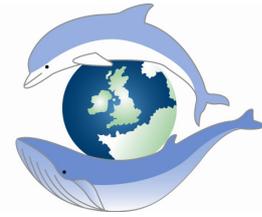


sea watch FOUNDATION



Editorial

Welcome to the September 2009 issue of the Sea Watch Foundation news sheet which covers the sightings, news and events that took place in August and September of this year. Thanks to all that sent in sightings and to those who were involved in the compiling of this issue. Please continue to send in all sightings, and if you would like to contribute to future news sheets, do contact me.

Best wishes,

Gemma Veneruso, Sightings Officer (gemma.veneruso@seawatchfoundation.org.uk)

NEWS

ASCOBANS Outreach and Education Award presented to SWF's Director

On the 18th September 2009, Sea Watch Director, Dr Peter Evans was presented with the "ASCOBANS Outreach and Education Award" at the 16th Meeting of the Parties to ASCOBANS at the United Nations Campus in Bonn, Germany. ASCOBANS is an international Agreement signed by ten countries (referred to as Parties) from North-western Europe that



are obliged to co-operate and promote conservation management, surveys and research, pollution, mitigation and public information. The triennial award was given for recognition of efforts to further the conservation of small cetaceans in the Agreement Area through education and outreach efforts within Sea Watch and the European Cetacean Society in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. It is a great honour to have received this award, when many other larger environmental conservation bodies exist in Europe dedicated to similar aims.

During the meeting, strategies were put in place to reduce two of the key threats to small cetaceans: bycatch and noise disturbance. New conservation and recovery plans have been established for the harbour porpoise in the North and Baltic Seas

respectively. These changes aim to reduce bycatch of individuals, support research and public awareness initiatives and establish a network of marine protected areas. It was also decided to produce guidelines that address the problem of underwater noise causing detrimental effects on marine mammals during the construction of renewable energy activities. For further information on ASCOBANS and the outcome of this meeting, visit www.ascobans.org.



Strandings

The months of August and September received high numbers of strandings, including a few surprises. An unusually large number of strandings of the northern bottlenose whale (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*) was reported. This is the same species that infamously stranded in the River Thames in 2006. The northern bottlenose whale is a beaked whale endemic to the North Atlantic, which normally inhabits deep offshore waters over 1,000 metres deep. The species can reach up to almost ten metres in length and has a characteristic bulbous head and dolphin-like beak. It feeds on deep sea squid, fish and other organisms that inhabit the sea bed at great depths. Hence it is a species rarely encountered on the continental shelf of the British Isles. However, every year at roughly this time, small numbers of these animals are seen in relatively



shallow waters around the British Isles. It is at this time that these animals are thought to make migratory movements from the Norwegian Sea to the North Atlantic, and it is possible that some whales become disorientated and take a wrong turn at some stage on their journey. Once this happens and they have reached shallow water where they are unable to feed, they become weak and have a very low

chance of finding their way back to their usual habitat. Sometimes, loud sounds such as the mid-frequency (2-10 kHz) active sonar used in military activities can cause beaked whales to strand.

In the past two months, there have been three accounts of northern bottlenose whale strandings in the UK. The first occurred on 2nd August near Cromarty, in the Moray Firth, where three animals were reported. Two of these were juveniles, which live-stranded and were euthanized, but the third was reportedly seen swimming

back out to sea. Another cause of stranding can be when one individual is ill, and it will often purposely swim into shallow water to die. Strandings of some cetaceans often occur in groups since the family members will follow this individual and not leave until it dies. However, too often the family cannot make their way back to deeper waters.

It wasn't until September that the next northern bottlenose whale appeared, this time in the south of England at Bournemouth, Dorset. This female, nicknamed Gilbert, was first reported on 12th September and was seen almost daily from land. There was hope that Gilbert had made her way back out to open waters when she apparently disappeared for a few days, sadly only to be found washed up on the beach at Alum Chine on 21st September, entangled in fishing gear.

On the same day, a juvenile northern bottlenose whale of five metres length was seen in the river Clyde, and swam right into the city limits of Glasgow! After two days, the animal disappeared and despite searches by members of British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR), the juvenile wasn't seen again.



The northern bottlenose whale was not the only beaked whale species to surprise visitors at the beach. On 13th August, a Sowerby's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon bidens*) was found alive in very shallow waters at Blakeney Point, Norfolk. Little is known about these animals as, like the northern bottlenose whale, they prefer deep canyons and continental shelf slopes, and they also seem to be shy towards boats so that they are rarely seen except during stranding events. Luckily, this mysterious animal was relatively unharmed and was successfully re-floated thanks to a team of volunteers.

Yet another deep diving species, the Risso's dolphin (*Grampus grampus*), stranded on the 17th September in north Anglesey where it was found dead at Cemlyn Bay. These animals can often be seen from shore in western parts of the UK, and in recent years, has been seen regularly in this area during the months of September and October. This particular animal had been individually identified just a few days earlier at Point Lynas as only the second Risso's dolphin to be seen in this area in two successive years, fuelling the hypothesis that the same group of Risso's dolphins may travel to the north Anglesey coastline each year in September.



The post mortem revealed a greatly enlarged spleen, and indicated that the animal suffered bubble lesions (gas embolism), a form of decompression sickness.



Finally, the last notable stranding, and perhaps the most surprising, was a 28ft humpback whale that was found dead in the River Thames. This is the first time a humpback whale has been seen within the Thames, and in fact, humpback strandings in the UK are relatively rare with just 14 strandings in the past 20 years, although one of these was not far away – in Sandwich Bay Kent in March 2001. The post mortem

concluded that the whale's stomach was empty so it may have been that starvation had been the cause of death.

