

**Editorial**

With the winter behind us, spring brought a number of exciting sightings including lots of killer whale records, and long finned pilot whales seen extremely close to shore. On occasions like this, it is possible to get good photographs of the dorsal fin used for recognising individuals and this is where our new campaign comes in. Sea Watch is asking observers to PHOTO A FIN in the hope that we may be able to identify the individual animals throughout the country using photo identification methods. We would like particularly high numbers of images during NATIONAL WHALE & DOLPHIN WATCH which is fast approaching. See below for further details. In addition, Sea Watch has developed a new Facebook page, a Blog, and You Tube channel which can all be accessed from www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk. Join us on these to keep up to date with our activities. Thanks to all observers that reported their sightings and those who contributed to this news sheet. If you would like to participate, please contact: gemma.veneruso@seawatchfoundation.org.uk.

Gemma Veneruso, Sightings Officer

**Killer whales**

© SWF/ R Baird

NATIONAL WHALE & DOLPHIN WATCH 7-15 AUGUST 2010

In its ninth year, the annual event, National Whale & Dolphin Watch (NWDW), will take place on 7-15th August. The event aims to raise awareness of the status of UK cetaceans and to collect as large a volume of data as possible from watches on land and sea around the British Isles so as to produce a snapshot of the overall distribution of cetaceans in summer months. Scientists, environmental organisations, boat operators and members of the public are once again invited to take part by collecting data either by doing their own watches or by joining a manned watch. In NWDW 2009, more than 400 sightings of nine species were recorded during the nine day event, with sightings being reported from 180 locations throughout the UK. For further details on how to take part, visit <http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/events.php> or contact sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk or call 01545 561227.

**PHOTO A FIN**

13 species of whales, dolphins and porpoises are regularly spotted in UK and Irish waters. Fins & markings on the back for many of these species are unique, making individuals recognisable. Photo ID can provide information on habitat preferences, social relations, and population trends, and allow us to track their movements. Send in photos of whales and dolphins that you see and we may be able to identify the individual! You can send in photos of animals that you come upon casually or Sea Watch can help you set up dedicated watches.



Send your photos to photo@seawatchfoundation.org.uk with the following info:

- Your name & contact info
- Date of sighting
- Location of sighting
- Estimation of the number of animals in the group
- Any other info you can provide such as time of sighting, sea state, behaviour & heading, etc

OR fill out a SWF sightings form available online and send with the photos.

Cetaceans are protected by law and it is an offence to intentionally disturb them. So please view the marine code of conduct at www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk.

BY-CATCH

In the past few months there have been a couple of incidents in Wales of accidental capture of harbour porpoise in fishing gear. The incidental capture of small cetaceans in fishing gear, also known as by-catch, is thought to be one of the most significant threats to populations worldwide. The entanglement of these animals in fishing nets is relatively common and since they cannot get to the surface to breathe, the animals, if not released, can eventually drown. By-catch in Welsh waters is relatively uncommon.

On the evening of the 23rd March, a harbour porpoise was found alive and entangled very close to shore between Tresaith and Aberporth in Cardigan Bay SAC. The animal was so exhausted that it did not resist being handled by RNLI crew from Cardigan whilst they were releasing it from the net, but luckily this porpoise was successfully released.

One month later, a report from Feleena Hobson came to SWF of an entangled porpoise which was sadly already dead. On the 24th April at Pensarn beach (Abergele), observers taking a stroll on the beach found an animal entangled in loose netting in shallow waters. Once they had dragged the net out of the water, they actually found a dead porpoise, tope shark, spotted dogfish, and five mullet as well as a number of other decomposed fish and a few live fish and crustaceans (that were released) all entangled in the net.



The problem of incidental capture occurs in many parts of UK and Irish waters. Significant by-catch has been recorded for short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) and harbour porpoise in the Celtic Sea to the south-west of Britain. Over the last two decades, high numbers of common dolphins and to a lesser extent harbour porpoise have been washed up off the coasts of Southwest England in particular, with injuries consistent with by-catch, although fortunately the incidence of bycatch appears to have declined in recent years.

