 harbour porpoise, 400m off St Bees, Cumbria at 08:00 on 15 February
- 1 harbour porpoise, Bowness on Solway at 12:22 on 10 January

### **Republic of Ireland**

Despite the winter months, there was still a considerable number of sightings off the coast of Ireland, with nearly 100 sightings of harbour porpoise, and over 20 common dolphin sightings, with several groups of 30-100 animals and one sighting of 800! There were also a lot of large whales recorded, including >35 fin whale (up to 30 individuals on 8<sup>th</sup> November off Cork) and 20 humpback whale sightings. For more information on Irish sightings, see the homepage of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group at [www.iwdg.ie](http://www.iwdg.ie).