Gemma Veneruso, SWF

SIGHTINGS SUMMARY & HIGHLIGHTS

Bottlenose dolphin reports continued to be high over the summer months with regular sightings in their usual haunts such as Cardigan Bay in West Wales and the Moray Firth, Northeast Scotland. Lots of sightings of the species continued in East Lothian, particularly off North Berwick, a beach town near Edinburgh. These animals first began visiting these waters regularly in May and they have been seen in high numbers ever since. September was particularly good for bottlenose sightings for this region with ten reports of the species. Bottlenose dolphins were also seen off the Grampian coastline, in Tyne and Wear, Cornwall (including a group of 50 between Lands End and Isle of Scilly!), the Channel Islands, North Wales and Anglesey and Northern Ireland. One highlight must include the 80 bottlenose dolphins observed by Alan Airey travelling east along the southern Moray Firth coastline!



Here in Cardigan Bay we were treated to a number of great sightings of the species. On the 20th August from the SWF office window in New Quay, we noticed two dolphins in surprisingly shallow water at the beach chasing fish. They were immediately recognised as Smoothy and her calf Lumpy, two individuals that are part of our Adopt a Dolphin campaign. Onlookers enjoyed the spectacle as the dolphins swam in just a couple of metres of water unperturbed by children body-boarding alongside. This event was repeated again just two days later when the same two dolphins came into the shallows once more! These individuals have been visiting New Quay harbour very regularly this summer. It is a popular area with mother-calf pairs, probably as there are good opportunities to feed here in the shallow bay.



Another close encounter occurred on the 20th September during a collaborative survey onboard CCW vessel 'Pedryn'. During a focal follow of a group of 12 bottlenose dolphins in Tremadog Bay, the animals and boat passed through a swarm of barrel jellyfish. One animal in particular began to play football with the jellyfish, kicking them out of the water and significantly splashing those onboard! For further

details, read Pia's account in the regional roundup below.

Short-beaked common dolphin sightings once again were reported at a number of spots in the UK including the Moray Firth, North Devon, Cornwall, Pembrokeshire, Northwest Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. Large numbers occurred near Skokholm Island in Pembrokeshire with regular sightings of groups of 100 and 200 individuals seen on the 26th September. However, the top spot must be the Republic of Ireland where sightings of hundreds of individuals were seen regularly and a super pod of 700 was reported from Co. Galway!



It was good to see that Risso's dolphins reappeared off the north coast of the Isle of Anglesey in September. This species has visited the area in September for at least the past two years, and a couple of individuals have now been matched in consecutive years, suggesting that the same group may come to visit this location each year. In the past two months, this species was also seen in North and Northeast Scotland, Cornwall, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland.

There were a number of humpback whale sightings again over these months, beginning with Shetland where a single humpback has been seen repeatedly since



the 15th July. These sightings have continued throughout August and into September. More unusual sightings of these animals occurred in Northeast England, with two animals spotted off Lindisfarne, Northumberland, and another two reports of a single whale at the outer Farne Islands. County Kerry in the Republic of Ireland actually had seven reports of humpback whales in September.

Continuing with the great whales, there were a number of reports of fin whales, again in the Republic of Ireland, this time in County Cork. There was also a possible sei whale seen offshore of Cornwall in late September.

Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Please send in all sightings to Gemma at:
gemma.veneruso@seawatchfoundation.org.uk

REGIONAL ROUNDUPS

SHETLAND

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

The majority of sightings from the Shetland Isles in August came from Sue Arber and



George Wallace whilst onboard the NORCET ferry (see Sue's summary below for more on the NORCET sightings). All of the positively identified animals were harbour porpoise apart from a few sightings of unidentified dolphins. Other sightings reported this month included a minke whale at Cunningsburgh on the 11th, a humpback whale spotted off Maywick on the 15th and again off Scalloway

on the 30th, six Risso's dolphins off Maywick on the 22nd, and four killer whales at Lamba Ness on the 22nd.

Humpback whale sightings continued into September with a single animal reported off Papa Stour, and two Risso's dolphins recorded off Boddam. The other remaining four sightings in September were harbour porpoise, a species that has not been anything like as common in Shetland as it was in the 1990s.

ORKNEY & NORTH SCOTLAND

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

This region once again proved to be rich in sightings, with high numbers of reports in August coming from Paul Castle at Strathy Point on the 7th, including three minke whales, 25 harbour porpoise, 12 Risso's dolphins and two unidentified dolphins. High numbers of sightings, such as of white-beaked dolphins, Risso's dolphins and harbour porpoise, were also recorded by Karen Munro from Thurso Bay. Ivor Thomas from the John O'Groats ferry recorded good numbers of harbour porpoise from Gills Bay and its surroundings in addition to Burwick, South Ronaldsay. A minke whale was also seen at this spot on the 20th. Other species that were reported included 30 short-beaked common dolphins three miles off Dunnet Head on the 31st, and three killer whales north of Stroma on the 5th.

September sightings were also regular with harbour porpoise being the most common. This species was seen at many points along the Caithness coastline, including large groups of up to 20 animals off Duncansby Head. Other



species included minke whales at Holburn Head (Caithness), Farr Point (Sutherland) and mid Pentland Firth, Risso's dolphins off Wick and Holburn Head, short-beaked common dolphins near Kirkwall, Orkney, and a rare sighting of four possible bottlenose dolphins off Skarfskerry Caithness.

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for Northeast Scotland

August

August had an exciting start with a juvenile minke whale feeding quite close to the cliffs at Lybster. I watched the minke lunge feeding on the surface and saw the whale forcing fish to the surface. This minke whale must have been impressed with the area because it returned on 6th and 8th, then on the 9th it brought a juvenile companion.

During August at Lybster, there were nine recorded sightings of harbour porpoise with most being reported by Colin and Grace Carter from their boat 'Samar'. Many of the porpoises seen were thought to be family groups since they would consist of two adults with a calf of varying size.

Dave Nicolson spotted groups of minke whales off the Whaligoe Steps at Ulbster on the 9th. He phoned me around at 1pm and said he had seen a group of three then a group of four feeding close to the Steps. I was passing later in the day so I called in to get the details. Whilst there, I spotted a group of harbour porpoise and wandered across to take a closer look. After a few minutes, a single minke whale appeared close in shore heading north.



On the 31st, there was a group of Risso's dolphins to the east of Lybster. These were spotted from the cliffs just before they rounded the headland. Before they vanished from view, I was fortunate to see a juvenile tail walk.

