

sea watch FOUNDATION



Short beaked common dolphins, Alan Portreath

Editorial

Welcome to the May 2007 issue of the Sea Watch Foundation news sheet, covering sightings of UK whales, dolphins, porpoises and other marine life during April and May. We have a bumper issue for you this time, which might reflect the fact that April was just so balmy this year. I wonder what we can expect from the July edition given that we've had the wettest summer since records began? If you are brave enough to weather the storms, there are many rewarding sightings to be had, so please keep those sightings coming in, and as always, your contributions to the news sheet are very welcome, so please send them (and photos!)

to me at
lawsonhandley@mac.com.
Happy seawatching
Lori



ADOPT A DOLPHIN UPDATE!

June has seen the launch of Sea Watch's Adopt A Dolphin scheme to raise funds for further research into whales, dolphins and porpoises around the UK and to improve awareness of the threats they face.

Details of the scheme, which is based around the Cardigan Bay bottlenose dolphins, are on <http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/adoptadolphin> and we would welcome your help in promoting it

If you are manning a stand somewhere, have links with local groups or organisations which might like to support it, or are happy to hand out leaflets or arrange a fundraising event, please let us know. Not only can we send you leaflets, but we also have a number of Sea Watch T shirts in adult sizes and cuddly dolphins that can be given away as prizes.



Adopt a Dolphin has already featured in some local newspapers and radio stations and is featuring in a number of children's publications over the summer.

All suggestions for promoting the scheme still further are welcome. Please email wendynecar@hotmail.com or clare.dickins1@btopenworld.com, or phone Wendy Nekar on 01926 421679 or Clare Dickins on 0121 444 8468 if you feel you can help.

Hitting the headlines

Sea Watch and the National Whale and Dolphin Watch have been hitting the headlines in April and May.

Sightings Officer Hanna Nuuttila has been featured on Country File's video diary and on Radio 4's Women's Hour; Peter Evans has given numerous radio interviews, including to Radio 5 Live, and Simon Barnes, writing in the Saturday Times Wild Notebook, gave us a mention for the third year running.

Many regional co-ordinators have also been interviewed in a list that reads like the alphabet of local stations – from Radio Aberdeen to Radio York, taking in Cornwall, Devon, Inverness, Lancashire, Suffolk, Somerset and more besides.

In Wales, Cardigan Bay Monitoring Officer Giovanna Pesante has been working with BBC Wales's wildlife presenter Iolo Williams, and Hanna with the BBC Wales Country Focus radio programme.

Appalling weather prevented a number of planned media trips, but a big thank you goes not only to those who were interviewed but also to all those who offered to take journalists out on trips.



Sightings Officer, Hanna Nuuttila (right) appeared on Country File and Woman's Hour

Despite the wind and rain, details for the first few sightings have been coming in as we write this and we look forward to seeing the final picture of the distribution of species which they help to create.

Please let us know, if you have not already done so, if you have been involved in any TV or radio interviews, or if you have been successful in generating any further media coverage.

Please email wendynecar@hotmail.com or clare.dickins1@btopenworld.com or phone Wendy Nekar on 01926 421679 or Clare Dickins on 0121 444 8468

SIGHTINGS HIGHLIGHTS

APRIL TO MAY 2007

- Killer whale sightings have been the highlight of the spring, with many sightings coming in from Shetland, Fair Isle and Orkney in particular. They were also seen very close inshore in Scarlet Haven, near Lybster, North East Scotland, in mid May.
- A fin whale was spotted off Burghead, in the Moray Firth in late April.
- Bottlenose dolphins and common dolphins were seen around the Isle of Wight in April and May.
- A lone bottlenose dolphin (nicknamed Dave) was sighted regularly from Kent during April and June.
- There was a rare sighting of common dolphins in Sussex in late April.
- Plenty of Risso's dolphin sightings and killer whales off Port Soderick and Point of Ayre, Isle of Man, kept the island folk motivated and helped launch the new Manx Cetacean surveys at the beginning of the summer. Further exciting sightings were seen in the form of a sei whale at the end of May off Dalby Point, as well as a group of ten minke whales off Bradda Head!

- Risso's dolphins were recorded off Fowey and traversing the lower reaches of the River Tamar on the border between Devon and Cornwall during May - A rare sighting in these parts.
- Also in Cornwall, a pilot whale was sighted off Pencarrow Head in April, and a fin whale was reported from Nare Head earlier that month.

As always, please send your sightings to Hanna Nuuttila, Sea Watch Foundation Sightings Officer, at: sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk (Please note the changed email address!!)

REGIONAL ROUNDUP

Shetland and Fair Isle

Deryk Shaw, Fair Isle Bird Observatory

It has been a good spring for sightings around Fair Isle – starting with three orcas, which were seen off South Light on 22nd March. In April, two minke whales were seen offshore on 28th and a long-dead one drifted into South Harbour on 30th. May was a good month for orca sightings and several early minke whales, which were seen on 1st (2), 3rd (5), 4th (2) and 9th (1). A pod of five orcas (including one large bull) appeared on the afternoon of 7th with four (possibly the same pod) seen the following day. Another two were spotted on 11th and a pod of five (different to that on 7th) searched the coastline for seals on the 12th. Presumably one of these pods was seen again off North Light on 17th, at least two individuals on 20th and five again on 25th. Added to these was a sighting of two pilot whales (female and calf) from a motor boat three miles north of the Isle. In addition, sightings from the *MV Good Shepherd IV* in Fair Isle waters included 80-100 common dolphins off Sumburgh in late May. [Editor's note: This represents the most northerly sighting of a large school of this species in UK waters.]