Worldwide, there are a number of cases where the by-catch of individuals from fishing gear has caused significant decline of specific populations. The vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*), the smallest of all porpoises, is endemic to the Sea of Cortez. It is now the world's most critically endangered cetacean species, with an estimated 150 individuals remaining. The decline is due largely to gillnet fisheries in which by-catch numbers are thought to exceed the birth rate of the species. It is predicted that if by-catch rates remain as they are today, extinction of the species could

occur in as little as two years. Another well-known case is the harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) in the Baltic Sea where numbers have declined partly due to by-catch. A number of measures have been introduced in recent years to attempt to reduce rates of by-catch. These include fishing gear modification and the introduction of pingers, a device that acoustically deters cetaceans from the fishing gear. There have also been changes in fisheries policy such as implementation of no-take zones and by-catch monitoring programmes. Sadly some of these measures have been relatively unsuccessful.

On the 20th March 2010, a workshop to assess by-catch mitigation was held at the 24th annual conference of the European Cetacean Society (ECS) in Stralsund, Germany. The workshop was led by Peter Evans, Director of Sea Watch, Stefan Brägger, Chair of the Advisory Committee of ASCOBANS, and Marije Siemensma. The workshop was organized by UNEP/ASCOBANS and the ECS, with input from the European Commission (DG MARE) and aimed to provide an up-to-date review of current mitigation measures and effectiveness, with discussion on how to improve current strategies that will reduce by-catch in fisheries in Europe. Several key recommendations were reached:

- 1) Cooperative projects should be funded that bring together fishers, gear technologists and cetacean scientists to work on finding solutions for by-catch mitigation.
- 2) ASCOBANS parties should try to influence the revision of EC Regulation 812/2004 so that it:
 - a) covers significantly and adequately the fleets and fisheries having a high risk of by-catch in European waters
 - b) allows fishers (and other stakeholders) to participate fully and from the start in the development of the revision
 - c) sets targets that need to be met in each area, thus allowing fishers to find the most suitable solutions for their specific situations
 - d) calls for financial resources to be made available for the improvement of pingers, and research into alternative mitigation measures and alternative gear types
 - e) includes an adequate monitoring and support system to ensure that mitigation devices like pingers are maintained adequately and that their efficacy is checked
- 3) ASCOBANS Parties should create incentives for the development of environmentally friendly, sustainable, fishing methods.

For details on ASCOBANS and mitigation measures for by-catch in Europe, visit www.ascobans.org.

SIGHTINGS SUMMARY & HIGHLIGHTS

April and May marked the start of the summer season with nine species recorded including a number of interesting sightings.

Harbour porpoise were well distributed around the country in these months. However, there were marked reductions in sightings in certain regularly watched sites such as Capstone Point, North Devon and off the Cornwall coast, compared to previous years. Despite this, there were encouraging numbers of sightings of this species reported off the Channel Islands, and high numbers of sightings around the Isle of Man.



Bottlenose dolphin activity was high in the Moray Firth, Aberdeenshire, Hebrides, Dorset, Cornwall, and west and north Wales. Frequent sightings of large groups between 60 and 100 were recorded off Anglesey. These large groups tend to occur in the winter months but in spring normally migrate southwards into Cardigan Bay where they disperse into smaller groups that occupy near-shore areas.

There were good numbers of short-beaked common dolphin sightings at a number of spots around the UK and Ireland such as north Cornwall, the west and south coasts of the Republic of Ireland, south west Scotland and the Pentland Firth.

There were also several white-beaked dolphin encounters these past months, with sightings occurring near Stonehaven in Aberdeenshire, North Sutherland and offshore east of Ramsgate, Kent.

Risso's dolphin reports were relatively well spread despite lower numbers being recorded off the Isle of Man compared to previous years. There were good numbers of sightings off north and north east Scotland, and a surprise encounter further south at Whinnifold, Aberdeenshire. The species was also reported in Cornwall.

There were low records of minke whale in April and May with few sightings in the Hebrides. However there were relatively good numbers recorded around Loch Gairloch and Co. Kerry, Republic of Ireland.

Only two humpback whale encounters were reported in April and May, the first off Shetland and another in Co. Wexford, in the Republic of Ireland.