Although August was a good month for sightings in Caithness, the east coast had some very windy weather during the month, resulting in far more seen along the north coast.

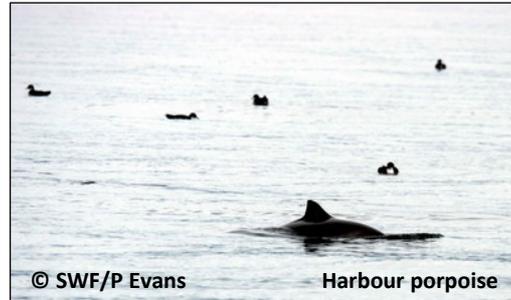
September

The windy weather on the east coast was more of a problem during this month than the previous one with very few days that were suitable for sea watching. The 13th was an exception with a calm sea where there were groups of harbour porpoise covering a wide area in front of the cliffs at Lybster. I spotted four groups, 2-2-3-6,

feeding - amongst them were three calves. There was also a rare sighting for the east of Caithness of a single bottlenose dolphin.

Colin Carter from his boat saw five harbour porpoise on the 28th, and a group of 15 on the 29th.

Sinclair Manson who is a vet and keen bird watcher spends a lot of time travelling the Caithness coast. Sinclair has reported many a whale and dolphin, and this month he sent me reports of five Risso's dolphin moving north at Wick on the 9th. He also spotted large groups of harbour porpoise passing Duncansby Head on the 15th. The groups consisted of 20, 15 and 10 porpoises respectively.



MORAY FIRTH

Written by Alan Airey, Regional Coordinator for Moray Firth (Kessock/Inverness to Cullen Bay)

August

As I would expect during the summer months, bottlenose dolphins were seen somewhere along the south Moray Firth coast every day during August. The Kessock Narrows at Inverness seem to be becoming more popular again with bottlenose. In the 1990's, they were regularly seen here leaping about and chasing salmon and other fish on the incoming tide, but for various reasons not yet fully understood, this area then fell out of favour. It is good to see that they are being seen more regularly there, and they were watched hurling big salmon about at the mouth of the River Ness and even in the harbour. The Chanonry Point/Fort George narrows always attract dolphins, especially with several mother and calf pairings who are virtually permanent residents in the Inner Moray Firth. August sightings here were generally good, with activity tailing off later in the month as the salmon run wanes. As we travel east along the south Moray coast, bottlenose dolphins were regularly seen off Burghead and from Buckie to Cullen Bay, with the wildlife boat 'Gemini



Explorer' particularly having many fantastic encounters. Bottlenose sightings by residents of Findochty and Portknockie were usually made from the kitchen window or from the garden whilst doing daily chores. Group sizes have ranged from two to 26, with 10 to 18 being the average and usually with one or two calves.

Harbour porpoises were again rather scarce this month, but on the 16th and 26th, two porpoise were seen off Buckie, five off Fort George on the 3rd, and a further five porpoise off Portknockie on the 11th August.

August has never been a particularly productive month for sightings of minke whales along this stretch of the coast, and this year was no different with only one minke sighting off Burghead on the 24th.

We had only one confirmed sighting of common dolphins during August, when two were seen at Portknockie on the 15th, but on the 9th, I watched a small group of 10+ dolphins leaping approximately 10 km north of Burghead, through the telescope; their size and behaviour suggested that they also might have been common dolphins. Common dolphins are becoming regular summer visitors to the Moray Firth so I was surprised we were not having more sightings.

A sunfish was also seen by the Gemini Explorer off Cullen on the 10th.

September

The highlight of the month, well for me at least, came on Friday 11th September. I had just finished work and turned up at Burghead to see several bottlenose dolphins approaching from the west, then further behind I noticed another group. As the first group headed east I saw a man struggling to watch the distant dolphins through his small binoculars, I pointed out that the second group might be easier to see as they were now just 50 metres away. We got chatting and to our astonishment we watched wave after wave of small bottlenose dolphin groups of fours, sixes and eights coming from the west, some passing by close into the headland and others a little further out. One dolphin in particular, called 'Fitri', was really noticeable due to a spinal deformity; it has a hump at the rear of its dorsal fin. I counted at least 80 bottlenose dolphins, and considering the Moray Firth population is estimated to be about 130 animals, then a good proportion of them had just passed us by. I phoned friends further east and they observed them passing by off Lossiemouth, although they were a little further off the coast there.



Bottlenose dolphins were sighted several more times through September - at Fort George, Burghead, Hopeman, Findochty, and Portknockie.

When the big group of bottlenose passed by on the 11th, I was concerned about three harbour

porpoise that I'd seen earlier that were directly in their path. Bottlenose dolphins do attack and kill porpoise in the Moray Firth. I then received a text saying that there were also 14 porpoise off Lossiemouth. As the dolphins passed, I kept a close eye on the area where the porpoises were, and my heart sank as I suddenly saw a lot of

feverish activity by the dolphins in the very same spot. However, I saw no sign of any porpoise been tossed about so hoped the dolphins had been just getting excited over a fish. Once the 80+ bottlenose dolphins had passed, I was very relieved to see the three porpoise re-appear and carry on going about their business. Luckily, at Lossiemouth, the 14 porpoise were close to the harbour, and the dolphins had passed by a little further out. Further sightings of porpoise were made later in the month at Burghead and Fort George.

No minke whales were sighted during September. Unfortunately, I was away in Greece during the calmest sea conditions, and when I returned, the weather was not favourable to ascertain whether there were any about in the usual feeding area that I see them, several kilometres north of Burghead. (However whilst away, I did see bottlenose dolphins from land on three occasions in Greece!).

Basking sharks often turn up in the Moray Firth from June onwards, but September and October are the prime months for sightings. I saw one large basking shark feeding off Burghead on the 2nd of September, with the sun glinting off its huge dorsal fin. Unfortunately, that turned out to be the only sighting of the month.

The crew and passengers of the wildlife boat 'Gemini Explorer' had a fantastic encounter on the 29th. They had just had a thrilling display by 20 bottlenose dolphins off Findochty, then as these animals disappeared west, they were aware of another group of dolphins coming up behind the boat. As they got nearer, they noticed they had very large dorsal fins, and these turned out to be a group of eight Risso's dolphins including a calf, which they were able to watch for five minutes.

