

## The Cetacean Monitoring Unit

# Sea Watch foundation



*Fin whale and common dolphin, off Ramsay Island, Pembrokeshire. Peter Evans/SWF*

## NATIONAL WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCH

**AUGUST 13-21 2005**

by Hanna Nuuttila, SWF sightings coordinator.

This year's National Whale and Dolphin Watch (NWDW) week was a great success with 58 manned sites around the country and several boat operators taking part. So far we have received 558 recorded sightings during the week but we are still waiting for more sightings reports from observers and boat operators.

We received very positive media coverage both on national and regional levels, largely due to the hard work of our media coordinators, Clare Dickins and

Wendy Nekar, although many regional coordinators did a great job themselves in approaching the local press and TV. Highlights of the media campaign included prime time coverage of NWDW on BBC Radio 4's "Today" programme and on BBC Newsround and a feature on NWDW and Sea Watch in *The Times*.

Harbour porpoises were seen in every region, bottlenose dolphins were frequently sighted in south and west England, the Channel Islands, Wales, north east England and eastern Scotland. Minke whales were also spotted in most areas, although they were unusually absent in the Inner Hebrides this year. Orcas were sighted in Shetland, north and south east Scotland. White-beaked dolphins and Risso's dolphins were seen in north and north east Scotland and the Hebrides. Risso's dolphins were also seen in the Gower Peninsula, South Wales. We

### Editorial

Welcome to the September 2005 issue of the Sea Watch Foundation News Sheet, covering U.K. and Ireland cetacean sightings from August and September.

It has been quite an important period due to the annual National Whale and Dolphin Watch (NWDW) week, and a big thank you to everyone who took part. We hope you had some rewarding sightings - from the sounds of it, many of you did, in spite of the gales and rain. If you found any articles relating to NWDW in your local papers, please remember to send your clippings to Clare Dickins, 61 Guphill Avenue, Coventry CV5 8BA or send scanned images to Clare at the following email:

[clare.dickins1@btopenworld.com](mailto:clare.dickins1@btopenworld.com)

Please contact me at [lorihandley@mac.com](mailto:lorihandley@mac.com) if you would like to be added to the News Sheet mailing list or to contribute to future issues.

Best wishes, Lori.

Lori Handley, editor



Sea Watchers during NWDW week, Peter MacDonald

had two unusual sightings: long-finned pilot whales off Runnelstone, Cornwall and a group of six fin whales west of Ramsay, Pembrokeshire, Wales (see photo above). The fin whale sighting added a great deal of media interest to the event! A final report will be finished very soon with more detailed analysis of this year's event.

## Sightings highlights

**By Hanna Nuuttila, Sea Watch Foundation Sightings Coordinator**

### More fin whales in Welsh waters

Two fin whales were sighted six miles west the Smalls, off the West coast of Pembrokeshire, on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> September. The whales were seen near the area where a large group of fin whales were seen in August. The sighting was reported by Steve Lewis from Pembrokeshire Dive Charters.

### Humpback whales off South West Wales

Following the sighting of three humpback whales in north Cardigan Bay in July, two, possibly three, humpbacks were seen from the Cork to Swansea ferry on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> September. The whales were spotted half way through the crossing, in the waters of the Celtic Deep. Anthony Swann, a passenger on the ferry, spotted and photographed the whales.

### Sperm whales sighted off the North Grampian and Sunderland coasts

A solitary sperm whale was seen off Kinnaird Head, Fraserburgh on the afternoon of 29<sup>th</sup> August. The animal was observed blowing, and described as a large, brown whale without an obvious dorsal fin. The sighting was reported to the South Grampian Regional Coordinator by Tim Marshall. In addition, fishermen off the coast of Sunderland reported a sighting of a sperm whale on Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup> September. The whale was seen approximately six nautical miles offshore from Sunderland and described as approximately 35 ft in length.

**Please send your raw sightings data to Hanna at: [hanna.nuuttila@seawatchfoundation.org.uk](mailto:hanna.nuuttila@seawatchfoundation.org.uk)**

## Regional Roundup August to September 2005

### Orkney Islands

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

Only two minke whale sightings were reported during this period; one at Copinsay Passage on 14<sup>th</sup> August and one off Hoxa Head, South Ronaldsay on 9<sup>th</sup> September. Three harbour porpoise were recorded off Mull Head, Deerness on 16<sup>th</sup> August, while on 18<sup>th</sup> August two were seen off Herston Head, South Ronaldsay and 20 in Burra Sound. On 8<sup>th</sup> August a group of six to ten Risso's dolphins were seen in Stromness Harbour and one was spotted off the western mainland. Two Risso's were also seen in Scapa Flow on 18<sup>th</sup> August.

### Northern Scotland: Moray Firth

**From Howard Hartley Loates, regional coordinator, (Sutors of Cromarty to Kessock/Inverness)**



Bottlenose dolphins in Cromarty Firth. The dolphin on the left is the "whistler"! H.H. Loates

As the newly appointed coordinator for The Sutors of Cromarty to Kessock I found the National Whale and Dolphin (NWDW) week a potential challenge. There is no active group operating under the Sea Watch Foundation banner although there are a number of people active and carrying out projects with the resident bottlenose dolphins. The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) and the Aberdeen University Field Station in Cromarty are active on specific projects and volunteers count bottlenose dolphins at Chanonry Point for the Field Station on a regular basis. At this time no one seems to be active over a larger area, hence species recorded tend to be bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise; the common animals in the inner Moray Firth. A bit of preparation work for the NWDW week resulted in a minke off the South Sutor of Cromarty on the 6<sup>th</sup> August, but unfortunately no minke were seen during the watch week. I decided the best way to approach NWDW was to do some watches myself from less well reported areas and was

allowed access to Fort George where I did two hour watches on four occasions. I also did two and a half hours at the South Sutor of Cromarty and at Chanonry Point. Bottlenose dolphins were seen at all locations and I didn't draw a blank on any day! As always at Chanonry, the talk was "you should have been here yesterday as a birth was witnessed". Bottlenose dolphins were easy to find during the NWDW and at Chanonry Point they were showing off, throwing fairly large salmon into the air and then jumping up to catch them; all very high speed and acrobatic. I also recorded bottlenose from Fort George and The Sutors of Cromarty. Porpoises were also seen from Fort George.