On a brighter note, reports of killer whales were especially high this year with regular sightings in April and May from Shetland, Orkney, north and north-east Scotland. The Caithness region saw higher numbers of killer whales than in recent years with animals coming in very close to land. A number of photographs were taken by Colin Bird that could be used to recognise individuals by looking at differences in the shape of the dorsal fin and the white/grey saddle behind the fin which is unique to individual animals (see Photo a Fin). In the Irish Sea, there was also a confirmed sighting of a killer whale between Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man on the



24th April. This sighting interestingly followed a couple of reports in March of a possible killer whale off Criccieth, northern Cardigan Bay, although these could not be confirmed. Killer whales are known to occasionally enter the Irish Sea, and sightings are normally reported roughly once a year. It is, however, very rare for an animal to enter so close inshore within Cardigan Bay.

Another species that surprised onlookers so close to shore was the normally offshore species, long-finned pilot whale (*Globicephala melas*). A group of around 80 individuals was first spotted in the mouth of the Cromarty Firth, north-east Scotland by researchers from Aberdeen University on the 4th May. These animals continued to move northwards into east Caithness over the next couple of days, to Latheron and then Lybster, where the animals here watched by observers just off the coastline. Long-finned pilot whales are common and widely distributed in the deep waters of the north-eastern Atlantic and seasonally enter coastal waters around the Faroe Islands, north Scotland, and western Ireland. However, it is rare to see these animals travel so close inshore as we saw at Latheron.



Further afield, the most surprising sighting of all must be the grey whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*) that was spotted by the Israel Marine Mammal Research and Assistance Centre (IMMRAC), off Israel in the eastern Mediterranean on 8th May. Once found throughout the Northern Hemisphere, grey whales became extinct in the North Atlantic sometime in the 17th-18th Century, and no sightings of the grey whale have been made in the Atlantic Ocean since. Today's grey whale distribution currently comprises two distinct populations: the Eastern North Pacific and the Western North Pacific. The Western North Pacific stock has been designated by IUCN as critically endangered, with numbers estimated at 130 individuals, and only 25-30

reproductive females. Almost all the population of Western Pacific greys has been satellite tagged, so an absence of tag suggests it is likely to be a member of the Eastern Pacific population. For a whale to have ended up in the Eastern Mediterranean, it must have travelled thousands of miles from its natural habitat. It potentially has travelled into the North Atlantic via the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean which, with global warming, has become navigable now. It must have then entered the Mediterranean via the Straits of Gibraltar. There were fears of how the animal would survive as there are limited food sources for this species in the Mediterranean. However, there have been no reports of a stranding so far, and the species has since been seen near Barcelona in Spain.



Send in all cetacean sightings to Gemma Veneruso at sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk.

REGIONAL ROUNDUPS

SHETLAND

During April and May, four species were recorded including an abundance of killer whale reports. Killer whales were sighted 14 times in April and May, in groups of three to 12 individuals. Notable pods of ten individuals were spotted on the 10th April and the 30th May at Sumburgh Head and Hermaness respectively. Minke whales were spotted four times, three of which were sightings of lone individuals as well as a sighting of five animals on the 29th of April. There were two different sightings of Risso's dolphins: a group of 20 individuals on the 9th April followed by one sighting of six animals on the 7th May. There was also a sighting of a lone humpback whale on the 5th May north east of Bressay.

ORKNEY

There was just one sighting reported for the month of April off Orkney: a pod of 12 killer whales that were spotted surfacing off Green Holmes on the 13th.

Killer whale sightings continued into May. Pods of six animals were reported in Scapa Flow on the 11th in the Sound of Hoxa and near Waulkmill Bay on the 27th. Further offshore, a pod of 20 individuals was seen from the air near the Brae oil field in the North Sea on 28th May.

NORTH SCOTLAND

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland

April was not a good month for sea watchers on the north coast of Scotland due to very strong northerly winds. Thankfully the winds did let up from time to time and there were six sightings reported. On the 6th April, a group of ten dolphins, of which the species could not be identified, were reported in Thurso Bay, off Scrabster. Further west, on the 11th, five Risso's dolphins and five white-beaked dolphins were spotted, both at Strathy Point, North Sutherland. On the 12th, there was a sighting of two Risso's dolphins between Thurso Bay and Dunnet Bay, Caithness, by Karen Munro. There were two sightings of harbour porpoise both by Karen Munro again at Thurso, a group of two animals on the 7th in Thurso Bay, and three individuals on the 28th at Scrabster.