NORCET surveys

[Written by Sue Arber, Regional Coordinator for North Grampian \(Cullen-Peterhead\)](#)

NORCET surveys are a collaboration between SWF, Aberdeen University, Northlink Ferries, and EGCP. They involve volunteers carrying out whale and dolphin line transect surveys on the MV Hascosay from Aberdeen harbour *en route* to the Northern Isles.

During August, I was kept busy taking part in several NORCET surveys to Orkney and Shetland Isles. On 6th to 8th August, accompanied by George Wallace, we were lucky enough to record the best sightings of the season! From leaving Lerwick on Friday evening until dusk, we spotted a total of 34 harbour porpoise and a minke whale, plus a number of unidentified dolphin species. Off Peterhead we spotted more dolphins and another minke. The approach to Aberdeen saw us surrounded by approx 40 white-beaked dolphins and another minke spy-hopping, all in all a very successful trip. On the 30th August, I was accompanied by Claire Carrigan on a survey to Orkney. We spotted a minke off Rattray Head, Aberdeenshire, and a total of 16 white-beaked dolphins, some of which were bow-riding the Hascosay. Again we had some good sightings of bottlenose dolphins. Our thanks go to Emily at EGCP and

Northlink Ferries and the crew of the Hascosay for their continued support for these surveys.

I watched eight bottlenose dolphins, including a calf moving past Portknockie towards Cullen Bay on the 20th September. There have been good sightings of bottlenose dolphins throughout August and September at Banff, Macduff, Cullen, and Portknockie, with group sizes ranging from six to 24 animals.

SOUTH GRAMPIAN

Written by Ian Sim, Regional Coordinator for South Grampian (Findon-Arbroath)

Between August and September, there were several recorded sightings by land- and sea-based surveys recorded around Aberdeen, Stonehaven and South Grampian. The main visitors were the regular population of bottlenose dolphins, minke whales, and harbour porpoise, as well as many sightings from NORCET trips. The highlight of the year must be the white-beaked dolphins around the Aberdeenshire area, between two and eight miles off the coastal shore between Stonehaven and Catterline with some acrobatics.

North Berwick has seen a large activity with bottlenose dolphins in these recent months, likely to be a large part of the population from Aberdeenshire which are appearing to be spreading further south each year, yet to be confirmed by a more detailed research study.

SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF



Bottlenose dolphins remained in East Lothian in August, with sightings at Fidra Island, North Berwick and one further north at Carnoustie beach. Two minke whale sightings were recorded offshore near the Auk Oil Field on the 2nd and 8th August.

Numbers of bottlenose dolphin sightings increased in September with ten reports. Most dolphins were seen at North Berwick, including a group of 20 animals on the 6th. However, sightings were also recorded at the Firth of Forth, Leven (Fife), and off Dundee.

NORTH EAST ENGLAND

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

All sightings were reported in September and they came with a few surprises. There were four reports of bottlenose dolphins, three of which were in Tyne and Wear, ranging in group size between three and 20 animals. There were also two probable bottlenose dolphins off the Holy Isle on the 23rd September. Bottlenose dolphin sightings that are normally few and far between in the region have been relatively constant since mid summer.

Another rare treat was three sightings of humpback whales. The first came on the 7th, when two animals were spotted off Lindisfarne, Northumberland. Another animal was then recorded off the Outer Farne Islands on the 13th, and again on the 20th.

**EASTERN ENGLAND**

Written by Dave Powell, Regional Coordinator for East Anglia

From August to September, a total of 63 animals (almost all porpoises) were reported with 48 in Norfolk, four in Suffolk, and 11 in Essex. Most sightings were of individuals or small groups up to five. Two harbour porpoise calves were seen in Norfolk. Animals were recorded from five sites in Norfolk, the most productive by far being the area between Walcott to Mundesley. This was in no small way due to the efforts of Mick Fiszer.

Most Essex sightings were from the areas around the Estuaries of the Rivers Blackwater or Thames. Just two sightings of four animals were sent in from Suffolk, both from Pakefield Coastwatch Station. The vast majority of sightings were of harbour porpoise, the exception being a report of a dolphin species off Pakefield Coastwatch Station in Suffolk in July.



The big surprise of the period came on the 13th August in Norfolk, when a Sowerby's beaked whale (*Mesoplodon bidens*) was found stranded on the end of Blakeney Point by some local sailors. The following account is from Edward Stubbings Seasonal Warden on Blakeney Point: "At 12:50 on the afternoon of the 13th of August, I

received a phone call from Jimbo, of Temples boats, saying that some sailors were



trying to help a dolphin back into the water on the seaward side of Far Point, and that I should get down there quickly. I picked up the seal stretcher and jumped on the quad. Halfway down the beach, I picked up Richard Berridge (assistant warden on Blakeney Point) and Richard Porter (Blakeney Point regular and photographer). We found six or seven people with a large grey cetacean

which they were keeping wet. Apart from blood coming out of two small cuts on the tail fin, the animal appeared to be otherwise uninjured. They had already tried, without success, to move it back into the water. We quickly decided to try again, this time with the aid of the stretcher.

It was at this point that Richard Berridge and I realised that it was certainly not a dolphin. Although we didn't know what it was, we decided to get it to safety and try and identify it later from Richard Porter's photos. We got it onto the seal stretcher, which was far too small (the stretcher is 1.4m in length, 1.8m including the handles), and after about 20m of extreme effort by eight people, we managed to manhandle it back into the water. The whole process from us arriving on the quad to the moment that the whale swam away took roughly half an hour. At first it tried to swim back to shore but we headed it back out to sea, and it eventually swam right out and apparently crossed the bar out to the open sea*. Some people said that they had seen a second animal jumping just offshore as we were encouraging our animal to head out to sea! The two Richards and I only ever saw one animal.



We eventually identified it as a Sowerby's beaked whale (confirmed later by Peter Evans, Director of Sea Watch). By using the photos, our memory of the event and Richard Berridge pacing out the pit left by the animal in the sand, we decided that the animal was roughly 3.5m in length, and may well have been a juvenile. It did, however, have a long beak and a well-developed melon."