Peter Macdonald was kind enough to invite me out on the Gemini Explorer on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September out of Buckie. Although the weather could have been kinder we did get a few bottlenose dolphins, some very close along

side. The fact that we had one animal that whistled when it inhaled was interesting and this is apparently an animal that is seen/heard regularly.

I do not seem to have the time to watch regularly but I hope to form a group of interested people sometime during the winter and by next year if all goes as planned I will have more eyes in the local area feeding information into the database. Any suggestions on setting up such a group would be welcome. It would be nice to avoid any pitfalls at the beginning.

### **North East Scotland**

#### **From Iain Macdonald, regional coordinator for North East Scotland (Nigg-Duncansby Head)**

**August:** Usually this is a fantastic month for cetacean watching thanks to the long days and calmer weather, but due to it also being the main holiday season, the time spent conducting regular watches proved to be lower than might be expected. However, some great sightings were reported, especially off Caithness where several species were regularly seen in a single day. This culminated on the 16<sup>th</sup> off Ulbster when a total five cetacean species were seen during a single watch.

Small numbers of porpoise were recorded throughout the month, mainly from a public lay-by off the A9 trunk road at Strathsteven in Sutherland and Lybster view point in Caithness. Larger numbers were reported on several occasions in Gills Bay along the north Caithness coast. Bottlenose dolphin records were disappointingly low, possibly due to low survey effort towards the south of the reporting section. One bottlenose dolphin was reported off Lybster on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, two dolphins were reported on 13<sup>th</sup> August off Nigg and two were reported off Lybster on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Minke whale sightings were confined to two off Whaligoe Steps on the 12<sup>th</sup>, one off Lybster on the 14<sup>th</sup> and one off Ulbster on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Killer whales were reported off the east coast of Caithness on several dates. Two were seen off Whaligoe Steps on the 12<sup>th</sup>, two adults and a calf were seen off Lybster on the 14<sup>th</sup>, four adults were reported off Ulbster on the 16<sup>th</sup> and four adults were reported off Whaligoe steps on the 18<sup>th</sup>. As was the case last year, killer whales were reported hunting other marine mammals. On the 14<sup>th</sup> a porpoise was seen to breach in close proximity to one of the killer whales, and on the 16<sup>th</sup> off Ulbster one was seen to chase two unidentified dolphins. Other notable records for the month were of five possible common dolphins of Lybster on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, two white-beaked dolphins off Ulbster on the 16<sup>th</sup>, several white-beaked dolphins of Whaligoe Steps on the 18<sup>th</sup> and two Risso's dolphins off Whaligoe Steps on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

**September:** The start of September produced another record of Risso's dolphins, this time off Brora, reinforcing 2005 as an exceptional year for this species along the northern shore of the Moray Firth. Fewer minke whale sightings were reported than expected, but this species was reported at its usual haunts. Of note this year were fewer flocks of feeding kittiwake, perhaps a sign that there is less food about. Small numbers of porpoise were recorded throughout the month. The highlight of the month was a single killer whale record from the Whaligoe Steps. Perhaps an appropriate place to locate the star find of September since the name for this location is derived from "whale geo". Although most famous for the incredibly steep set of steps leading down a cliff, it has evidently been a good place to see cetaceans over a long period of time.

### **Grampian**

#### **From Peter MacDonald regional coordinator for North Grampian**

**August:** With fine weather and good seas the sightings were of a high standard in August. Cetacean watchers all along the southern side of the outer Moray Firth encountered bottlenose dolphins, harbour porpoise and minke whales in most recognised watch sites. Spey Bay to Banff was the main watch area for the bottlenose dolphins with sightings occurring most days, but during the month only a few harbour porpoise and only one minke whale was recorded off Portknockie. The top sighting for this area was on the 14<sup>th</sup> when a group of more than eight Atlantic white-sided dolphins were seen in Cullen Bay, fast traveling into the bay, then away north. This group was possibly seen in the Inner Moray Firth at Fort George at 10:30 am with the Cullen sighting at 15:00. Further east at Port Soy to Fraserburgh, some amazing sightings of minke whale and porpoise were coming in, bottlenose dolphins were also seen but it was the minke whales that stood out, some coming in close to Banff Bay to feed and also at Whitehills.

The National Whale and Dolphin Watch (NWDW) week was a mixed bag concerning sightings with a series of land and sea based watches. Findochty proved the best place to be on the Saturday with over 40+ bottlenose dolphins seen close to shore. Out at sea we travelled to Troupe Head, sadly no sign of the minkes, but harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphins, and a lone basking shark were recorded. In late August a few sun fish were encountered at Findochty and Lossiemouth.