Orcas seen off Fair Isle on 7th and 12th May, Photos Mark Breaks



Orkney

From Chris Booth, regional coordinator for Orkney

There were a number of orca sightings around Orkney in May including five off South Ronaldsay on 5th, seven between Shapinsay and the Mainland on the 13th, five off the east side of Shapinsay and five off Rackwick Hoy on 15th, three off Shapinsay and at least one in the Pentland Firth on 18th. A juvenile minke whale live stranded on Graemsay on 18th April but died, while another juvenile that live stranded at Stromness on 27th April was successfully refloated by a group of divers. There were sightings of single whales in Eynhallow Sound on 1st May and off the Brough of Birsay on 12th May.

Eight to nine Risso's dolphins were seen off Warness, Eday on 4th May, and there was also a report from Karen Munro of one off Thurso on 12th April. Seven white-beaked dolphins were seen in the Pentland Firth, off Hoy, on 2nd April. Last but not least, the only reports of harbour porpoise were of three in Eynhallow Sound on 9th May and two in Scapa Flow on 21st May.

Moray Firth and North Grampian

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

Bottlenose dolphin numbers started to increase during March and April at Chanonry Point but sightings are still sporadic. Harbour porpoise were also seen from time to time. Fish balls have been noted in the area off the Cromarty Gap, and the *Ecoventures* boat out of Cromarty has seen the occasional minke whale as well as the more usual bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise.

An immature male common dolphin was found dead at Fort George on 26th April. The animal was 164 cm long. The post mortem revealed that both lungs showed evidence of over-inflation and a small number of lungworms were present. The stomach had a moderate nematode burden with associated ulceration and no food was present in any of the stomach chambers. A large number of pale-pigmented healing poxvirus lesions were found on the left flank. Finally there were no significant bacteriology isolations. The cause of death was inferred as a live stranding possibly after the dolphin was separated from its social group.



Stranded common dolphin, Fort George 26th April. Photo Howard Loates

Grampian

From Peter MacDonald, regional coordinator for North Grampian

In April, summer-like weather brought fine days to the Firth and some fine sightings. Bottlenose dolphins were recorded in various areas of the Firth with Burghead to Banff faring well. Groups of dolphins were recorded close in at Findochty and Cullen Bay, and towards Pennan. Harbour porpoise were sighted in Cullen Bay but tended to be in pairs and well out to sea. Minke whales were once again back in the Firth this month, with sightings at Macduff and Burghead. The most exciting sighting of the month was of a fin whale at Burghead.

May kept us in the summer mood and sightings were also on the up. Groups of dolphins were seen on most days at Spey Bay and further into the Firth. Harbour porpoises were seen close to the shore and one sighting from the hostel kitchen window was a particular treat! Minke whales amazed us once again by being so close into shore, which brought renewed hope for another grand year for sightings. A fin whale again made an appearance in the Firth on the 24th and 30th May. We also had a report from a local fisherman of what appeared to be 15+ pilot whales, encountered on the 30th. The weather started to crash towards the end of the month, but on the whole it was'nae a bad wee month for watching! Thanks particularly to Alan Airey for all his watching and reports!

South Grampian

Compiled by Luke Saddler, SWF volunteer

There were numerous bottlenose dolphin sightings throughout both April and May, most notably off Stonehaven, Aberdeen Harbour and the surrounding area. Large pods were sighted regularly, with the largest (of 25 individuals) on the 19th April. There were a few sightings of individual minke whales in mid May off Girdleness and Collieston and also a few sightings of an unidentified large whale off Peterhead in late May. Harbour porpoises were sighted on a few occasions, with a flurry of sightings at the Bullers of Buchan, north of Aberdeen, on the 20th April. Five Risso's dolphins were sighted at Muchalls, roughly 10 miles south of Aberdeen, on the 26th April.

South East Scotland**Compiled by Luke Saddler, SWF volunteer**

It has been a fairly quiet few months in South East Scotland. Two bottlenose dolphins were seen in Tayport Harbour, Dundee on the 8th April, and six were sighted in the South Esk estuary, just east of Edinburgh, on the 5th May. Another group of six bottlenose dolphins were sighted south of Edinburgh, 1 km north of Dunbar on 16th May.

West Sutherland**Andy Summers, Sutherland Highland Ranger**

West Sutherland was rather quiet during April and May, with not much to report. The weather in May was rather awful and lots of windy days made observations difficult. A single orca was seen near Handa Island on 2nd April but did not hang around. There were very few reports of porpoises and only two minke whales were reported. Both minke whales were in the last week of May at Clachtoll and Stoer lighthouse. Finally, three bottlenose dolphins were seen in the Sound of Handa on 24th May.

