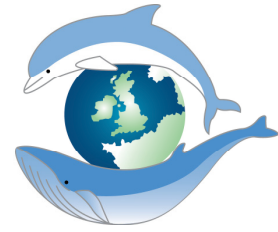


sea watch FOUNDATION



Editorial

Welcome to the November 2009 edition of the Sea Watch Foundation news sheet, reporting Sea Watch sightings, activities and news for the months of October and November. As the summer draws to a close we see the number of sightings reducing from October to November, most likely due to the wintry weather. Despite this there was still plenty to report with 12 species of cetacean recorded over the two months. Thanks to all that contributed towards the news sheet. All cetacean sightings are important so please do continue to send them in!

Best wishes,

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



SIGHTINGS HIGHLIGHTS OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2009

October saw the rate of sightings gradually drop, highlighting the end of the season for most researchers and commercial boat operators. By November, there was little to report, partly due to the fact that there are few observers at this time of year and because of unfavourable weather conditions for watches.



The harbour porpoise as usual was spotted at many locations throughout the UK and Ireland, with important areas including the Norfolk coast, North Devon, Aberdeenshire and a number of locations in Ireland. Bottlenose dolphins were also reported in their usual haunts including the Moray Firth and Aberdeenshire and were still being recorded in the south east of Scotland at East Lothian at the beginning of October. In previous years,

East Lothian received occasional sightings of this species. However, since last May there have been repeated sightings of bottlenose dolphins in large numbers in this area. With a number of sightings also of this species in North-east England, including the most southerly record on this coast that we are aware of at Withernsea Sands, North Humberside, this may suggest that we could be seeing a shift in the range of this species. Something to keep an eye on next season!

Other sightings of bottlenose dolphins occurred off Jersey, Dorset, Cornwall, Cardigan Bay, Isle of Man, the Hebrides and Republic of Ireland in October along with the increasingly large groups that were seen in North Wales particularly off Anglesey. We know that many of the Cardigan Bay dolphins travel northwards in September and October and form large groups off North Wales in the winter months and, as anticipated, a number of large groups were sighted off Anglesey in November.

Also in Wales, an unusual stranding of a Sowerby's beaked whale was found on the 25th October near Bridgend. This is the same species of beaked whale that live-stranded at Norfolk last August. A very different kind of whale, the minke whale, was spotted off Skomer Island in Pembrokeshire. Also in Pembrokeshire, common dolphins continued to be recorded in relatively large groups of up to 50 animals -no "super" pods this time though! As has occurred in previous years, the common dolphins seem to have had a more southerly distribution during these months, with winter sightings also reported in Cornwall and Republic of Ireland. During recent summers, we have been seeing increasingly more sightings of common dolphins in the north of Scotland and Orkney, confirming the northerly shift of the species with several sightings in the North Sea. This October, however we had just one report of common dolphins in Orkney, and this was unconfirmed. Perhaps



the Scottish waters at this time of year are just too cold to bear!

There may have been few common dolphins about, but a number of interesting sightings of other species came from Scotland. Killer whales were seen a couple of times in the north, including 25 animals at Muckle Flugga, Shetland and a visit to Trinkie in the north-east by a pod of six animals. Also, in the north, Risso's dolphins interestingly made up the majority of Shetland's sightings in October. This is comparatively



late in the year for sightings of this species in the region. Further south, during just ten minutes of watching in the Moray Firth, Regional Coordinator Alan Airey saw three harbour porpoise, 13 bottlenose dolphins and a minke whale! The most unusual sighting from Scotland, however, has to be the possible sperm whale that was spotted near Channerwick, Shetland on the 20th November! Earlier, a sperm whale washed up dead at Balmedie beach, Aberdeenshire on the 30th October.

Ireland was host to six species in October and November including the great whales as per usual, with records of fin whales off Co. Cork and humpbacks in the waters off Co. Kerry.



However, one of the more unusual sightings of this period came from SW England where 25 white-beaked dolphins were seen on the 10th October off Cornwall! Small numbers of white-beaked dolphins are seen quite regularly off the Dorset coast, but with rather few winter sightings in this region. This species occurs also in the southern North Sea, but elsewhere its range may be shifting somewhat northwards.

If you spot any cetaceans, unusual or not, please send them in to:

gemma.veneruso@seawatchfoundation.org.uk.