**September:** The first week of September saw some amazing sightings. On the 1<sup>st</sup>, Atlantic white-sided dolphins were again seen in Cullen Bay, with six animals traveling fast in and out of the bay. Risso's dolphins were recorded over at Fraserburgh on the 4<sup>th</sup> and on the same day a sun fish was seen off Findochty. Despite the summer drawing to a close, the sightings of bottlenose dolphins were still good in the Buckie to Cullen area, and a rare sighting of five harbour porpoise in Cullen Bay drew gasps of joy from all on board the Gemini Explorer! Good sightings up towards Burghead and Nairn of bottlenose dolphins suggested mackerel were still in the Firth. Many of the squid boats that have been here at Buckie have moved up to the inner Moray Firth. Minke whale and porpoise were still being seen to the east of Banff as well as good sightings of bottlenose dolphins. It will be interesting to see if the pattern remains the same next year. Maybe a more fuller and detailed survey could be carried out? As ever I went along to various events and schools. Cullen Primary School was a hoot, with the play group particularly enjoying a scary game of "pass the great white shark" - a great way to learn about the fantastic creatures that live in our seas!

### South West Scotland and Inner Hebrides

#### From Penny Hawdon, Community Sightings Programme, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust

**August:** Unfortunately the number of sightings of minke whales seem to be right down this August, and although this may result from sightings not being passed onto us, these results seem to fit in with what is happening throughout the west coast of Scotland at the moment. The range of distribution seems to be as wide as usual - with sightings from as far south as Arran to as far north as North Harris. On the 7<sup>th</sup>, two animals were seen in Lochbuie (south east Mull) and the next day a solitary animal was spotted just west of the Treshnish Isles. Usually minkes can be seen around the Small Isles during August, and although the numbers are dramatically reduced, there have been a few sightings e.g. on the 9<sup>th</sup>, two animals were seen between Muck and Mallaig and on the 11<sup>th</sup>, an individual was seen between Skye and Canna. Local whale watching boats have also reported extremely low sightings throughout August.

Harbour porpoise numbers seem to be normal for this time of year. We have been receiving regular sightings from the Sound of Mull, the Mallaig area and the Sound of Sleat. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, there were two porpoises seen in the Sound of Taransay. A yacht saw a large group of 15 animals from Duart Castle on Mull on the 20<sup>th</sup>. All whale watching and cruising boats on Mull have also been reporting regular porpoise sightings, with some animals being extremely inquisitive.

There has been a lot of documented bottlenose dolphin activity in the Inner Hebridean waters, and also some sightings further out in the islands. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, a group of 30 animals were seen at the entrance to Loch Gairloch and two days later, on the 12<sup>th</sup>, 12 dolphins were spotted near Dunoon. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, there was a sighting extremely far north - five animals seen from the Butt of Lewis. With the use of our photo-ID catalogue, we can determine the range of bottlenose dolphins in the Hebrides. There have been occasional sightings throughout the month from the Sound of Mull and south as far as Ayr.

Passengers on the Oban to Barra ferry were treated to a fantastic energetic encounter with a group of 12 common dolphins on the 7<sup>th</sup> August. These are thought to be part of a larger group of 37 animals, including some very small calves spotted near Barra the same day. Less than a week later, a group of at least 40 dolphins were seen feeding near the entrance to Loch Dunvegan on Skye. It is possible that these were part of the same group of animals. There were a few sightings from around Mull throughout the month, but the next large group which was reported was 12 animals seen from the Uig to Lochmaddy ferry on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

The resident group of killer whales has been sighted on many occasions this August. On the 7<sup>th</sup>, three were seen from land at An Gearrannan, Lewis, and the next day three individuals were again spotted just north of Coll. One yacht was lucky enough to spend over an hour with a group of 10 - 12 animals, including Floppy Fin, John Coe, Aquarius, Lulu and Nicola. Two killer whales were also spotted near Muck on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

Three Risso's were seen near Orsay Island, Port Wemyss, Islay on August 11<sup>th</sup> and a large unidentified whale was seen south west of Ailsa Craig, Firth of Clyde, on the 20<sup>th</sup> August.

Numbers of basking shark continued to be high throughout August, with reports coming in from as far north as Berneray and Lewis, and south to Islay. The distribution this month continues to include larger numbers of sharks to the northern end of their range. Frequent reports were made of large feeding aggregations, for example on the 8<sup>th</sup>, five were seen west off Treshnish, and the next day, seven were seen between Coll and Tiree. Throughout the month, basking sharks were regularly seen from Glengorm and Calgary Bay on Mull. One boat had reports of up to 30 sharks on more than one occasion in the Small Isles area. One sun fish was seen off the Port of Ness, Isle of Lewis, on the 2nd August and one between Staffa and Little Colonsay (west coast of Mull) on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

**September:** We have received very few minke whale sightings this September. A solitary individual was seen off north west Mull on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the whale watching boats based in Tobermory had sightings in the same area on the 5<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> but there have been no further recordings. One factor to bear in mind is that the weather has been particularly bad this September with a succession of depressions passing over the west coast of Scotland. This

has meant that many boats have not been able to cover their usual range, or even get out at all. However, there may also still be sightings forms due to be sent in to us.