West and South West Scotland (Hebrides)**From Laura Mandleberg, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust Sightings Officer**

This season's first minke whale was seen from a local fishing boat off the north coast of Coll towards the end of March. Since then a spectacular spell of settled weather in the Hebrides has led to good sightings of minke whales. Local whale-watch vessels have been treated to groups of whales actively feeding at the surface throughout April.

Basking shark reports have arrived early this year: first reports were received from fishing boats off the north coast of Iona in mid-April and since then reports have been steadily rising as the spring season gets into full swing.

Bottlenose dolphins were reported by members of the public just once in March (off Colonsay) but were reported five times in April. Small groups were seen off Kilhoan pier (off north west Mull) and in Mallaig harbour at the beginning of the month and then again further south off the Arran coast. A few days later, five dolphins were seen off Easdale by a local boat operator. These dolphins stayed in the area and continued to delight passengers aboard *MV Porpoise II* for three consecutive days. A larger group turned up further north in the Sound of Iona in mid-April.

Two sightings of common dolphins were reported in mid-April: a group of 20 were sighted off the west side of Iona and a small group of common dolphins were seen from a yacht off the Isle of Scalpay, north Harris.

May lived up to its reputation again as being a busy month for cetacean sightings. Minke whales continued to be regularly sighted around the local area, as well as further north and south of Mull. Common dolphins featured high on the list of sightings throughout May; a particularly large group of several hundred dolphins were reported by local fishermen off the Isle of Coll. Basking sharks were also regularly reported, particularly around Coll, Tiree and the Treshnish Isles. There were also sightings of the less frequently observed Risso's dolphins, which were seen feeding by one local operator off the Treshnish Isles. Another operator came across the even more rarely sighted white-beaked dolphins off the Cairns of Coll.

In terms of strandings; an adult male Atlantic white-sided dolphin was washed up on a beach on the west side of Mull in mid-May. Scientists from the Scottish Agricultural College came over to Mull to pick up the animal. Results from a post mortem examination revealed no obvious cause of death.

Other Reports from South West Scotland**Compiled by Luke Saddler, SWF volunteer**

A fair number of harbour porpoise sightings were reported in the last few months, whilst five individuals were sighted off the Mull of Galloway on the 6th April. Another four were seen off Lochaline, Sound of Mull

on 9th April. Four bottlenose dolphins accompanied Geoffrey Hunter as he travelled from Cuan Sound to Easdale on the 9th April. A further five harbour porpoises were sighted at Balcary Point, Solway Firth on the 14th April, as well as five at Southerness Point on the 26th April. Lori and Richard Handley reported eight harbour porpoise on the 14th May and six individuals on the 17th from Fascadale, Ardnamurchan. A common dolphin was sighted outside the entrance to East Loch Tarbert in the evening of the 24th May. On the 30th May in Kilstay Bay, which is within Luce Bay, three dolphins were sighted – these were believed to be either white-beaked or Atlantic white-sided dolphin.

North East England

From Andy Tait, regional coordinator for North East England

April saw five sightings of harbour porpoise, with lone animals seen 100 m off Lizard Point on the 12th and 16th, and off King Edward's Bay on the 17th. Pairs of porpoise were seen off King Edward's Bay on the 16th and 23rd of the month.

We received only three sightings in May. The first report, on the 1st May, was of a group of unidentified dolphins (up to 10 individuals) off Seaton Sluice near Blyth, and the second report was of six dolphins, possibly bottlenose, on the 4th. This pod was first spotted going close round Tynemouth Pier, then they were tracked by myself and a couple of friends all the way northwards to Seaton Sluice and up past Blyth Harbour. Finally, two porpoise were seen 50 m off Lizard Point on 4th May.

North East England: Yorkshire and Humberside

From Robin Petch, regional coordinator for Eastern England

Things seem to have been very quiet in this area and, unfortunately, I have been too busy with work to get out and about much myself. Only one confirmed sighting has been submitted, of a harbour porpoise around Immingham Harbour early in May! At an Environmental Fayre at "The Deep" in Hull recently, a number of people told us that they often see porpoises, for example at Mappleton, Spurn Point and from a dive rib at many points along the coast, but no actual sightings have yet been forthcoming. None of these facts comes as a surprise. There are also, as yet unconfirmed, reports of two or possibly three stranded porpoises having been found in the Humber, which I am currently following up.



Harbour porpoise, Humber Estuary, 9th May. Photo Roy Kersey

Porpoises are being seen by Whitby Coastal Cruises fairly regularly, and we will be spending the second weekend of the National Whale and Dolphin Watch week with them as well as our usual events at "The Deep" and Flamborough Head on the first weekend. The Hull Daily Mail is also doing a feature. We hope for an upturn in sightings as a result!

Eastern England: Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk

Compiled by Luke Saddler, SWF volunteer

April saw a number of harbour porpoise sightings, primarily in mid April and of small numbers of animals. The largest group sighted was of four individuals from Pakefield coastal watchtower, Suffolk, on the 15th. The largest proliferation of sightings was from Dunwich Heath, Suffolk, by the Dunwich Heath Seawatch. May only heralded two harbour porpoise sightings, both of which were offshore south of Colne Point on the 12th from the charter vessels 'Eastern Promise' and 'Vicky Emma'.