May, in contrast to April, is a month that many in the area will remember for many years because there were 12 reported sightings of killer whales along the north coast during a 24 day period, centred upon the John O' Groats area, with most observations being made from Duncansby Head.

Five of the sightings were made by the crew of the John O'Groats Ferry. Skippers Dave and Ivor Thomas regularly phone me and pass on their sightings to the Sea Watch Foundation.

I managed to get to Duncansby Head and had three sightings, one on the 13th, another on 15th and again on the 16th. On two occasions, I was able to get pictures of individuals that were identified as orcas from the Iceland Northern Group. Word of these sightings at Duncansby Head spread locally, and a number of people were soon passing on their encounters with these magnificent animals.



Killer Whale

SWF/ F Ugarte

It seemed as though pods came in threes. Kaitlin Mainland saw three killer whales breaching in the Bay of Sannick, Sarah Lyons spotted three animals at Gills Bay, and David Jones reported three again from Duncansby Head. Theresa MacKay who spotted five on her second day of trying at Duncansby Head almost missed a very close encounter. Theresa reported an animal

very close to the cliff, so much so she only became aware of the orca when it made a loud blow as she was getting back in her car!

My friend Karen Munro spent hours without success at Duncansby Head. She received a call from Ivor Thomas from the Ferry on a foggy day saying there was a group off John O' Groats Harbour. She drove the mile to the harbour, leaped into the North Coast Adventures wildlife tour boat and set off to find them. What looked like a certain close encounter vanished like the orcas in the fog that had followed Karen. I think it is clear from the stories that a degree of luck is needed when sea watching.

Also during the month, Risso's dolphins were reported five times, with three large groups seen off the North Sutherland coast: 30 at Kirtomy by Dave Jones, 12 at Armadale by Chris Conway, and 20 at Strathy Point by Paul Castle.

Short-beaked common dolphins were also spotted three times in the Pentland Firth and once in



Thurso Bay. The largest group numbering 50 was seen off Dunnet Head by Niall Laybourne from the RSPB.

Minke whales were only recorded two times during the month, both sightings made by the John O'Groats Ferry during its crossing between John O'Groats and South Ronaldsay, Orkney, on the 5th.

There were 12 sightings of harbour porpoise during the month, and three unidentified dolphin groups seen off Scrabster near Thurso.

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North east Scotland

Spring has arrived at last in the far north and the sea is now starting to warm. Seabirds are nesting on the cliff ledges and are feeding on sand eels and on the many shoals of fish fry that are bubbling to the surface. This is all good news for the sea watcher, and this proved to be the case in April as we had 23 sightings in the month recorded off the east coast of Caithness. The one thing of note regarding these sightings was the fact they seemed to be feeding much further offshore compared with previous years.

Most of the sightings were harbour porpoise, with 19 sightings recorded from Swiney Hill, Lybster. The warmer water also increased the number of Risso's dolphins this month, with three sightings recorded. The first of the month was seen by the Caithness Seacoast tour boat on the 7th. They observed two Risso's dolphins close to the shore three miles south of Wick. The second sighting on the 10th April was at Swiney Hill, Lybster, with five dolphins spotted about

1km offshore. The third sighting was on the 18th again at Swiney Hill; this time, there were four animals in the group about 1.5 km offshore.



At Swiney Hill, Risso's dolphins are frequent visitors during the spring and early summer, and they swim very close to the shore when travelling east. This has allowed me to take many a good photograph over the last few years, including those that can be used to identify individuals from photo ID.

One minke whale was spotted from Swiney Hill on the 29th. Again like most sightings this month, it was a long way offshore, heading south-east with a very slow swim. There was also one unidentified dolphin species reported from Swiney Hill.

The month of May, with continuing good weather, resulted in 22 sightings off the east coast of Caithness with some being the Sea Watchers dream sightings.

There were five Risso's dolphin sightings in May. The month kicked off with Risso's dolphins on the 1st, with two sightings at Swiney Hill Lybster including a single animal a long way offshore, and then a group of four just 50 metres from the shore. The third sighting was again at Swiney Hill on the 2nd with a group of six individuals. It may have been the same group of six that were reported by Barry Scollay from his yacht "Even Chance" 1 hr 34 minutes later one mile off Wick. On the 16th, a lone Risso's dolphin was observed by Colin Carter from his creel boat "Samara" 1 km off Lybster.