Harbour porpoise were regularly sighted in the Sound of Mull throughout September. Reports include four individuals at Minard, Loch Fyne on the 5<sup>th</sup> and one near Bono Rock Beacon, just south of Kerrera on the 6<sup>th</sup>. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, eight were seen from land at Dunoon, and six were seen from the Oban to Craignure ferry on the 19<sup>th</sup>. A pod of more than thirty bottlenose dolphins were seen bowriding north west of Mallaig on the 6<sup>th</sup> September. On 7<sup>th</sup> September three individuals were seen in the Sound of Mull and a pod of between 12 and 20 were spotted south of Salen. Ten dolphins were seen from Kentallan Farm, Aros on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 14 from Aros Castle on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Five were seen near Lismore lighthouse on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Local whale watching boats, based in Tobermory, saw bottlenose dolphins on the 7<sup>th</sup> (about 30 animals), 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. A pod of common dolphins were seen bow riding in West Loch, Tarbert, Isle of Harris on 6<sup>th</sup> September and one was seen from the Oban to Craignure ferry on the 19<sup>th</sup>. Two or three killer whales were seen at the mouth of Loch Harport, Skye, about one mile offshore on the 6<sup>th</sup> September. Two northern bottlenose whales were seen from land at Ullinish, Isle of Skye, on 6<sup>th</sup> September.

Finally, ten basking sharks were seen between Skye and Rhum on 3<sup>rd</sup> September. The following day one was seen at Port nan Gamhnauntail and one in Crossaig Bay, Kintyre Peninsula. One basking shark was seen off Port of Ness, Isle of Lewis on the 6<sup>th</sup>. On the 13<sup>th</sup> a shark was seen south east of Eigg. On September 29<sup>th</sup> one was seen near Tolsta Head, Isle of Lewis and another off the east coast of Kintyre near the entrance to Loch Caolisport.

### **North west Scotland**

#### **From Ian Birks, regional coordinator for NW Scotland**

The sightings in August and September continued to disappoint. Despite the focus of attention of the National Whale and Dolphin Week, few people were prepared to brave the vile weather which varied from gales and wet to flat calm and wet. Of the two I preferred the gales as this kept the voracious midges at bay. The sight of a group of sea watchers wrapped in oilskins and midge hoods while trying to look through binoculars has probably gone down in tourism legend. Despite having traditionally been one of the most successful sea watching points, we were only able to spot three harbour porpoises on our single calm day.

We had hopes of a return to normal with enhanced sightings as we moved into September, previously having had comfortably into three figures worth of harbour porpoises in Strath Bay, Loch Gairloch, but still strong winds and poor visibility in torrential rain have robbed us of the chances of sightings. Best record? 125 mm rain in 30 hours with force ten wind. I challenge anyone to try seawatching in that!

The best we had was on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September when both Charlie & Susan Phillips and I visited Rua Reidh Lighthouse, seven miles north of Gairloch in late afternoon. There were three minke whales including a sub-adult working fish shoals in the tide eddies below the point and within 200 m of the shore. Approximately 400 m to the south there was a basking shark doing much the same, and a half mile off Melvaig, three miles further south, yet another minke. This was our only calm clear day.

As I write this in early October the wind is at force ten again, the cloud half way down the seawall and the mix of seawater and rain quite tangy. Roll on summer, we missed the last one!

### **From John Macleod, Lochmaddy, Outer Hebrides.**

Two unidentified dolphins were seen Lochmaddy, Isle of North Uist on the 8<sup>th</sup> August and four Risso's dolphins were seen on the 13<sup>th</sup>. The Risso's only stayed around for one day, whereas in previous years they have remained for about a week in early August.

### **West Sutherland**

#### **From Andy Summers**

Four basking sharks were recorded on the crossing to Handa Island on 9<sup>th</sup> August, but there were also records from Durness, Clashnessie, Clachtoll, Raffin and Drumbeg – a total of eleven records. The saddest report was a freshly dead basking shark just south of the Sutherland border near Polly Bay. The shark had obviously come into a small lagoon at high tide and got stranded. There were five minke whale sightings including an adult and calf seen from the shore at Achmelvich on 8<sup>th</sup> August and two adults seen together from the beach at Sango Bay in Durness. Almost daily sightings of porpoises were recorded on the ferry to Handa Island along with occasional sightings from Stoer Lighthouse. The only dolphin records I obtained were of a single unidentified individual at Stoer Lighthouse and a single white-sided dolphin (possible the same one) three days later. Then on 26<sup>th</sup> August a pod of 20 or more unidentified dolphins, including young ones, were seen heading north from Clachtoll Beach.

The National Whale and Dolphin Watch at Stoer was well attended with over 40 people listening to a talk on cetaceans on the 18<sup>th</sup> August, however the weather let us down again with both a bank of fog and strong winds at the same time making our watch from the lighthouse rather pointless. The strong winds created a headache for the

Highland Council, when a dead sperm whale washed up the following day on the remote beach at Oldshoremore. It is still there attracting lots of gulls. A dead Risso's dolphin arrived on the beach at Durness a few days later.

September was very quiet with a solitary minke whale reported at Clach toll, another basking shark at Raffin and three porpoises at Inverkirkaig.

### **South Grampian**

**From Kevin Hepworth, regional coordinator for South Grampian.**

White-beaked dolphins were reported from all along the coastline with Girdleness/Aberdeen Bay and Stonehaven Bay as hotspots. Large numbers were reported from Girdleness on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August (30+), 3<sup>rd</sup> August (50+) and Stonehaven on the 20<sup>th</sup> August. As in previous years the animals had good calve to adult ratios of 1:3 and were very active, usually around one to two km offshore, although anecdotal reports of large groups around oil platforms off Aberdeen were received. Groups sizes were generally in the six to nine individuals range.

The trend for increased numbers of minke whales off our coastline continued from last year with Collieston being particularly good during August. Group sizes were one to three animals although five off Donmouth for three consecutive evenings around the 14<sup>th</sup> August represents a good record. This particular group were very actively lunge feeding and also breaching at times within 500 m of the Aberdeen esplanade in fairly shallow water. Up to four animals were feeding off Collieston on the 27<sup>th</sup> August. Records also came in from Stonehaven and Montrose.