*Blakeney is a natural harbour with a sand bar protecting and separating it from the open North Sea. The whale was just a few hundred metres from the end of the point TF462991, and although it was on the seaward side of the Point ,it was inside the bar.

NORTH KENT

Written by Jon Bramley, Regional Coordinator for North Kent

A humpback whale was found dead under the Dartford Bridge crossing on Saturday September 12th.

Initially, reports of a whale blow being seen led people to believe that another northern bottlenose whale was in the Thames, but the body of the animal was then recovered and determined to be a juvenile male measuring 9.5m. A subsequent post mortem has determined that the whale may have died from starvation.

The whale had first been spotted off Gravesend on Thursday the 10th, but no further sightings were reported until the animal was found dead on Saturday at Dartford. A post mortem examination indicated that the whale had died of starvation, and was estimated to be about two years old.

SOUTHERN ENGLAND

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Two dolphins were recorded on the 13th August off Peveril Point, and a single common dolphin was spotted one mile off the Beaulieu River entrance on the 24th.

There was just one report in September, of two harbour porpoise at the western entrance of the port of Dover on the 11th.

CHANNEL ISLANDS

Written by Bertram Bree, Regional Coordinator for the Channel Islands

Sightings

There were 20 sightings reported in August and September, all of which were bottlenose dolphins. Group sizes ranged from two to 30 animals, and dolphins were observed predominantly off the east and south coasts of Jersey. One report of two animals was recorded off Sark.



News

At present, we are collaborating with Tom Brereton in the UK of Marine Life, backed by Clive Martin, and groups like GECC - key partners of Al Lark in the Bay of Mont St Michel, sharing our resident local cetacean populations where the 300 or more local bottlenose dolphins which are generally resident off Jersey, live. In August and September, a number of groups of around 20 and 30 bottlenose dolphins were observed moving up from the Bay of Mont St Michel to the Minquiers Reef just to the north of the Bay and just south of Jersey, in a key feeding area for the species. This is where Al Lark are based at Cancale east of St Malo, with their main RIB 'Tursiops' available to members of Al Lark, (which anyone can join to do three-hour long Dolphin cruises from Cancale).

Also in Jersey, South Coast Cruises have a large boat which leaves from St Helier harbour almost daily. In August and September, they have been regularly observing groups of up to 20 and 30 bottlenose dolphins along the south-western coast of Jersey. Mention you are a SWF contact if you want to book a cruise, and they will show you photos they take of the local dolphins if time permits and point them out to you if you go on their cruises!



Also in Grouville Bay on the east coast of Jersey, and on the north coast of Jersey, regular observations of bottlenose dolphins were made throughout August and September, in particular near the green navigation buoy off Gorey pier.

On the coast of Normandy, our contacts, the GMN and GECC, noted the northern bottlenose whale records in the top site in France for this species in Lower Normandy during this time, so the species was obviously active in the area possibly entering our part of the Channel from the North Sea.

Our colleagues in the GECC, with the co-operation of Poitiers University, produced a thesis on our local bottlenose dolphin population which is believed to be one of the largest in Western Europe, with over 300 animals photo-identified.

We are working now with Cecile Vincent and Vincent Ridoux at La Rochelle University, who are involved with satellite tracking our two species of seal, which are also resident, as well as a number of basking sharks being satellite tracked in our area. Radio-tracking of cetaceans by our French colleagues is also taking place in our area, backed by those colleagues at La Rochelle University, where the CRMM is based, who detail some of their work on their website.

At the end of April 2010, we hope to hold a marine protection meeting for our area of the Channel in Jersey at the Societe Jersiaise. All are welcome, particularly sea mammal enthusiasts and cetacean specialists, with more publicity next spring.

SOUTH DEVON

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

There were just three sightings reported in South Devon, all in September. All sightings were of bottlenose dolphins, including 14 animals off Teignmouth on the 6th, 14 near Babbacombe, and a group of ten off Dartmouth.



CORNWALL

Written by Dan Jarvis & Gemma Veneruso, SWF

(some sightings data reproduced with kind permission of Ray Dennis/Cornwall Wildlife Trust's Seaquest Southwest project)

Sightings

Lots of different species were spotted during this period - so a pretty exciting report this time! Six different cetacean species were recorded, the most prominent being harbour porpoises, with multiple sightings of small pods at Cape Cornwall, Land's End, Porthgwarra, and Porthcurno. Other sightings of them occurred at Lizard Point, Coverack and the Manacles. Bottlenose dolphins were relatively quiet, however, as only a relatively small number of records were reported - from Newquay, Porthtowan, Godrevy, Pendeen,



Sennen, and Falmouth. On the other hand, a very large group of 50 animals was seen off Wolf Rock, halfway between Land's End and the Isles of Scilly, on 19th



September. A few pods of common dolphins were around at Cape Cornwall, Porthgwarra and Porthcurno, with an unusual sighting close to shore at Marazion as well. Moving on to the species that we don't get as much down here, a pod of white-beaked dolphins was reported off Fowey in August, and a pilot whale seen close

to shore at Mevagissey on 20th September as well. A minke whale was also observed off Porthgarra during September. Unidentified dolphins were seen at Sennen and Tintagel.

Basking sharks were still out in force, albeit in small numbers still, as they were reported from many locations between Zennor, around Land's End, and all along the south coast. This included a report from Veryan Bay near St Austell, which is normally an area that is a bit thin on the ground for sightings of them. Ocean sunfish were also out and about quite a bit, with individuals seen at Perranporth, St Agnes, St Ives, Cape Cornwall, Coverack, and Whitsand Bay.

Seawatch Southwest survey sightings

(Sightings data used with the kind permission of Russell Wynn/Seawatch Southwest www.seawatch-sw.org).