Eastern England: Thames Estuary

From Renata Kowalik, Thames Marine Mammals Sightings Survey, Marine & Freshwater Conservation Programme, Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

Over April and May, there were a lot of harbour porpoise sightings sent in for the Thames estuary – eleven in total. Two of the sightings were of five and nine porpoises seen off Shornemead Fort and Cliffe Fort respectively. Three dolphin sightings were also sent in but it is thought these may have been harbour porpoise as well. Eight sightings of, we think, the same seal were sent in for the Docklands area of London and one from Coal House Fort in the Estuary.

Southern England: Kent

From David Walker, Dungeness Bird Observatory, Kent

There have been a number of harbour porpoise sightings recorded from the Dungeness Bird Observatory. In April, porpoises were seen on 20 days with a peak count of ten on the 13th. Porpoises were also seen on 20 days in May, with a peak count of eight on 17th.

From Jonathan Bramley, regional coordinator for North Kent

There was an unusual sighting of two orcas about 1 mile off Folkestone, Kent on the 10th April. These were spotted by fishermen and reported via G.Burt/CEFAS. In addition, the lone sociable bottlenose dolphin nicknamed “The Dave” was seen on a number of occasions.

Southern England: Sussex

From Stephen Savage, regional coordinator for Sussex

Although there were not a huge number of dolphin sightings for April and May in our region, we did experience some unusual sightings. One or two reports of stranded common dolphins a year is not unusual for Sussex, in fact a dead, partly decomposed, common dolphin was washed up back in March. However, even a quick glimpse of a live healthy common dolphin is much more unusual. It started with a call on the morning of 13th April concerning a small (possibly a baby) common dolphin outside the Brighton Marina. We verified that it was a common dolphin. When I returned home in the evening there were several calls and updates on the answer phone. At about 8.00pm the dolphin headed out to sea in a south westerly direction and we thought that would be the last we would hear of it.

Then, on 27th April, British Divers Marine Life Rescue contacted me about a young common dolphin off Eastbourne, and were enquiring if any groups of common dolphins were in the area. A group of commons had in fact been reported as a casual sighting off Newhaven (East Sussex) on 20th April and it was suggested the young one could have been from this group. After this, we received another report of six common dolphins at Selsey Bill (west Sussex) on 28th April. The young dolphin seems to be fit and healthy and has been reported from time to time off East Sussex. Its exact location has been kept a secret to ensure that it does not get harassed

Also on 28th April, 40-60 harbour porpoise were reported off Kingmere Rocks (2-3 miles off Littlehampton West Sussex). A group of people were free-diving and suddenly found themselves surrounded by porpoises, blowing loudly at the surface. This is also an unusual sighting for Sussex.

As usual, we received several bottlenose dolphin sightings. Five sightings were reported from vessels; three in April and two in May. This includes two sightings from the Fisheries Protection Vessel - *The Watchful*. One of these latter sightings was a group of 6-8 bottlenose dolphins which is a relatively large group size for Sussex. Also six bottlenose dolphins were seen from land on April 19th off the coast at Ferring. They were moving very slowly westwards, about 500 m from the shore. Possibly the same group was seen again on April 28th at the same location by two other observers. Finally, on 27th March, a seal, believed to be a common seal, was reported in the River Ouse at Ofham near Lewes.

Southern England: Hampshire and Dorset**Compiled by Luke Saddler, SWF volunteer**

There have been numerous sightings around the Isle of Wight especially in the vicinity of the Needles on the western tip of the island – bottlenose dolphins were seen on a number of occasions in early April and early May at (perhaps unsurprisingly) Dolphin Bank and in Alum Bay. The Red Deer Sea Angling Club had a great sighting of approximately 60 common dolphins on the 12th April, again off the Needles. Late May saw a bottlenose dolphin sighting in Chichester Harbour, as well as an unidentified dolphin species in the Solent (between Portsmouth Harbour and the Isle of Wight).

South West England: Devon**From Gavin Black, Devon Biodiversity Records Centre & South Devon regional coordinator**

After such a bad start to the year, things have picked up considerably and we've have had a glut of sightings from a variety of species. Bottlenose dolphins, common dolphins, Risso's dolphins and porpoises all put in an appearance.

The beginning of April saw bottlenose dolphins spend some time on the south coast of Devon, especially in the Torbay area. Initially a group of five was spotted on the 4th April at the western edge of Bigbury Bay. Two days later a group of four was spotted off Dawlish Warren by the Environment Agency, monitoring the effects of the *Napoli*. On the 8th groups of between four and 12 were seen in Tor Bay and then on the following day, groups of similar sizes in Bigbury Bay. It wasn't until almost a month later that bottlenoses were spotted back in Tor Bay, this time again in a group of 12. After this, the only other sighting is of nine (including two young) just off Woolacombe Sands on 23rd May. I hope they spend some more time with us this year... unlike last year!