After a very slow start for 2005, harbour porpoise records began to climb and the first real peak of individuals occurred off Collieston on the 27<sup>th</sup> August with 22+ animals feeding over a wide area. Generally reports were of single or up to three animals from most of the usual haunts along our stretch of coast. Risso's dolphins were reported twice from the Shetland ferry around the 15<sup>th</sup> August (I am still waiting for the exact details to be confirmed) and six north of Peterhead on the 27<sup>th</sup> August. Four animals, spotted a mile and a half off Collieston on the 29<sup>th</sup> August, were also possibly Risso's. Nine white-sided dolphins were reported crossing Stonehaven Bay on the 14<sup>th</sup> August. Finally a single sperm whale was seen just outside our area passing Kinnaird Head on the 29<sup>th</sup> August.

### **North east England**

**From Andy Tait, regional coordinator for Northumberland, Tyne and Wear,**

Following a few sightings of a bottlenose dolphin in Amble in the later part of July, sightings continued with odd associations with the tourist boats and fishing craft running out of the harbour. A single sighting on the 10<sup>th</sup> at Beadnell was possibly the same dolphin. During the National Whale and Dolphin Watch week a single bottlenose dolphin was seen in Tynemouth on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> associating with various boats from a small motor craft to the north sea ferry "Jupiter" off which it did a spectacular leap in front of the bow. A single porpoise was seen off Amble Harbour on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> September, two pelagic trips, one from Tynemouth and one from Seahouses, spotted six to ten white-beaked dolphins seven miles off Blyth, and five porpoise and a young minke whale about 1.5 miles east of Bamburgh. Over the same weekend, we had a sighting of a killer whale off Tynemouth and an adult minke whale four miles offshore. A bottlenose dolphin was seen twice on the 4<sup>th</sup> at Redcar. On the 5<sup>th</sup> a single porpoise was seen foraging about 50 m off the reef at Cresswell. An adult minke whale was seen four to five miles off Sunderland at lunchtime on the 17<sup>th</sup>, and to finish the month off nicely, a sperm whale seen six miles off Sunderland on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

### **Eastern England and East Anglia**

**From Mark Iley, Essex Wildlife Trust**

Nine sightings of harbour porpoises were recorded during August and September. On the 19<sup>th</sup> August two sightings were recorded, and another on the 29<sup>th</sup> in the Blackwater Estuary. On 21<sup>st</sup> August, an adult and calf were seen slow swimming and logging on the surface in Sole Bay, Southwold (Suffolk). On 29<sup>th</sup> August a pod of ten porpoises were seen in St Lawrence Bay, Stone, East Mersea (Essex), past Coopers Beach. Porpoises were reported to have circled a group of stationary jetskis, and seemed interested in the idling engines. One porpoise was seen on 10<sup>th</sup> September south west of Burrow Three, and a pod of nine were recorded on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September East of Burrow Five in the Thames Estuary. Three dead porpoises were reported; the first on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August off Kent, the second in "late" August on the River Stour north shore at Harkstead Beach, and finally on the 9<sup>th</sup> September off Whitstable, Kent. The River Stour stranding was found at spring tide with no obvious cause of death. The animal was small and a "bit thin" and had sustained some damage to its dorsal fin and upper tail fluke. The individual seen off Whitstable was fairly fresh and approximately 3 ft 6 ins long. The skin was torn on the side to the rear of its head and was removed from the dorsal fin and tail.

**Southern England****From Stephen Savage, regional coordinator for Sussex****Selsey dolphins**

The Selsey bottlenose dolphins continued to be reported through August, even in rough seas. Colin Stratton, who has provided many reports of the Selsey dolphins kindly invited me out on his yacht Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> September to see and photograph the dolphins but sadly they were not around. While we anchored in the area, several boats appeared and circled, presumably looking for the dolphins before heading off again. It appears that vessels have been taking people out to see the dolphins, but if Sunday was the norm – I suspect this is not enough to cause an harassment problem. On every other occasion Colin has passed through the Looe Channel the dolphins have just appeared, so this was very disappointing. Colin did give us (I took along a student from one of my marine courses) a free sailing lesson on the way back to harbour to help make up for it and I can definitely see the appeal of traveling under sail. It does appear that the Selsey Dolphins have now moved on. Colin reported seeing them on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September and they were still happy to interact with vessels. This sighting was also confirmed by another observer via the sighting hotline. On the last observation, Colin noted a distinctive marking on a dolphin that frequently interacted with vessels. Colin nick named this dolphin “Adidas” after a mark on the left side of the dorsal fin, similar in shape to the Adidas symbol! There have been several reports following this from sailing vessels and the Sussex Sea Fisheries Vessel that the dolphins were not present and so Colin’s is the last definite sighting. I am in the process of searching out sightings not reported to us and any images, especially any of photo-ID quality so that we can either find out where they came from or where they have moved to. We are all hoping they may return next year.

**Other sightings**

A group of six dolphins were reported off Selsey Bill on the 12<sup>th</sup> August. It is not known if these were entirely different dolphins or another group that temporarily joined the original three. Apart from the Selsey Dolphins we have received two bottlenose dolphin sightings for the Brighton area, but again, observations are still far down on previous years. Interestingly, we had a confirmed report of three long-finned pilot whales off Galley Hill Bexhill by Ian Standivan who attended the ID training session earlier this year at Hastings.