One of the rare sightings for the east coast of Caithness came on the 6th at 10.45am, with a report from Colin Carter that he had spotted a group of long-finned pilot whales close to the shore at Latheron in 7 fathoms of water. This must be part of a large group that had been seen a few days earlier near Cromarty.

I was working at the time so I asked my wife Shirley to go and monitor the group that were visible from the main A9 road.

She reported that they were milling about and that there was a lot of splashing. Many drivers were pulling off the road to watch them and take photos. Some of the observers, seeing the Sea



Watch Foundation sticker in the car window, started asking my wife questions about what they were seeing.



Shirley monitored the group for the entire day as the group did not move off until I got there just after 17:00. The group headed north along the coast, taking two hours to cover the two miles to Swiney Hill where I managed a few pictures when they passed within 50 metres of me.

The whales were last observed by Karen Munro several miles off the Whaligoe Steps at Ulbster at 21:30 hrs. Karen had also rushed over after work to help monitor the group and take some pictures as they made their way along the coast.

With the excitement of the pilot whales over, I thought the rest of the month would be just routine, but how wrong I was proved to be because we found ourselves with one of the most intense activity of killer whales that had been seen off the coast of the north Scottish mainland for some years.



There were 18 sightings recorded around Caithness in the space of 25 days, with five of the sightings in my area on the East coast. There were also lots of unconfirmed killer whale sightings by the various bird watching groups in Caithness and Orkney.

The first sighting on the east coast occurred on the 17th, and was reported by Elaine Tonberg who was visiting the Whaligoe Steps. She observed three whales heading north. I spotted four killer whales off the

Whaligoe Steps on the 20th heading north just 75 metres offshore, pictures were taken, and the whales were identified. Michael Kay reported five killer whales moving between Latheron and



Killer whales

© C Bird

Lybster on the 26th May. Michael was able to track the animals until he lost sight off them between Lybster and Ulbster. On the 28th, I was in the enviable position to have nine killer whales within 50 metres of the shore at Swiney Hill Lybster, where I was again able to take photographs of the animals to be used for photo identification. The last sighting on the east coast was from Michael Kay on the 30th, who spotted a pod of killer whales off Berriedale. But

no sooner had he spotted them, they vanished.

Of the more usual sightings of the month, there were 11 harbour porpoise reports. These included five from Swiney Hill, Lybster, five from the Whaligoe Steps at Ulbster, and one off Latheron.

On the 5th May there was a single minke whale seen from Swiney Hill, Lybster.

MORAY FIRTH

Written by Alan Airey, Regional Coordinator for the southern Moray Firth

I was away most of April, so no sightings from me for this month, however our local bottlenose dolphins were navigating back and forth along the Moray coast and were sighted on three occasions in groups of between five to 12 individuals by the Gemini Explorer and Peter Macdonald. April also saw the first recorded sightings of minkes in this part of the Firth for 2010. The Gemini Explorer reported three minkes between six and eight miles north of Buckie as it returned from a survey in the Beatrice field.

The month of May really saw the arrival of the minkes. On calm days, sightings could almost be guaranteed of a minke or three between two and ten km offshore, north of the Burghead to Lossiemouth coastline. These calm days also produced several harbour porpoise sightings where individuals and small groups of up to six were reported off Burghead, Covesea and Cullen. Fort George, Burghead, Covesea, Lossiemouth,



Minke Whale

SWF/P. Evans

Spey Bay, Buckie, Findochty and Portknockie as usual provided the bottlenose dolphin sightings but they seemed slightly scarcer than expected, and mostly just in small groups although several calves were seen. The bigger groups of 20+ were mainly to the east around Cullen area.

SOUTH GRAMPIAN

Cetaceans were spotted in the region virtually every day of the month of April, represented by three different species. Harbour porpoises were witnessed on the first and last day of the month, in Aberdeen harbour and off Whinnyfold respectively, with one to three animals encountered at a time. Also at Whinnyfold, Kevin Hepworth spotted a group of five Risso's dolphins on the 30th.