Gemma Veneruso, SWF

REGIONAL ROUNDUPS

SHETLAND

Compiled by Jane Gardiner, SWF volunteer

October and November were quiet months for cetaceans around Shetland, with four recorded sightings in October and only one in November. Risso's dolphins made up the majority of sightings in October with groups of two animals sighted on both the 2nd and 19th around Foula and to the north of Mousa Sound respectively. 25 killer whales were seen off Muckle Flugga on the 6th October. A live stranding and eventual deaths of two Atlantic white-sided dolphins at Uyeasound occurred on 10th November, and later in the month a sperm whale was sighted near Channerwick on 20th.



ORKNEY AND NORTH SCOTLAND

Compiled by Jane Gardiner, SWF volunteer



A total of three species were observed in the waters around Orkney and North Scotland during October, with no reported encounters in November. Firstly, a single minke whale was seen from land at Scarfiskerry, Caithness on the 2nd. The next few weeks were quiet, but a possible sighting of three short-beaked common dolphins at Scapa Flow, Orkney, followed on the 17th. Finally, a single harbour

porpoise was seen from Rackwick, Hoy in Orkney on the 26th.

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland

October was a very turbulent month with very strong winds, leaving few days with the sea sufficiently calm for spotting cetaceans.

Colin Carter reported four sightings of harbour porpoise along the east coast between Lybster and Forse during a two-day period. With a single harbour porpoise on the 13th and

groups of three, two, and two on the 14th. All these sightings were seen from his creel boat "Samar" and were seen between 800m and 1.3 miles from the shore.

On the 28th an exciting report came in from George L. Campbell of Wick. He reported seeing between six and eight killer whales feeding off the Trinkie. The Trinkie is an outdoor sea filled swimming pool used during the early part of the 20th century (hardy bunch the Scots!). George first became aware of them at midday when he looked out of his window. The pod was moving south, away from the house where George lives. George was unable to provide



much detail, because he was not in a position to get out of the house to get closer to the orca group.

The wind has continued to blow and turned the sea into a mass of churning white caps for most of the month of November. During this month the beaches have been a sad sight with larger than normal numbers of dead grey seal pups washing ashore because of the terrible sea conditions.

There is no sign of a let up forecast for the remainder of the year, and with the days becoming shorter, this could be one of the worst watching periods that we have had for many years in the far north.

SOUTHERN MORAY FIRTH

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

October brought 33 reported cetacean sightings to my part of the Moray Firth of which 18 were bottlenose dolphins, 11 were harbour porpoise, and the remaining four were minke whales.

We quite often have some good settled weather up here in October, ideal for spotting porpoise, who seem to be about in greater numbers at this time of year. All but one of the porpoise sightings were off Burghead, with the most individuals seen at any one time being 12 on the afternoon of the 12th. Three porpoise were also seen off Covesea village, near Lossiemouth on the 17th. Saturday the 17th was a particularly pleasant day for October, in one 10-minute period, I spotted the the porpoise just mentioned, 13 bottlenose dolphins travelling east just a few metres out from the rocky shore of Covesea under the cliffs, and a distant minke whale, all in flat calm seas.

Earlier in the month, I had seen two minke whales on the 5th and a further minke whale on the 12th, all off Burghead. Bottlenose dolphins were seen frequently all along the coast during October. The biggest group of bottlenose dolphins was of 27 off Hopeman on the 5th - they were grand to watch performing huge leaps in the two-metre swell, as well as a little surfing. Groups of between two and 14 bottlenose dolphins were also seen from Fort George to Portknockie throughout the month. As usual, Findochty and Portknockie produced most of the bottlenose dolphin sightings.



October is usually a good month for basking sharks in the Moray Firth, but this year, I only saw one on Oct 8th off Burghead. Less daylight and worsening weather brought fewer sightings still in November, with only 24 recorded. What turned out to be the last minke whale of the year for this area was seen off Burghead on the 4th. A few fine days of calm seas produced harbour porpoise sightings off Burghead and an unidentified dolphin approximately 8 km north. Of the 18 bottlenose dolphin sightings in November, all but three were along the stretch of coast between Buckie and Portknockie, where the group size was usually 10-15. The only other bottlenose dolphin sightings were six seen north of Fort George near Inverness on the 21st, and five off Burghead on the 7th and 11th.