**National Whale and Dolphin Watch**

The main manned watch site for the National Whale and Dolphin Watch week was at the Brighton marina. No sightings were recorded this year (although the normal peak of sightings is April to July). The sea was calm and the visibility was perfect. A flock of 15 terns flew back and forth during the day, but were not seen feeding, so perhaps there was not much potential prey for cetaceans. Fishermen were catching a few mackerel and bream but not in large numbers. However, as a means of raising public awareness it was a great success. Based on the western arm, I put up posters and photographs of past sightings from the area and some general info. Many people stopped and asked us about what we were doing and some stayed and took part for a while. We had the opportunity to talk to a large number of local people during the day making the event very worthwhile (although it’s always disappointing not to have a sighting). I also gave out some general literature including the Sea Watch website encouraging people to follow the event as sightings come in.

**From David Walker, Dungeness Bird Observatory, Kent**

During August, harbour porpoises were seen on 21 days, typically in groups of two to three, but solitary individuals were recorded three times and a group of four was seen on the 7<sup>th</sup>. A pod of about seven unidentified dolphins was seen on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Harbour porpoises were also recorded on 21 days in September. Three September sightings were of pods of five to six individuals.

**South West England - Cornwall****From David Ball, Silver Dolphin Centre, Porthleven**

August has been a good month for our study of the bottlenose dolphins, with sightings on at least fourteen days of the month. Last year we started emailing our bottlenose sightings to Devon and Dorset coordinators to track the pod, and looking at the recent reports there is a definite pattern of movement. August was also good for minke whales, with four sightings of reported, as well as a large pod of pilot whales being seen off the Runnel Stone.

September was a quieter month, with bottlenose dolphins only sighted on seven days. The work we are doing and moving to Penzance has brought us into contact with a new group of boat owners. Some of the local day trips are keen to report their sightings to us and will take volunteers out with them at no charge to us. On the 18<sup>th</sup> September, Jo Dyer from the centre saw a large pod (up to 30) of what she thought was mixed bottlenose and Risso’s dolphins with young just off Nare head heading towards St Anthony lighthouse, in Falmouth Bay. We had bottlenose sightings reported from Hayle Towans, the Manacles and Tresco on the isles of Silly all on the same day, (12<sup>th</sup> sept).



We have had continued sightings of basking sharks and the odd turtle and while diving. There still seems to be plankton around that we wouldn't normally see this time of the year. Water temperature has struggled to reach 16°C, so it has felt more like spring waters compared to two years ago when we had a balmy 20°C. We would be interested to know if anyone else has noticed these changes. We ran four training days for Cornish Marine Life Rescue, which have been well attended by volunteers which now include local vets, coast guards, coast watch, policemen and boat operators. As well as being great for rescue call outs this has also given us extra eyes and ears for reporting sightings as all the courses have included identification training. Because of this we have now had a visit from the local TV news team and press. This has also raised our profile and that of the sightings work we carry out. So while sightings may seem to quiet in the winter it's no reason not to be out looking for local cetaceans!

### **From Dan Jarvis, Cornwall Wildlife Trust.**

Several cetacean species were recorded between August and September in the county, ranging from the usual bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises through to the rarer Risso's dolphins and minke whales.

Bottlenose dolphins were spotted very frequently at places such as Falmouth, Fowey and the Lizard Peninsula on the south coast and Newquay, St Ives Bay, Newquay, Padstow and Port Isaac on the north coast. A small group were seen around the Isles of Scilly too. There was an exceptional sighting of almost 50 bottlenose dolphins north of Polzeath during August. A professional photographer, local to St Ives Bay, provided us with some excellent quality images of a small pod in the Godrevy area (see photo), which are being used by marine biologists for a photo-identification project. At least one of the animals, positively identified as being off Falmouth earlier this year, is thought to be a part of the much larger offshore pod in the Celtic Sea rather than one of the inshore pod members.



Bottlenose dolphins, Godrevy.

Harbour porpoises were another frequent visitor, with sightings all around the coast from Looe, St Mawes, Falmouth (where a large pod was seen on one occasion), the Lizard, Mount's Bay, Land's End, Pendeen and Perranporth. Both the records from Looe and Perranporth are, unfortunately, of live stranded or entangled animals (see below for more information). Common dolphins were again regularly seen, the majority of sightings taking place to the west of the county at Land's End, the Isles of Scilly, Pendeen, Falmouth, the Manacles and Newquay. Large pods of around 50 animals were seen off Land's End and in Fal Bay. Risso's dolphins, a fairly rare species around the South West, were observed mostly to the west at similar locations to the common dolphins. Unidentified dolphins species were spotted at Falmouth, Bude, Padstow and the Lizard, with larger pods seen off Land's End and Coverack. Bottlenose, commons and porpoises were all recorded during National Whale and Dolphin Watch (NWDW) week. Pilot whales were observed once, during NWDW week, off the Runnel stone, when a pod of 30 were spotted. Another possible sighting was made when a large animal was seen to breach off Cadgwith near Lizard Point. Minke whales were infrequently observed with lone individuals seen off Wolf Rock, Land's End, and unusually, off St Ives and Godrevy. The latter two sightings took place during NWDW week and are likely to be of the same animal. Also seen during this period were basking sharks, mostly during August with sightings beginning to decline in September as they moved offshore. Pendeen, Newquay, Whitesand Bay, Mount's Bay and the Lizard Peninsula all had regular sightings, with large groups of the sharks seen off Trevoze Head and Port Isaac. Ocean sunfish were also frequently observed, having been noticeably scarce in the first half of the year, and were seen in St Ives Bay, Lantic Bay, Whitesand Bay, and off the North Cliffs, Pendeen, Land's End, Mevagissey, Lamorna and the Lizard. Finally, individual leatherback turtle sightings were made at the Isles of Scilly, Portloe and in Mount's Bay.