During the rest of April, all the sightings were of bottlenose dolphins at the usual hotspots: Stonehaven, Catterline and Aberdeen. Most groups ranged from five to 35 individuals, including

up to three calves in some of the groups.



Bottlenose dolphins

SWF/ F Ugarte

Numbers of sightings diminished slightly in May, with only one encounter of harbour porpoise, a group of six animals seen in Aberdeen harbour the 6th of May. Groups of two, seven and ten white-beaked dolphins were recorded on the 29th in groups between Muchalls and Portlethen, but the majority of sightings were of bottlenose dolphins. Most of them were

spotted from land-based watches in Aberdeen, Inverbervie and Stonehaven, the last having witnessed the biggest pod seen this month of 60 animals travelling south on the 11th May.

SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND

There was just one sighting reported on the 31st May of a lone harbour porpoise surfing in the waves 3 km north west of the Isle of May.

NORTH EAST ENGLAND

No sightings were reported for these months in north east England.

EAST ENGLAND

No sightings were reported in these months for this region.

EAST ANGLIA

There were eight sightings in April and May reported in East Anglia, all of harbour porpoise. The area is becoming increasingly recognised as an important region for this species. The largest group of seven animals occurred at the very beginning of April. They were spotted whilst they were travelling down the Old Lynn Channel on the 3rd. The remaining sightings were of single individuals feeding, which were spotted in the usual hotspots, Walcott, Mundelsey and Bacton

between the 17th and the 28th.

In May, three more sightings of harbour porpoise were reported within two days in the middle of the month. On the 16th a group of three porpoises was recorded off Walcott early in the morning. Three animals were again seen later that morning off Bacton still feeding. It was at Bacton again that two porpoises were reported feeding on the 18th.

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

There were just four sightings reported for the months of April and May in this region. Two of the four sightings were of white-beaked dolphins. Five animals were seen feeding on the French side of the Ridge in the English Channel on the 16th April, and two were seen on the 23rd May offshore east of Ramsgate, Kent. The other two sightings for these months were of lone harbour porpoises. One was seen off the Tollesbury entrance to the river Blackwater on the 27th April, and the other was seen off River Colne, Essex on the 8th May.

SUSSEX

Written by Steve Savage, Regional Coordinator for Sussex

There were no whale or dolphin sightings to report for April or May. However, on the 2nd April, a dead harbour porpoise washed up near the old Toll Bridge over the River Adur at Shoreham, West Sussex. I was able to take several photographs, take measurements and remove a tooth all of which have been forwarded to the London Natural History Museum. It is possible that it

swam into the river and died, as the remains were relatively fresh, but it is more likely that it washed into the river by the very high tide and fast flow of the river.

Evolving Seas Conference 15th and 16th April

I was invited to participate and attend the Brighton and Hove Council's annual sustainability conference which this year focused on the topic of the Evolving Seas. The conference was open to all stake holders, including members of the public, and sea users (leisure and commercial), and took place at the Brighton University

The first day of the two day event focused on threats to the coastline at Brighton including sea level rise, flooding and coastal erosion and the wider picture of coastal access and the Marine Bill. I was invited to run a presentation on the local ecology (which of course included sea mammals) and finished with a broader look at global issues such as sea temperature rise, acid oceans and their effects globally on habitats, species and food webs – including the possible local impacts. Between 2000 and 2007, the UK common seal populations have declined by about 56% and continue to decline. The second day focused on renewable energy, in particular offshore wind farms.

In the afternoon, two ecology tours took place on the Shoreham Beach Local Nature Reserve, a site of rare vegetated shingle habitat. One was led by Dr Legg, and I ran the other tour. This also provided the opportunity to do a bit of sea watching and talk about local sea mammal sightings.



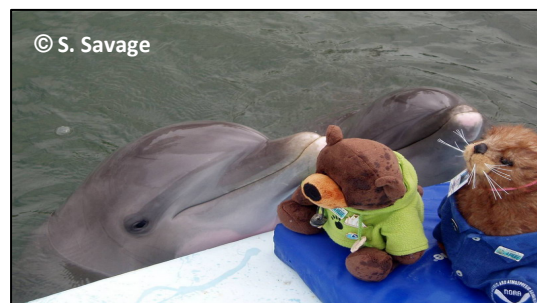
Common (Harbour) Seals

Solitary common seals were reported along the Sussex coast at Chichester Harbour, Selsey, and Pagham harbour in West Sussex. A common seal was also reported in the River Ouse. This is probably the same seal that has been recorded in the Ouse on previous occasions. There have been a lot of mullet around in the lower reaches of the river, which may have enticed the seal into the river.