SOUTH GRAMPIAN AND SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND

Compiled by Jane Gardiner, SWF volunteer

The month of October started off in good shape with respect to cetaceans in the South Grampian and Southeast Scotland area. The 10th was a particularly successful day with six confirmed sightings of harbour porpoise and one minke whale recorded from Collieston, Aberdeenshire. Sightings continued throughout the month with pods of one to two harbour porpoise seen on the 12th, 14th and 26th from various locations around Aberdeenshire. Encounters, however, decreased as we moved into November with only a single animal sighted off Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire on the 17th.

In addition to the harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphins were well represented in this area, with reported sightings on the 2nd, 12th, 14th and 19th of October. A particularly high sightings rate was observed on the 24th when four schools, ranging between seven and 12 animals, were encountered throughout the day from Torry Battery in Aberdeen. The

beginning of November started slowly for bottlenose dolphins but eventually picked up with pods of 26 and 20 animals recorded on the 20th and 26th, from Stonehaven and Torry Battery, respectively.



NORTH EAST ENGLAND

Compiled by Jane Gardiner, SWF volunteer

The month of October was quiet for cetaceans in the Northeast of England with only a single sighting of five harbour porpoise from offshore of Marine Drive, Scarborough on the 11th. Unfortunately sightings rates did not pick up into November with no recorded encounters.

EASTERN ENGLAND

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

There were seven sightings recorded along the east coast of England, all of which were harbour porpoise. Most sightings were reported from the Norfolk coast with porpoises being spotted at Blakeney Point on the 4th and 10th October, Mundesley on the 6th and Walcott on the 17th October and 19th November. A single porpoise was recorded at Orford Ness, Suffolk on the 12th October, and at Holehaven, Essex on the 21st.



SOUTHERN ENGLAND

Two bottlenose dolphins were reported from Branksome Chine in Poole Bay, Dorset on the 27th October.

CHANNEL ISLANDS

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

Large groups of bottlenose dolphins were seen off the east and south coasts of Jersey during the first half of October. The largest group consisted of 30 individuals which were spotted off Gorey in Grouville Bay. Two more sightings of 20 animals were reported, at Grouville Bay and south of Elizabeth Castle in the south of Jersey. There were no further sightings reported in the second half of the month.

There were just two sightings of bottlenose dolphins in November, which also occurred in smaller groups, both from northeast Jersey. Three animals were seen at La Coupe on the 17th and a group of six was recorded at St Catherine's Breakwater on the 30th.

**SOUTH DEVON**

There were no sightings reported from South Devon.

CORNWALL

Written by Dan Jarvis and Gemma Veneruso (SWF) (some sightings data reproduced with kind permission of Ray Dennis/Cornwall Wildlife Trust's Seaquest Southwest Project)

Sightings

A pretty quiet period compared to last time, mainly as a result of lots of bad weather, but a decent scattering of sightings were still reported involving a few species. Firstly, harbour porpoises put in appearances off St Ives, Land's End, and Porthcurno, as well as at a number of locations around the Isles of Scilly. Bottlenose dolphins were very subdued, however, as they were only spotted at Godrevy and Falmouth. Common dolphins were present a few times in the vicinity of Fal Bay, and other pods were also seen off the Eastern Isles and St Agnes at the Isles of Scilly. A small pod of Risso's dolphins that was seen off Gwennap Head completed the tally of identified dolphin sightings, although unidentified groups were reported from Polzeath, Hayle and St Ives. Going to larger species, minke whales were seen off Porthgwarra and Porthcurno, while a large whale was observed off St Agnes at the Isles of Scilly on 14th October, most likely a fin whale. As for other species, no ocean sunfish was seen this time, but a few late basking sharks were still around off Land's End and Port Quin.

Seawatch Southwest survey sightings

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

The Seawatch Southwest survey ended in mid-October, and is due to restart again in July 2010. However, the last couple of weeks' worth of survey effort produced frequent harbour porpoise and common dolphin sightings, occasional bottlenose dolphins, and ocean sunfish, plus a few Risso's dolphins, minke whales and basking sharks. However, the true highlight was a pod of 25 white beaked dolphins on 10th October, a relatively rare species in this part of the UK.