Porpoises were spotted regularly off the north coast (when the weather allowed), primarily off Capstone Point and due east of here. Oddly none were spotted any further west than this, their more usual stomping ground. Interestingly, there were a few sightings on the south coast, which is somewhat unusual. An observer on board a Brittany ferry saw an individual and a group of three 7 miles due south of Plymouth on 17th April. A group of three was also spotted just off Berry Head on 8th April.

We had a rare seemingly lengthy visit from a group of up to four Risso's dolphins between 8th and 10th April. They were first spotted on 8th in St John's Lake, which is a very shallow expanse of water, just north of Torpoint up the Tamar Estuary. They were seen a couple more times over the next two days in the same area, after which they disappeared.

Four sightings of common dolphins were reported throughout the period from four different locations between Seaton and Plymouth. Three of the sightings were of groups of no more than 14 animals but on 15th April just outside Tor Bay, a tour operator was overjoyed to see a group of between 60 and 80 with a number of calves come and join the boat for a while.

Currently we're still waiting for the good weather that was promised and looking forward to a prolific season of spotting. Many thanks to all the volunteers who sent in their records... please keep them coming!

South West England: Cornwall**From Dave Ball, Silver Dolphin Centre**

April and May were exceptional months for bottlenose dolphin sightings around West Cornwall. We received reports almost every other day.

April was a really good month, the weather was hot and sunny with over a dozen sightings of harbour porpoise, ten sightings of common dolphins, one fin whale, one large unidentified whale that was probably a minke, and a lone pilot whale.

With 17 reported sightings of bottlenose around our coast, they were often spotted from the local coastal paths. On one weekend we had three separate reports of the bottlenose from different locations.

On a weekend boat trip with the Marine Discovery, students from the Silver Dolphin Centre saw bottlenose dolphins playing in Mounts Bay, while at the same time I was leading a group of divers in Lamorna Cove where we also had an encounter with dolphins. They came and found us 20 metres down and wanted us to play. As we made our way back to the shore they followed us in and when we surfaced they continued to swim around us. They stayed in the cove for over two hours. Now I know that dolphin swim projects are not really good for the dolphins but when they want to swim around you, there is no way you can out swim them on your way back to the shore! One of the dolphins appeared to be a mother with a mature calf: first the mother checked us out, always keeping her self between us and the young dolphin, then after a while she moved aside to let the young dolphin come in for a look.

May sightings were fewer than April's, with only half a dozen sightings of porpoise, a couple of sightings of common dolphins, but more than 20 sightings of bottlenose dolphins. Again they have been putting on shows around the coast in St Ives and Penzance.

These sightings of bottlenose suggest an increase in the number of the species around our coast, which is great as it has been reported that numbers were on the decrease. From the start of the year to the end of May, we have now over 55 sightings for the bottlenose.

Our local Cornish Marine Life Rescue group is doing a display at the Glowen festival in Penzance on Sunday 24th June, and anyone interested can come along on the day and take part, or to find out more information, contact the centre.

We have also been getting reports of the harassment of marine life by local boats getting too close to dolphins and basking sharks. It is our intention to collect photographic evidence, which we will not only send to the police but we will make sure is published in the local press.

Silver Dolphin Centre, Trinity House, Wharf Road, Penzance, Cornwall, TR18 4BN. Tel: 01736 364860 or 07881 688234

E mail: conservation@silverdolphin.freeserve.co.uk

Website: <http://www.silverdolphinmarineconservationanddiving.co.uk>

South west England – Cornwall

From Dan Jarvis (sightings information reproduced with permission of Cornwall Wildlife Trust (<http://www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk>)

There are a huge number of sightings to report in this article, unlike the poor showing last time! Six species have been confirmed during the previous two months with several interesting records to discuss.

To start with, however, harbour porpoises have been spotted relatively irregularly around the Land's End and Lizard Peninsula areas, all of them involving small groups or individuals. Bottlenose dolphins in the meantime were much more scattered, with reports coming in from Fowey, Falmouth, Prisk, Penzance, Newlyn, Porthcurno, Sennen, St Ives and Perranporth. Two of these records involve interactions with common dolphins, the first occurring on 21st April off Penzance when a group of up to 18 was seen with a pod of around 25 commons. The second report came in on 15th May, as a smaller pod of approximately seven bottlenose appeared to chase off a group of six commons at St Ives.

Common dolphins have been very abundant during this period, perhaps making up for their scarce observations during winter? In any case, several small pods have been out and about around Cornwall's

coastline, with a few larger groups putting in appearances as well from time to time. Records have come in from Fowey (including one of a group of 35), Lantic Bay, Roseland, Falmouth, Penzance, Lamorna, Wolf Rock, the Isles of Scilly, St Ives, Trevoze Head and Boscastle.

Risso's dolphins, usually a rare species to see down here, have been recorded during May, with sightings of a pod of 12 animals off Fowey on 3rd May, and a group of up to four individuals spent a few days traversing the lower reaches of the River Tamar on the border between Devon and Cornwall, reaching as far up as Torpoint a little later on that month.

Two sightings of single animals make up the final two species recorded. A spyhopping pilot whale off Pencarrow Head on 20th April and a fin whale reported from Nare Head on 6th April.