As previously mentioned, there were two rescue incidents, both involving harbour porpoises during this period. The first of these took place at Perranporth near the end of August, when a single animal came ashore. Trained volunteer Marine Mammal Medics from British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) attended immediately and found the animal in moderate condition with no injuries. Two refloatation attempts were made using their specialist rescue equipment. The first unfortunately resulted in a restranding nearly half an hour after a successful refloat, but the animal responded poorly during the second refloat, so was not released and taken back on to the beach for further stabilisation. Sadly, the animal's condition declined dramatically, and the decision to euthanise made. The post mortem report showed that the animal was suffering from pericarditis, pleuritis, a generalised bacterial infection and a parasite burden, as well as having no food in its stomach – a very sick animal indeed. Obviously there was no other option for this animal as it would not have survived for long back in the sea. BDMLR Cornwall



recently ran a private course for members of the WDCCS, and are running a training course open to the public at Newquay college in mid-November. Details will be posted on their website ([www.bdmr.org.uk](http://www.bdmr.org.uk)) soon, with the current courses already organised around the country. The second rescue incident took place a few miles off Looe, when Richard Pierce, Director of the Shark Trust, happened upon two porpoises entangled in monofilament netting. One animal had already drowned, dragging the second animal underwater which was desperately struggling for air. Richard managed to cut free the frightened animal and it swam off. The body of the dead porpoise sank and couldn't be retrieved.

As well as the National Whale and Dolphin Watch during this period, September saw the annual Marine Conservation Society's Beachwatch event. This is run every year and members of the public are encouraged to join in with local beach cleaning events around the country. Several events were held in Cornwall, and I attended the event organised by the National Seal Sanctuary at Gwithian, Hayle. This was very successful with many of bags of litter collected by the dozens of enthusiastic people that turned up. Lunch was provided in the typical form of Cornish pasties, and entertainment by BDMR Medics who put on a dolphin rescue demonstration during the afternoon.

On a final note, as we enter winter, the breeding season for grey seals and the time when dead cetaceans are washed up regularly, members of the public are being reminded of the relevant organisations to report things to in the county:

For live seals, call the **National Seal Sanctuary** on 01326 221361.

People are warned to not approach or handle any pups that they may find on the beach, as this can cause the mother to reject it, as well as the danger of being bitten and risk of infection.

For dead cetaceans, seals etc, call the **Cornwall Wildlife Trust** hotline on 0845 2012626.

People are advised not to touch carcasses due to the risk of infection.

For live cetaceans in distress, call **British Divers Marine Life Rescue** on 01825 765546.

People are advised not to immediately return animals to the water, but to keep the animal upright and wet, avoiding getting water in the blowhole, until a thorough health check can be made by trained Medics and veterinarians.

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## **Wales**

### **From Hanna Nuuttila, sightings coordinator, Sea Watch Wales.**

During the NWDW week over 160 sightings were recorded in Wales and six species were sighted: harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin, Risso's dolphin, common dolphin, minke whale and fin whale. Big thanks to all observers and boat operators around the country, including Nia Jones and others in Marine Awareness North Wales, Shearwater Coastal Cruises, Annie and Martin Garnett, Cardigan Bay Marine Wildlife Centre, Skomer Island Warden Juan Brown, Steve Lewis of Pembrokeshire Dive Charters, Louise Bebb from the Seawatch Centre in Boverton and special thanks go to all the observers of Ceredigion Council Dolphin Watch, who manned several sites all along the Ceredigion coastline throughout the week!

The Risso's were sighted off Oxwich Point, Gower Peninsula, in Glamorgan, an area with very few sightings recorded this year. Bottlenose dolphins were seen in all around Cardigan Bay as expected but also in various sites in North Wales including Tremadog Bay, Point Lynas, and Conwy Bay. During the Watch Week, we conducted a Sea Watch common dolphins survey from Pembrokeshire and spotted large groups of common dolphins, harbour porpoises, minke whales and the incredible sighting of six feeding fin whales, together with several minke whales and common dolphins, just eight miles West of Ramsay Island, near the Smalls. This was really an amazing sight, as never before had such a large group of fin whales been sighted on the UK continental shelf!

Throughout August and September we had regular sightings of bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises on line transect surveys of the Cardigan Bay SAC. Bottlenose dolphins were also seen regularly from New Quay Pier and during the one and two hour passenger boat trips. Harbour porpoises on the other hand were only seen further out to the SAC, none in close proximity to the coastline. Elsewhere in Wales there were sightings of harbour porpoises from Ramsay Sound and Aberech near Pwllheli on the Llyn Peninsula, and of bottlenose dolphins from The Skerries Lighthouse in Holyhead, from around Skomer and Grassholm, Between Pwllheli and Harlech, and off Mwnt and Aberporth in Cardigan Bay. Common dolphins were spotted in the Celtic Deep, in the Irish Sea and around the Smalls Lighthouse off West Pembrokeshire in August and September. A minke whale was seen off Strumble Head on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September. Risso's dolphins were recorded 1/4 mile off the Skerries Lighthouse on 12<sup>th</sup> September, near Holyhead, and another minke whale and two fin whales were seen off the Smalls from a tour operator's boat on the 15<sup>th</sup> September.