As explained in the previous June/July article, Russell Wynn and his team from the National Oceanographic Institute of Southampton and partner organisations have been carrying out dawn to dusk seabird and marine animal surveys from Gwennap Head, near Land's End, for the last couple of years. The current survey season is now in full swing, and here is a summary of some of the marine life sightings they have recorded (a full list is available to view on their website – link above). Harbour porpoises were seen on many days, mostly small pods. Bottlenose dolphins were



seen on a few occasions, with a sighting on one day in August of 30 animals together. Common dolphins were also recorded intermittently, although on a couple of days, well over 100 animals were spotted. Minke whales were recorded on numerous days in September, but there was also a sighting of a possible sei whale a long way offshore on 25th September. On 30th September, a pod of four

Risso's dolphins was observed (which takes the combined confirmed number of species in Cornwall recorded over this period up to seven). Ocean sunfish were spotted on a few occasions, while small numbers of basking sharks were seen regularly throughout the period.

News

August and September were largely quiet for callouts for British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org.uk) again, although an injured herring gull was picked up in Newquay, which had to be euthanased. On 10th August, a member of the public found a loggerhead turtle washed up alive at Loe Bar, near Porthleven, and it was taken for rehabilitation at Newquay Blue Reef Aquarium. This was then followed by a callout on 4th September to another live loggerhead turtle at Trebarwith Strand, near Tintagel, which also went to the Aquarium for treatment, and eventual release back out to the wild in their natural habitat in the tropics. At the end of September, the grey seal pup rescue season finally started, with three pups being taken for

rehabilitation at the National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk) on consecutive days. The pup with the net entanglement injury that was rescued in July, and mentioned in my previous article, made a quick recovery and was released back to the wild in August. The Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings Network (www.cwtstrandings.org) continued to receive reports of Portuguese Man-o-War throughout August and September, amongst other foreign visitors washed up on the beaches. On the mammal front, a handful of dead grey seals and harbour porpoises were recorded, along with a bottlenose dolphin and a striped dolphin (which takes the cetacean species total up further, to eight!). Other animals of interest included a leatherback turtle at Bude, and a rare thresher shark in fresh condition at Hayle, which received considerable media attention.

Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) has applied for, and been granted, funds to monitor seals around the Isles of Scilly over the next few months by the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Sustainable Fund. This exciting project will hopefully reveal new information about what our local seals' habits are in that area, and hopefully connect more seals that have been photo-identified on the mainland to the archipelago.



Events

During August and September, BDMLR conducted several mock dolphin rescues to raise awareness and funds. Locations visited were Rock, Newquay, St Agnes, Portreath, Camborne, Helston and Praa Sands, working with Cornwall Council, RNLI, St Ives and Camborne Round Tables and Trevarno Gardens. Meanwhile, the National Seal Sanctuary took part in the Marine Conservation Society's annual 'Beachwatch' campaign and organised a beach clean with the National Trust at Gunwalloe, which was quite successful and, most importantly, made our environment safer for all.

Emergency numbers:

For dead cetaceans, seals, turtles, sharks 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, and sends trained volunteers to tag, measure and photograph all carcasses.

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

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

Stranded turtles should also not be returned to the water and will need urgent transport to the nearest suitable rehabilitation centre once medics arrive to give first aid.

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. Instead, observe from a safe distance and keep other people and dogs well away to minimise distress to the animal until help arrives.

NORTH DEVON

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Thanks to Chris and Sharron Blackmore, there were good numbers of sightings reported in August and September. The vast majority were harbour porpoise that were recorded at their usual haunt, Capstone Point, Ilfracombe. Sightings of the species were also recorded in August near Combe Martin and Croyde. A group of 15 dolphins that were thought to be short-beaked common dolphins, were spotted off Lundy Island on the 1st August.



Porpoise sightings at Capstone Point continued strongly into September with 16 sightings in the month. There were also reports of porpoise in a number of areas surrounding Ilfracombe, at Morte Point, Croyde Bay, Combe Martin, and east of Lundy.

BRISTOL CHANNEL AND SOUTH WALES

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Only two sightings were reported in this region, both in mid-September. The first occurred on the 10th when one porpoise was spotted at Three Cliffs, Gower Peninsula. On the 19th, a relatively large group of eight harbour porpoise including six juveniles were seen between Porthcawl and Ogmore-by-Sea.

WEST WALES

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Bottlenose dolphin sightings continued to flood in, thanks to SWF staff and volunteers conducting regular land- and boat-based watches. There were just three

days in August when dolphins were not seen from New Quay, a prime spot to



observe the Cardigan Bay population! Group sizes ranged from one to 13 animals. Another regular site for the dolphins was Mwnt, south of New Quay. Sightings were also recorded at Aberporth and Ynys Lochtyn. There were a few reports of harbour porpoise within Cardigan Bay, at Cwmtudu, Ynys Lochtyn,

Aberporth and Aberystwyth.

Bottlenose dolphins continued to be seen regularly off New Quay through September, as well as the odd porpoise sighting from Cwmtudu and Aberporth.

There were a number of sightings reported from Pembrokeshire in September such as regular short beaked common dolphin sightings from St. Ann's Head, Skokholm and Skomer Islands. Group sizes reached more than 100 on a number of occasions south of Skokholm Island, with up to 200 animals were seen on the 26th. Porpoises were also regular in these areas.



'Pedryn' Survey in Tremadog Bay

Written by Pia Anderwald, SWF

Between 12th and 20th September, Sea Watch conducted five days of photo-ID surveys for bottlenose dolphins in the northern part of Cardigan Bay in collaboration with the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) and Marine Awareness North Wales



(MANW), onboard the CCW boat 'Pedryn'. This was the third year that these September surveys have taken place, and, as in the previous two years, they were very successful, with a total of 25 sightings – seven of harbour porpoise in groups of one to five, and 18 of bottlenose dolphin in groups of two to 15 individuals. The bottlenose dolphins were encountered mainly along the coast

from Criccieth to Porthmadog, around the Tudwals in the north, and along the inner part of Sarn Badrig. A high proportion (two-thirds!) of the 18 groups had calves with them, including two new-borns. On one occasion, the mother of a calf could be observed throwing a small fish (possibly a young mackerel) into the air in water of no more than 1m depth.