News

Due to the prolonged periods of bad weather, October and November have seen an unprecedented number of calls about seals that may be in trouble, with a large proportion having to be rescued and taken for rehabilitation at the National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk) and RSPCA West Hatch (www.rspca-westhatch.co.uk) by British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org.uk). In fact, both hospitals virtually reached capacity on several occasions, and space was only freed up by four seals being sent to RSPCA East Winch in Norfolk, just to make room for the new arrivals. Many of the earlier rescues were of young pups having been separated from their mothers, while the majority of the latter pups that were rescued were weaned but malnourished and suffering from various injuries. Also during October, due to the number of rescues involving climbing down cliffs, BDMLR purchased their own rope climbing equipment and the training of "medics" in how to use it will be started soon.



The Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings Network (www.cwtstrandings.org) was kept busy with a number of calls regarding dead seals, but also a few about harbour porpoises and common dolphins. Also of note were dead basking sharks at Perranporth and Gunwalloe within a few days of each other, plus the continuing influx of Portuguese Man-O-War.

Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) welcomed volunteers from the Looe Voluntary Marine Conservation Area group to their local haul-out to show them what seals in other parts of Cornwall get up to, and so that they could see how different it is to watch seals from a cliff-top. Also in progress is some research on entanglement of seals in discarded materials, which will hopefully be ready to issue in the near future.

Events

With the incoming winter, events are fewer. However, the National Trust at Godrevy organised a beach clean to tidy up parts of the popular beaches in the area. Cornwall Seal Group also delivered an evening talk on seals to the Helford Marine Conservation Group, which was very well received by the many attendees.

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 Jane Gardiner, SWF volunteer

A single species, the harbour porpoise, was sighted throughout the months of October and November around the coast of North Devon. Seventeen out of a total of twenty-four sightings were recorded in October, with the largest pod of eight animals seen at Baggy Point on the 5th. The majority of sightings, however, were composed of just one to two animals. Capstone Point, Ilfracombe, was by far the most common location for harbour porpoise encounters during this period, with no reported sightings in other areas throughout the month of November.

WEST WALES

Compiled by Jane Gardiner, SWF volunteer

October got off to a great start with a total of 20 sightings composed of four different species within the first eight days. Three pods of short-beaked common dolphins were observed in Pembrokeshire on the 1st, with the largest group size, sighted to the west of Skokholm Island, estimated at 50. Neighbouring Skomer Island was, however, the most common location for this species, with two encounters noted on the 1st and one on the 2nd.

Harbour porpoises were seen on the 1st, 5th and 8th in various locations around West Wales although all six encounters on the 5th were reported from Ramsey Sound in Pembrokeshire. Whilst a pod consisting of five animals was seen, the majority of sightings included just one to two porpoises. The 8th of October had a particularly high



number of sightings including a pod of five bottlenose dolphins, two of which were calves, in New Quay Harbour, Ceredigion. A minke whale was also sighted that day off Pigstone Rock off Skomer Island.

Unfortunately, the rate of sightings did not continue, with no further recorded cetacean species during the rest of October, or November.

NORTH WALES

Written by Peter Evans, SWF Director



During winter months, bottlenose dolphins disperse from Cardigan Bay and increasingly turn up off Anglesey and the North Welsh coast, sometimes in large groups. During October, bottlenose dolphins were seen either singly or in groups ranging in size from 3 to 30, off the north and east coasts of Anglesey (mainly in Red Wharf Bay, but also off Puffin Island, Dulas Island, Point Lynas, and in Bull Bay) on 2nd, 3rd, 12th, and 28th. The other species recorded regularly was harbour porpoise. There were 13 sightings (of single animals or groups of up to 8) during October, all from the Anglesey coast (mainly off Point Lynas and in Bull Bay, but also around the Skerries), on 5th, 10th, 12th, 13th, 22nd, and 26th.

Sightings on 10th and 13th took place during a marine mammal course that Sea Watch ran with the School of Ocean Sciences for Bangor University students. There was also a single Risso's dolphin sighted on 3rd October between Point Lynas and Amlwch.

November saw a downturn in records, probably at least partly due to the weather conditions that prevailed through the month. However, on 9th November, a photo-ID survey was undertaken by Sea Watch, out of Amlwch, when between 30 and 35 bottlenose dolphins were seen in scattered groups in Red Wharf Bay east towards Puffin Island, along with two sightings of harbour porpoise off Point Lynas. A group of 15 bottlenose dolphins was seen once on 28th and twice on 30th November between Moelfre and Point Lynas in Anglesey. Harbour porpoises were sighted three times on 4th, 7th, and 11th, with up to six animals seen, all in Bull Bay.