The rest of the cetacean records received are all of unidentified dolphin species, but do include some very interesting information. These include pods at Polruan (possibly six Risso's on 28th April), Fowey, St Austell, St Anthony's Head, Falmouth, Coverack (~120 animals, probably commons, seen on 7th April), Logan Rock, St Ives (over 100 dolphins, probably commons, about 36 miles north of the town in mid-May), Portreath, Perranporth and Newquay (up to 40 individuals 10 miles north-west of the town, thought to be either commons or possibly striped).

I'll end the sightings roundup now with the exciting news that basking sharks started appearing around South West England as early as the middle of April. It was a fairly slow start with records of either very small groups or lone individuals but that gave way to bigger groups reaching past the double figures mark. Sightings have been made mostly along the South coast, at places such as Fowey, St Austell, Falmouth, the Manacles, Coverack, Kennack Sands, Cadgwith, Church Cove, Praa Sands, Mount's Bay, Lamorna, Penberth Cove, Porthcurno, Wolf Rock, Land's End and round on the North to Sennen, Cape Cornwall, Pendeen and St Ives. With reports of group sizes increasing quickly as I write this, it looks like we could have another great summer of seeing these huge sharks feeding around our coastline.

In other news, a few things have been going on lately for local marine conservation groups. The Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings Network (<<http://www.cwtstrandings.org>>) has been quiet with only a few dead harbour porpoises, common dolphins and grey seals being recorded by their volunteers. The most exciting local news from British Divers Marine Life Rescue (<<http://www.bdmlr.org>>) is that Cornwall Area Coordinator Dave Jarvis (my dad!) has accepted an invitation to become a Director of the charity! Congratulations! On top of this, the group has had four call-outs regarding cetaceans, none of which required any action beyond observing the animals before they moved away safely by themselves. These included a dolphin at St Ives, a pair of dolphins at Penzance, a small dolphin or porpoise at Newquay and the four Risso's dolphins at Torpoint mentioned above in the Sightings section. Three calls about seals were received, one of which resulted in the rescue of a pup from Porthgwarra due to injuries to both foreflippers and was taken to the National Seal Sanctuary (<http://www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/cornl.html>), who have released several rehabilitated seal pups recently.

Cornwall Seal Group (<http://www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk>) is beginning to raise funds to help create awareness of seal conservation by bringing out a small range of merchandise in the form of key rings and postcards depicting several well-known local seals that have been photo-identified at colonies around Cornwall. Helping to further this, Sue Sayer (who formed the CSG) made a starring appearance on Springwatch, telling viewers of her passion for seals and describing the rescue of a pup, later shown being released. Well done to Sue for great sections in the programmes!

Finally, the European Cetacean Society (<http://www.europeancetaceansociety.eu/ecs/>) conference was held in San Sebastian, Spain, at the end of April and was attended by hundreds of delegates from around the world. Some of us (me included) enjoyed a relaxing and cetacean-filled journey to and from the meeting on the Southampton P&O ferry 'Pride of Bilbao'. Observed on the journey down were harbour porpoises, common,

striped, Risso's and bottlenose dolphins, plus a minke whale. Sadly, three dead dolphins were spotted caught in trawl nets as well. On the return journey, large numbers of common and striped dolphins were once again seen, as well as major highlights in the form of fin whales, Cuvier's beaked whales, and even a pair of Sowerby's beaked whales made an impressive spectacle as they dove beneath the bow of the ferry! The meeting itself was also a big success with lots learned and new friends and contacts made – plus I finally got to meet our own Hanna Nuuttila (who is a lovely person)! Here's to the next conference: The Netherlands, 2008!

Following on from the above, members of the CWT Marine Strandings Network gave poster presentations of their research on cetacean and seal deaths in Cornwall from the last several years at the ECS, which made for very interesting reading. This was backed up with a workshop on the new Bycatch Evidence Evaluation Project (BEEP), created to help fill the void left by government budget cuts restricting the number of animals allowed for post-mortem examination, which gathered support from similar networks in other countries. Following on from this, back here in the UK, the South West Dolphin Report was launched in Plymouth by Devon and Cornwall Wildlife Trusts and the Marine Connection, making for an informative and well-publicised event.

Meanwhile, more students at Newquay College have been taught by BDMLR how to rescue marine mammals in distress, adding several new trained Medics to their callout roster at the end of the day. Duchy College students are also now interested in running a similar programme, so to help get the ball rolling, an afternoon of presentations was given on the basics of seal and cetacean rescue. Finally, a few members of the Cornwall Seal Group had a trip down to the National Seal Sanctuary during May to see the last few pups coming to the end of their rehabilitation before being released back to the wild. All had an enjoyable day and another trip could be in the works soon!

Emergency numbers:

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. CWT is the official recorder of dead marine wildlife in Cornwall.

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

People are advised not to immediately return stranded cetaceans to the water, but to keep the animal upright and wet, avoiding getting water in the blowhole, until trained Medics and veterinarians can make thorough health checks.

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.

Wales

Compiled by Luke Saddler, SWF Volunteer

Late April and early May heralded an influx of volunteers into the New Quay (Ceredigion) office of the Sea Watch Foundation allowing the commencement of both boat and land-based surveys.