**Isle of Man****From John Galpin, regional coordinator for the Isle of Man**

**August:** August proved a difficult and strange month, with either a feast or famine of sightings. The last few basking sharks of the season juxtaposed with the surreal sight of 57 choughs feeding on our recently mown hay fields added interest in the absence of cetaceans. With a visitor due on the eighth, wanting to see and discuss cetacean sightings, the odd two or three common dolphins seen so far this month had seemed a bad omen. However, within minutes of arrival, our guest was able to enjoy a 30 minute display from seven bottlenose dolphins leaping, and high speed travelling across the surface in a frenzy of splashing, head and tail slapping. The 10<sup>th</sup> August was nicknamed “harbour porpoise day”, with 28 sighted in the late afternoon and early evening, spread across the sea in two’s and three’s. Apart from a single basking shark, the day’s watches ended with no other cetacean being recorded. Difficult and windy conditions looked to hinder all watch efforts throughout the National Whale and Dolphin Watch Week, with none of the local observers having any sightings to report. However a break in the weather on the afternoon of the 18<sup>th</sup> provided another feast, with 11+ minke whales, 16+ harbour porpoises and three bottlenose dolphins all seen from Dalby on the west coast of the island. A final, single minke whale that evening ended August’s sightings as the northerly wind regained its control of this summer’s weather.

**September:** With northerly winds maintaining their grip, there were only three opportunities for watches throughout the month. Some good sightings were had from Dalby on the far west coast, but there were no reports from elsewhere around the island. The watch of the 2<sup>nd</sup> yielded no sightings whatsoever, but things improved for the 6<sup>th</sup> when harbour porpoises, common and bottlenose dolphins provided a welcome sight from 07:30 hours through to lunch time. Throughout the morning, a pair of bottlenose dolphins breached, splashed and head slapped in an exuberant display 400 metres from shore. The 12<sup>th</sup> provided the last watch of the month, and through the afternoon eight minke whales, 16 harbour porpoises and two or three bottlenose dolphins could be seen from Ballaquane. The minkes were particularly active, sometimes moving at great speed, with white water stripping from their bow waves as they hurried through the sea. Throughout the early part of the month a few pairs of trawlers were actively fishing the herring and mackerel just four miles off shore.

**Republic of Ireland****From Pádraig Whooley, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group sightings coordinator**

Fin whales were encountered on 16 occasions during this period, of which 15 encounters were from the usual west Cork haunts between Toe Head and the Old Head of Kinsale. These comprised largely of observations from two whale watch operators in the area and land based observations from Galley Head. Total numbers seen in West Cork were 45, with a mean group size of three fin whales. The only other fin whale sighting outside of west Cork, in Irish waters, was reported by IWDG member Bernie O’ Brien, on passage from Rosslare, Co. Wexford to Cherbourg France on 8<sup>th</sup> September, aboard MV Diplomat. Some four hours south of Rosslare Harbour in the Celtic Sea area, passengers were treated to the spectacle of groups of five to nine fin whales traveling in a south west direction. The best estimate over the hour period was c40 fin whales which were observed by most passengers on board.

There were eight humpback whale encounters, all bar one, were positively identified as the individual known to the Irish humpback whale catalogue as #HBIRL3. This is the fifth consecutive year this individual known locally as “Boomerang” has returned at this time of year to the inshore waters of West Cork. A single sperm whale was photographed by the Irish Air Corp, while on fisheries patrol, on 9<sup>th</sup> August, some 220 nautical miles off the Irish southwest at position 50° 20N 13° 46 W.

The two most unusual sightings concerned this deep water species. Both incidents came from County Cork and both were within the same week, and one is left wondering whether the incidents were related. On 9<sup>th</sup> Aug a lone female bottlenose whale followed a ferry into Ringaskiddy, Cork Harbour, where it remained for the day. This animal appeared to be in poor condition and not surprisingly was dead the next morning. A preliminary post mortem examination was carried out by University College Cork. Six days later on 14<sup>th</sup> Aug a second adult bottlenose whale showed up in a Pulleen Harbour, near Castletownbere on the Beara Peninsula, West Cork. It intrigued whale watchers and researchers alike, as it was in apparent good body condition and showed no signs of live-stranding. It was observed swimming strongly around a marker buoy with occasional bouts of breaching and tail-slapping on



Northern bottlenose whale, P Whooley

each of the next six days and was last seen on 19<sup>th</sup> Aug. We hope this event had a happier outcome than the earlier one.

There were 63 encounters of 91 minke whales, recorded from all regions. The main clusters of sightings were in West Cork, the Sleah Head area of the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry and In Donegal Bay from locations like Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo and St. John's Point, Co. Donegal. A group of four killer whales were observed from Mullaghmore Head, Co. Sligo, on 17<sup>th</sup> Sept. A review of images suggest they may be the same pod photographed off Kinnogue Bay, Inishowen Peninsula, County Donegal/Derry on 7<sup>th</sup> July. Common dolphins were sighted on 125 occasions, although an element of this can be explained by increased reporting from a new whale watch operator in West Cork. Common dolphins were still confirmed in areas which previously only had occasional sightings. Bottlenose dolphins were observed on 37 occasions, 92% of these came from the Irish west and south coasts. Such high levels of bottlenose dolphin activity are unprecedented and raise many interesting questions. Finally Risso's dolphin activity comprises five sightings of 18 animals.

**Comprehensive analysis of all Irish cetacean sightings is available through the IWDG website [www.iwdg.ie](http://www.iwdg.ie), which provides on line access and interrogation of over 7,000 validated sightings**

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**Further details on all our activities can be found on the Sea Watch Foundation website ([www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk](http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk)) or by calling Sea Watch on 01865 717276.**