Education Project

One World, One Ocean; the Adventures of Ed the Bear

This project involves a teddy bear (Ed the Bear) which I have been sending to different locations around the world as part of an ongoing factual educational story but with a fictional character. The project aim is to show we are all part of one



ocean and that the global issues that affect our planet are part of this global ocean (and land). Ed encounters fascinating wildlife along the way, from whales to albatrosses and tide pool life. He has also dived on shipwrecks and coral reefs, witnessed an oil spill, and the damage that marine litter does to wildlife. This May has been the first UK school visit with this project which also aims to show that our own wildlife and coastline is as valuable and fascinating as the exotic locations that Ed visits. It is hoped that Ed the Bear will take part in National Whale and Dolphin Watch this year. For more information about this project check out the weblog at: <http://adventuresofedthebear.blogspot.com/>.

DORSET

(Including sightings data kindly forwarded by Durlston Marine Project)

In April and May, there were 17 sightings of bottlenose dolphins recorded. Major sighting locations included Peveril Point, Old Harry Rocks, and Bournemouth. Group sizes were commonly between five and ten, but a few encounters numbered between 11 and 15 animals, in addition to a group of 20 individuals seen off Blacknor Point on the 17th April. There were another 19 reports of dolphins where the species could not be identified. These were primarily from watch sites around Durlston.

CHANNEL ISLANDS

Written by Bertram Bree, Regional Coordinator for the Channel Islands

In April, the weather started to improve and there were therefore more sightings with the



Bottlenose dolphins

© SWF/ G Veneruso

improved conditions. The GECC in Cherbourg Octeville (<http://www.obs-mam.org>) continued to visit Channel Island waters, seeing bottlenose dolphins regularly off the Ecrehous reef between Jersey's east coast and the French coast 20 kilometres away in Jersey waters.

A number of porpoise sightings were also reported near us in French waters, and sadly a newborn porpoise washed up in nearby Normandy. Off Jersey, there were two bottlenose dolphin sightings in April, including a group of 40 animals between the Ecrehous reef and St Catherine's breakwater on the east coast on the 23rd. Four more dolphins were spotted off Grouville Bay feeding on the submerged sandbank on the 30th. Four harbour porpoise were also reported on the 24th off the Ecrehous reef.

There were four sightings reported in May. The three bottlenose dolphin reports all came from Jersey. On 12th May, the South Coast Cruises boat that takes the public on trips to see dolphins, saw six bottlenose dolphins in St Aubin's Bay. It wasn't until 26th May that bottlenose dolphins

were reported again. A group of eight was seen by Caz Medder in Fliquet Bay in Jersey off the north-east coast of Jersey, a top spot, at 10:00 hrs. On 28th May, at least two bottlenose dolphins were seen off Horn Rock feeding over the southern part of the sandbank entirely underwater (here called the Castle Bank), later heading northwards.

In Guernsey, there was a report of two harbour porpoise on 15th May by Steve Le Goupillot, at Fort Le Marchant.

The sightings of porpoise were of great interest as they appear to be becoming more frequent visitors to this area, and breeding here. However, observer coverage has been low despite the better weather, so many records are likely to be unreported.

SOUTH DEVON

There were no sightings reported in South Devon.

CORNWALL

Written by Dan Jarvis (including sightings data kindly forwarded Ray Dennis/Cornwall Wildlife Trust's Seaquest Southwest project
www.ercis.co.uk/wildlife_recording/seaquest_southwest.htm)

Sightings

The long-awaited improvement in the winter's weather obviously meant better chances of



marine mammal sightings, and April and May got the warmer seasons off to a decent start with a good number of sightings, although only involving four different species – none of which were whales, unusually! Harbour porpoises seemed notably quiet, with sightings of small groups off Padstow, Botallack, Porthgwarra and around the Manacles reef. Bottlenose dolphins more than made up for things, however, with quite a lot of

sightings of pods, ranging from pairs up to ten, reported by observers from Newquay, Godrevy, St Ives (where 10 were spotted on 31st May off Porthmeor beach), Botallack, near Land's End, Porthgwarra, Porthcurno, the Manacles, in Helford River mouth, and finally at Falmouth. The pair seen in the Helford River were particularly active and put on a good show for those who saw them.