One of Sea Watch's survey areas is in the Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in the north of Cardigan Bay. Surveys here involve effort-based dedicated searches of the area (two primary observers at all times) from the 33ft sailing boat *Celine* out of Aberystwyth. The first trip of the season (18th April) was a great success with four bottlenose dolphin sightings – two groups of 15 animals as well as a group of 10 and a group of four. It was great to see a few calves within some of these groups. Photo-ID was

carried out during all bottlenose dolphin encounters for analysis and potential matching to identified individuals already stored in the Sea Watch database. Favourable conditions all day enabled a few sightings of the ever elusive harbour porpoise as well. Unfortunately, such success wasn't repeated on the second trip on *Celine* (4th May) with 9.5 hours of surveying resulting in a mere single sighting – of a grey seal in the mouth of Aberystwyth harbour as we returned to port.

A survey of the area around Pembrokeshire was also carried out in late May from the motor boat *Scorpius*. Although not very successful as a Photo-ID trip with only one dolphin sighting, we did manage to see an astonishing number of harbour porpoises (about 35 individuals in a three hour interval); one even leapt fully out of the water, which is very un-harbour porpoise like behaviour!

Line-transect surveying of the Cardigan Bay SAC in the south of Cardigan Bay also commenced in April. The line-transect surveys are conducted from the motor boat *Dunbar Castle 2* out of New Quay and follow pre-determined transects throughout the SAC. The first trip (19th April), like that of the *Celine*, was a great one for sightings, with numerous bottlenose dolphin, harbour porpoise and grey seal sightings – one particularly good bottlenose sighting consisted of 14 animals, three of which were calves and one that was newborn. As with the surveys aboard *Celine*, photo-ID of the bottlenose dolphins was attempted when they were encountered.

Being West Wales, there's a constant battle to get the right conditions to allow successful and valid surveys to take place, and this had been a big factor in the last few months as the conditions just haven't been there to allow for many surveys to take place. Despite this five surveys did take place in April and May, all of which were pretty good for sightings apart from that of the 26th March, when the swell picked up significantly mid-transect, forcing an early return to port.

Sea Watch also conducts land-based surveys around the UK and in West Wales, the New Quay office conducts its surveys from the end of the pier/breakwater in New Quay itself. These commenced at the start of May and involve observers watching in two-hour shifts throughout the day and monitoring pinniped and cetacean behaviour, and associated boat interactions. Although there was little to see in the first few weeks, bottlenose dolphin sightings soon began to pick up, some weeks with almost daily sightings. There has been a mother and calf in and around the harbour quite often in the past months. The large majority of boaters have been sticking to the code of conduct with only a few instances of speeding in the vicinity of the dolphins. No harbour porpoises have been seen from this location, but the occasional grey seal pops its head up in the south-west of the Bay.



Harbour porpoise and gannets, St Brides Bay, West Wales, 7th April. Photo Roy Packer

North West England

From Dave McGrath, Sustainability Education Officer at Solaris Centre, Blackpool

In April, the only reported sighting for North West England was a pod of four harbour porpoise off Starr Gate, Blackpool on the 30th.

During the early part of May, the weather was not good for watching for cetaceans. Later in the month, both weather and tides were much better but there seemed to be a lack of fish and not surprisingly there were no reports of our porpoises. It would be very interesting to know how far our 'resident' porpoises travel. Where are they when they don't appear to be in the north-west? How far out to sea do they feed? The lack of sightings poses a multitude of questions.

Isle of Man**From John Galpin, regional coordinator for the Isle of Man, and Manx Whale & Dolphin Watch**

April started much as March finished, with regular sightings of Risso's dolphins from around the south of the Island and along the east coast as far as Onchan Head, just north of Douglas. Reports varied, some described nearly all black animals, others, groups with the more usual scarred and grey bodies of the mature dolphin. Photographs of these 'all black' dolphins confirmed that they were indeed Risso's. There were also occasional reports of a single bottlenose dolphin around the Island, sometimes seen breaching.

The most exciting sighting of April was a group of three orcas, seen by local fisherman, John Murray. The sighting began with a pair, soon followed by that of a mature male with its very tall, erect dorsal fin. These animals were seen off Little Ness, on the east coast, just a few miles south of Douglas. Little Ness is developing into a regular hot spot for cetaceans throughout the year, with lots of Risso's dolphin activity, now these orcas, and later in the year, a prime spot to see the minke whales that follow the spawning herring to this same shore.

The month continued with many fine spells of weather to allow good numbers of sightings, mainly Risso's and harbour porpoises, and the odd minke.

May saw the start of the '2007 Isle of Man Cetacean Survey', a season of line-transect surveys throughout the territorial waters of the Isle of Man. These surveys have been generously supported by the Manx government through its Department of Tourism and Leisure and the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, Wildlife and Conservation Division. Funding has been provided for 40 days of surveys throughout the year. More details of these surveys can be seen on the Manx Whale + Dolphin Watch website <http://www.mwdw.net> and <http://www.visitisleofman.com>.