The highlight of the trips was probably the last day, when a group including three calves was encountered just off Criccieth. Being a sunny calm Sunday, the area was one of the centres of recreational boat activity, and while the dolphins had been feeding in several sub-groups when they were first encountered early in the morning, they soon concentrated into a tight group and headed away from the coast, possibly in part as a response to some harassment by speedboats and two jet-skis. After merging with a second group of dolphins at some distance to the coast and away from the boat traffic, the animals started to engage in some social interaction and play. There were high concentrations of barrel jellyfish (*Rhizostoma octopus*) in the water in the vicinity. Apparently seeking out some of these jellyfish along their way and letting them glide along the full length of their bodies, some dolphins, including a mother and calf which were bow-riding 'Pedryn' for over 10min, flicked the heavy cnidarians out of the water with a powerful upward stroke of the tail (the behaviour can be seen at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/8308796.stm>, on a video which one of the team took, and some still images are included with this article).



Following a news item by BBC Wales about this footage, various people attempted to find explanations of possible evolutionary advantages for this behaviour. However, none of those explanations made much sense in the light of the observed combination of behaviours, and we therefore conclude that the dolphins (adults, juveniles and calves alike!) were simply having fun.

NORTH WALES

Written by Peter Evans, SWF

The weather in North Wales during August was relatively unsettled, leading to lower numbers of sightings than usual. Most sightings were of harbour porpoise, thanks particularly to land-based watches made by Mike Thompson on Anglesey, where they were seen



regularly at Llanbadrig and in Bull Bay. Numbers were generally small, either single animals or aggregations up to six. The species was also reported from Point Lynas, though numbers were thought to be down on previous years. A boat survey along the south side of the Llyn Peninsula on 9th resulted in a porpoise sighting at the St Tudwals Islands. A bottlenose dolphin was also recorded on that survey, at Trwyn y Fulfran, whilst further east, a group of six was spotted at North Hoyle wind farm on 3rd. This last sighting is one of the more easterly records that we have of this species in North Wales. Risso's dolphins were also seen on one occasion, when a group of seven was spotted on 12th one mile north of Moelfre, by Jon Shaw during a boat trip.

During September, there were as many as 14 sightings of Risso's dolphins, reflecting its regular presence along the north coast of Anglesey, with sightings of groups numbering up to 12 from several locations, but particularly between Bull Bay and Periwinkle Bay, including Point Lynas, between 11th and 27th. There was also a sighting of 25 Risso's dolphins on 13th at Porth Ysgadan on the north coast of the Llyn Peninsula. One of the Risso's dolphins photo-identified from Point Lynas sadly turned up dead a few miles west at Cemlyn on 17th. Pia Anderwald of SWF attended the post mortem. Its greatly enlarged spleen revealed that it had died of a gas embolism, the only instance of this recorded in UK during 2009, although in earlier years this species and other deep divers have occasionally been found dead with this symptom.

There were at least 21 sightings of harbour porpoise from scattered locations from Tremadog Bay and the Llyn Peninsula to around Anglesey eastwards to Great Orme Head. Sightings were generally of small groups up to five. Bottlenose dolphins were also seen on at least 30 occasions at various locations. Observations from the "Pedryn" surveys in Tremadog Bay between 12th and 20th are described in Pia's article that precedes this. Elsewhere, the species was seen in groups of up to 16



around the north and east coasts of Anglesey (Between Amlwch and Puffin Island), and along the north coast of the Llyn Peninsula, mainly between 12th and 27th of the month.

NORTH WEST ENGLAND

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Harbour porpoises were the main species spotted in this region during August and September. They were observed from Blackpool, Ainsdale, Pickering Pasture, and in Cumbria at St Bees Head and between Port Carlisle and Glasson. On the 18th August, three common dolphins were also spotted from St Bees Head.

ISLE OF MAN

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

August sightings in the Isle of Man were relatively good, the most common species being the minke whale with 15 records. These animals were regularly seen from Contrary Head, Calf of Man, and off Bulgham Bay. Harbour porpoises were reported on 12 occasions, with hotspots at Dalby Point and Bradda Head. There were also reports of Risso's dolphin off Douglas, Peel and Calf of Man.



Minke whale

© SWF/ P Evans

Fewer sightings were recorded in September, with just seven reports. Four of these were porpoise sightings - at Peel, Douglas, and two off Dalby Point. Minke whales were recorded at Laxey Bay and Black Hear, and one unidentified dolphin was seen off Bradda Head.

HEBRIDES

Written by Laura Mandleberg, HWDT Sightings Officer

August

Groups of bottlenose dolphins were spotted on several days in August off the coast of Mull. This month included a visit from four dolphins into Tobermory Bay. Despite the wet and misty weather, HWDT staff managed to get out to photograph the group. Most of the dolphins were matched to the HWDT catalogue. Other sightings were made between Barra and Eriskay, in Canna Sound, and off the Isle of Jura.

Minke whales were still being reported from throughout June. Despite the bad weather, HWDT received more sightings in August than this time last year. Most sightings were made north of Mull, but there were a few sightings around Jura, one

in the Kilbrannan Sound, and one 10 miles off the coast of Troon. More unusually, though, was a sighting halfway down the Sound of Mull in Aros Bay, an area where minke whales are rarely seen.

There were only five sightings of common dolphins in August, including two seen in Loch Carron. We are particularly interested in this sighting as there were two resident dolphins in Loch Carron a couple of winters ago. The animals stayed in the loch playing around boats for the whole winter. This is unusual as common dolphins are normally summer visitors to our coasts. It is not yet clear whether these are the same two animals, but we are keen to find out more.

There was a sighting of Risso's dolphins off the Butt of Lewis. The dolphins were in a mixed feeding group with about eight bottlenose dolphins (possibly an offshore group). This is only the second sighting of Risso's dolphins reported to us this year.

The definite highlight of the month was the humpback whale seen by a local boat operator, as well as observers from the shore, in the Sound of Iona on the 13th August. We are hoping to obtain a photo of the animal's fluke for identification purposes; it may well be the same animal that "Silurian" encountered west of Canna during a survey in June.

Reports of basking sharks and sunfish continued throughout August.