NORTH WEST ENGLAND (Inner Liverpool Bay: Hilbre Island – Dee Estuary to Walney Island – Morecambe Bay north)

Written by Dave McGrath

There were only four sightings of cetaceans, all harbour porpoises, from this region over the autumn period and unfortunately both the October sightings were of stranded dead animals. On 4th October one was found dead on the beach at Cockersands near Pilling. Later in the month, on 25th, one was washed up at Heysham (Lancs) showing evidence of being hit by a ship.

In November, two porpoises were seen feeding together in the inner Ribble estuary on the high tide at Crossens, north of Southport. The last sighting of the period was a very brief view off New South Promenade, Blackpool on the rising tide on the morning of the 30th.

ISLE OF MAN

Compiled by Jane Gardiner, SWF volunteer

October kicked off well with a single minke whale sighting 15 miles off Langness Point on the 1st. Minke whale sightings then continued throughout the month with encounters on the 8th, 10th, 12th, 14th and 15th. Group sizes mainly averaged between one to two animals; however



a pod of five minke was seen to the NE of Langness Point on the afternoon of the 8th. Mid-October proved to be a good time to see harbour porpoises in the waters surrounding Dalby Point, with 13 sightings documented within two days. The majority of these were recorded on the 14th, with a pod of 20 being worth a mention. As the month came to a close, bottlenose dolphin sightings rapidly increased, with five sightings, one of which was estimated at eighty animals, recorded at various locations on the 26th. This continued onto the 27th when a pod of 20 was observed between Niarbyl and Dalby Point.

On the whole, November was extremely quiet with the exception of the 8th when two minke whales were recorded off Bulgham Bay whilst three pods of between two and one hundred bottlenose dolphins were encountered near Douglas Bay.

HEBRIDES

Compiled by Gemma Veneruso, SWF

All sightings during October were either bottlenose dolphin or harbour porpoise reports. Bottlenose dolphins were reported from Grassport, Croig, and a group of twenty probable bottlenose dolphins at Loch Craignish. There were three porpoise reports this month, all of which were at the head of Loch Duich.



There were no sightings reported in November.

NORTH WEST SCOTLAND

There were no sightings reported for this region during these months.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Compiled by Jane Gardiner, SWF volunteer

Cetacean sightings occurred consistently throughout October, with harbour porpoises regularly sighted from several locations. Black Head, Co. Antrim, is definitely worth a mention with pods of between two and four animals reported here on the 5th, 19th and 25th. Also seemingly important for cetaceans in this area is Bloody Bridge, Newcastle, where seven harbour porpoise were seen on the 10th, and minke whales were spotted on the mornings of both the 4th and the 10th.

A slight drop in sightings occurred in November with only a single species, the harbour porpoise, recorded throughout. The same locations, however, proving to be important with a pod of 20 encountered on the 8th at Black Head, Co. Antrim. Previous to this, nine animals were spotted near Bloody Bridge on the 7th.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Compiled by Jane Gardiner, SWF volunteer

An impressive total of one hundred and forty-nine sightings, composed of six confirmed species, were reported for October and November 2009. The main species worth a mention are bottlenose dolphin, fin whale, humpback whale, minke whale, harbour porpoise and short-beaked common dolphin. An estimated one hundred and forty-eight bottlenose dolphins, in four pods, were seen between the 5th and 6th of October with pods of forty-five and sixty-five encountered around Inishmore, Aran Islands in Co. Galway.

The waters around Co. Cork are an excellent location for fin whales, with seven out of the eight sightings in October and half of the sightings in November, recorded in the area. Fifteen animals were seen around West Cork on the afternoon of the 1st October, whilst two pods of eight were sighted in Co. Waterford on the 8th and 10th November. Also seen off West Cork were a pod of fifteen minke whales, and a pod of around 750 short-beaked common dolphins on the 4th October.



Slea Head, Kerry is another area worth mentioning for a number of species. Two humpback whales were sighted here on the 1st and 5th October, whilst a pod of six harbour porpoises was encountered on the 4th October. Sighting success in this area continued further into the month with a pod of 200 short-beaked common dolphins observed on the 8th October.

Harbour porpoises were the most commonly sighted species in November, with a total of seventeen encounters, of which six occurred around Co. Dublin. High numbers of sightings continued to occur in Co. Cork and off Slea Head in Co. Kerry in November, with bottlenose dolphin, minke whale, short-beaked common dolphin, and fin whale seen at least once during the month.

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>.