The surveys are manned by a number of Sea Watch Foundation trained observers as well as local enthusiasts. A number of training sessions have been held, and 62 people have been trained and signed up for the surveys. Part of the work will establish Photo-ID catalogues of various species, in particular the Risso's dolphins and the minke whale, important and regular species around our island.

May sightings of Risso's dolphins continued, and the 15th proved to be a spectacular day. A perfect sea and warm weather produced a large number of reports of Risso's, often seen breaching, from Douglas all the way around to Port St Mary, where Richard Cope of the Manx Bird Atlas captured some remarkable shots of breaching dolphins - see <http://www.mwdw.net>.

On the 20th, while watching our singleton bottlenose breaching just off the Point of Ayre, Allan and Susan Wood, on holiday on the Island, were entertained by an orca breaching a number of times, and as it did so, it twisted in the air in order to dive back down into the water head-first.

On the 22nd, Brian Maddrell and I watched a pair of feeding minke whales just off Dalby Point when they were joined by a third, much larger whale.

Following examination by Peter Evans, it has now been recorded as a 'probable' sei whale. The photo shows a large hooked dorsal fin, long sloping back and a small blow simultaneously seen with its dorsal fin. Sei whales are one of our rarer species but are recorded in the Irish Sea, and the skeleton of one that beached on the island hangs in the Manx Museum. Whales like this have been seen in previous years.

The last strange sighting took place on the 30th, when five mature and five juvenile minke whales were seen near Port Erin. This was such an extraordinary sighting that it was immediately passed 'up the line' for Sea Watch evaluation. The description of animal size, shape, colour, dorsal fin, all indicated minke, but being so unusual it needed more complete investigation.

Following discussions with the observer, the report was confirmed as a group of 10 minke, all within 200 metres of the shore at Bradda Head. It should be noted that this area is one of the historic herring fishing grounds around the island and attracts all manner of cetaceans. Herring are abundant in those waters at this time of the year, and apparently, this season, numbers are very high.

“Visit Isle of Man” is running an online diary from June to October that will be based on reports and footage from the Manx Whale & Dolphin Watch Survey. For more information see: <http://www.visitisleofman.com/>, and see <http://www.mwdw.net/> for more on the Manx survey.

Channel Islands

Compiled by Luke Saddler, SWF Volunteer

There has been numerous sightings of bottlenose dolphins throughout the Channel Islands, some of the sightings recording quite large pods of this species primarily in April, with far fewer sightings recorded in May. Pods of 20 bottlenose dolphins were sighted in St Aubins Bay, Jersey on the 18th April, Le Hurel Slip, Jersey on the 20th April, and South of Jethou on the 28th of April. Also a pod of 30 bottlenose dolphin was sighted north of Chausey on the 21st of April. No other species were reported. Thanks go particularly to Bertram Bree for reporting local sightings here.



Bottlenose dolphin, Ile de Sein, Brittany, April 2007.
Photo Alain Troffigue

Northern Ireland & Republic of Ireland

Compiled by Lori Handley (All records are validated and available on <http://www.iwdg.ie>)

Probably the most notable sighting around Ireland in April was of an exceptionally large aggregation of bottlenose dolphins, in Donegal Bay. Up to 175 individuals were seen in at least four separate groups from a whale-watching vessel between Mullaghmore and Bundoran. The species identification was confirmed by video footage as one group stayed with vessel for approximately four miles. Common dolphins were seen on several occasions from different localities, including a pod of 100 off Seven Heads, Cork on 20th April and 60 off Sleah Head, Kerry on 27th. Orcas were seen on three occasions in groups of four or five off Cork, Mayo and Galway in the first half of the month. Sightings of harbour porpoise and basking sharks were fairly regular throughout April, appearing as lone individuals in several localities. Two minke whale sightings were reported from Sleah Head in Co. Kerry, on 17th and 19th April, and a Risso's dolphin was spotted off Bantry Bay, Co. Cork on the 11th.

Sightings of harbour porpoise, basking shark, bottlenose dolphin and common dolphin continued fairly steadily throughout May. Orcas were seen on only one occasion when a pair was seen initially just outside Ventry Harbour, Kerry on the 2nd. May saw the return of fin whales to Ireland, with the first sighting of the season of eight individuals off Ram Head, Ardmore, on the 20th. Frances Gallagher and Padraig Whooley from IWDG observed another group of potentially 10 fin whales from Roches Point, Cork on the 29th May. On 28th Nick Massett observed eleven basking sharks over a two-hour period around Sleah Head. Breaching was witnessed on four occasions by different animals, and one breached clear of the water four times, just 100 m from the cliffs! That sighting sounds difficult to top, but as a grand finalé to the month, Andrew Malcolm observed 35 basking sharks in 40 minutes, which is something of a record. Sharks were seen throughout a dedicated watch in a wide arc between Mine Head, Waterford and Capel Island, Cork, on 31st May.

Sea Watch Foundation's project "Encouraging Public Participation in Cetacean Monitoring" is supported BG International, Dong Eterforskning og Produktion and Atlantic Petroleum, and the Countryside Council for Wales. Further details on all our activities can be found on the Sea

Watch Foundation website (www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk), by e-mailing
<info@seawatchfoundation.org.uk> or by calling Sea Watch on 01545 561227.