September

Bottlenose dolphins were seen on eight occasions in September. The dolphins were spotted at the start of the month in Loch Craignish, Kintyre, then later in the month further north around the Corryvreckan Gulf, and finally up around Mull towards the end of the month, where they stayed for several days. All sightings except one were of bigger groups of between 10 and 20 individuals. The presence of newborn calves was also confirmed for the first time this year. Pictures from one encounter were sent in to us from a dive boat, and it looks like one of the new mothers is the well-marked individual #5043.

Some very large groups of harbour porpoises were reported in September. Groups of up to one hundred-strong were spotted feeding in the tide off Grasspoint, Mull, and also in the Sound of Raasay. Harbour porpoises are known to form large foraging groups at this time of year. It is also the time of year that they are mating and this may be another reason why they aggregate in big numbers.



Risso's dolphins

© SWF/ P Evans

Minke whale sightings are dwindling in number now, as their feeding season draws to a close. There were just five sightings of single minke whales, three of which were recorded on the same day from a keen-eyed reporter on the ferry passage between Canna and Skye. Similarly, there were just two

basking shark reports and no common dolphins seen in September indicating that the seasonally abundant food supplies are drying up.

There was, however a group of about 20 Risso's dolphins spotted off the Treshnish Isles in the middle of the month. This is one of very few sightings of this species that we've received this year.

Finally, there was a possible report of a northern bottlenose whale in Loch Linnhe this month. This follows several other reports of the species elsewhere in the UK, including a young bottlenose whale in the River Clyde. This is the time of year when this, normally offshore species, makes a southwards migration, and so are sometimes seen off our coasts as they follow prey inshore. However, they seem to run the risk of becoming disorientated if they travel too far inshore, for example as happened to the 'Thames whale'.

NORTH WEST SCOTLAND

Written by Ian French, Regional Coordinator of North West Scotland (Mallaig-Cape Wrath)

August continued with the unbroken sunshine and very little wind that we had experienced in the previous months, making sightings fairly easy. The common dolphins were still showing sporadically in the Minch, and venturing into Gairloch on three occasions during August. Porpoise sightings continued to rise quite rapidly and we were recording numbers in pods of approx 40 plus. This is quite early in the year for large groups as it is usually around October and November the porpoises gather within Loch Gairloch in such large group sizes (we have sightings data for the last 20 years for Loch Gairloch, so very easy to extrapolate information like this).

Minke whale sightings stayed fairly consistent again, based on previous years sightings, with individuals being seen on average once every two days.

Basking shark numbers were down compared to the last few years, and a lack of jelly fish swarms seemed to reinforce the theory that the plankton blooms were not as intense this year.



September started with a bang with 11 days of storms and high winds preventing any boat-based sightings, but shore-side viewing revealed the porpoises still in fairly large pods dotted around Loch Gairloch, with lots of lunging and rooster tails not unlike Dall's porpoise!!!

When the weather subsided, we were able to get out further into the Minch with the hope the storms had stirred up the plankton, and the hope of some big sightings. Alas, only very few minke sightings were recorded, with the almost resident pods of porpoise right into shore line of Loch Gairloch.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF (Sightings data produced by IWDG and SWF)

The majority of sightings in August were harbour porpoises, in groups of between two and six animals. The animals were seen at spots throughout the Antrim coastline, as well as off Newcastle and Belfast Lough. There was one report of 12 bottlenose dolphins off Bangor on the 30th August, and two groups of unidentified dolphins were seen on the 1st and 7th August, at Portstewart and Portrush respectively.

There were more dolphin reports in September with three counts of unidentified dolphins reaching a group size of up to 15 animals at Red Bay, Co. Antrim. There were five records of definite bottlenose dolphins this month, including large groups of 25 at Portstewart and 30 at Portrush. Harbour porpoises continued to make an appearance, and two minke whales were observed off Dunmore Head on the 9th September.



REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF (Sightings data produced by IWDG with some additions from SWF)

As usual, there were great numbers of sightings reported these months, and in August alone, nine species were recorded! The most common species was the harbour porpoise, which was reported 18 times from various points around the country. Bottlenose dolphins were predominantly seen off Co. Galway but were also reported off Counties Kerry, Clare, Dublin, Wexford and Cork. Short-beaked common dolphins were regular visitors to a number of locations in County Cork including a group of 100 at Cape Clear Island on the 28th. There were also a number of sightings of this species in Kerry, such as 350 animals off Valentia Island on the 22nd, and 175 at Clogher Head on the 31st. Minke whales were fairly regular to the Cork and Kerry coastlines, with 10 reports in August. Rarer sightings this month included two Risso's dolphins off Hook Head, Co. Wexford on the 7th, two killer whales at Annagh Head, Mayo on the 15th, three northern bottlenose whales at Carlingford Lough, Co. Kilkenny on the 22nd, a probable fin whale on the south-west

coast on the 15th, and 12 long-finned pilot whales in the northwest of the country on the 26th.



There were even more sightings in September, the most common species being once again the harbour porpoise with 54 reports seen throughout the country. Short-beaked common dolphin was the second most regular species, with 28 reports. They were seen in their usual haunts in Counties Kerry and Cork, including groups of 100 and 200 animals.

However, they were also seen off Mine Head in Waterford on the 26th, and the highlight must be 700 animals at Clifden Bay, Co. Galway on the 13th! Bottlenose dolphins were common at many locations around the country, in September. Minke whales were predominantly seen from Sleah Head, Co. Kerry. They were also found around the neighbouring Blasket Islands and Puffin Island, numerous locations in Co. Cork, off Dunree Head and Doorin Point in Co. Donegal, at Clifden Bay in Co. Galway



and Loop Head, Co. Clare. The great whales made more of an appearance in September, with nine reports of fin whales and seven of humpback whales. All fin whale sightings came from Co. Cork, whereas the humpback whales were all seen in Co. Kerry, particularly around Clogher Head. There was a single report of three killer whales on the 12th at Slyne Head, Co. Galway.

Further details on all our activities can be found on the Sea Watch Foundation website (www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk) or by e-mailing info@seawatchfoundation.org.uk.