On several occasions, groups of common dolphins were spotted offshore from Padstow, with numbers mostly upwards of 30, and probably the best sighting of this period occurring on 17th

May when approximately 80 appeared during decompression stop for a group of divers! A little further down the coast at Newquay, a pod of about 100 common dolphins was seen feeding intensively three days later, making it the biggest group recorded over this period. The last identified species recorded was Risso's dolphin, ten of which were seen along with a calf off Pendeen on 17th May, and an adult pair at St Michael's Mount at the end of that month.

A sighting of ten dolphins off St Ives on 17th May could well have been the aforementioned Risso's dolphins, but without any further evidence to help with identification, they will have to remain unconfirmed. Unidentified dolphin pods were also observed following a boat off Perranporth, off Cape Cornwall, and in the Fal Estuary where 15 were seen on 1st May.

Other creatures of interest included an ocean sunfish off Holywell Bay, near Newquay on 26th May, plus large amounts of various jellyfish species throughout the period. However, it is now coming into basking shark season and many reports have already been sent in, though mostly of small numbers. Their distribution appeared well established, with sightings along most of the coastline from Newquay, St Ives, all around the Land's End peninsula, Fal Bay, Gerran's Bay and St Austell Bay. There was also a rare sighting of a basking shark at the Isles of Scilly – a location that these fascinating animals somehow overlook during the months they are close to the coast.

News

Callouts for British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org.uk) finally went quiet for the Cornwall area, with a handful of false alarms of sleeping seals needing to be dealt with. However on 11th May a young bottlenose dolphin was seen struggling against rocks just west of St Ives, and was washed out before any actions could be taken. The National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn1.html) in the meantime is busy releasing the final batch of rescued seal pups from the winter back to the wild.

Sticking with seals, the Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) continues to gather regular survey data from various locations, and photo-identification is paying off well with many repeat identifications confirmed between several different locations for a number of individual seals, and is really showing just how complicated a jigsaw the life of a seal actually is. Research into this and other areas are currently underway, and members of the group attended this year's European Cetacean Society conference in Germany, where they presented a poster on one of the most recent investigations.

The Cornwall Wildlife Trust (www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk) now has a range of marine initiatives in place that have been set up over the last year or so, and have been very popular for volunteers to get involved with. These include the Basking Shark Project and Your Shore, for example, and also helping to develop the five Voluntary Marine Conservation Areas with local community support. You can find out a lot more by looking at the 'Living Seas' area of their website.

Finally, the CWT's Marine Strandings Network (www.cwtstrandings.org) has continued to receive reports of the occasional dead stranded grey seal, harbour porpoise, or common dolphin, but as well as this, a few seabirds have been recorded and, unusually, an ocean sunfish that washed up on Millandreath beach in SE Cornwall on 18th May.

Events

Various events are now coming into focus for the summer for BDMLR, CSG, and CWT to raise awareness and funds for their work. These range from display stands to support other events, interactive demonstrations, and public talks on many different topics. Check out their websites for listings of upcoming events that may be of interest to you!

NORTH DEVON

Written by Lauren Davis, Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (DBRC)

Sightings

Cetacean sightings from North Devon in April and May included only harbour porpoises. A total of ten sightings were reported in groups of between one and four animals, with the majority in April. They were spotted at the usual places of Downend, Tunnels beach, Ilfracombe, Capstone Point, and Bull Point.

New website

Devon Biodiversity Records Centre has its very own new website and can be viewed at www.dbrc.org.uk.

The new DBRC website has a whole section dedicated to the Cetacean Recording Network that falls within the Seaquest SW project. You will find this under 'field work'.

One of the exciting new features of the website and within the Cetacean Recording Network is the sightings and stranding pages <http://www.dbrc.org.uk/view-seaquest-sightings/>, <http://www.dbrc.org.uk/view-seaquest-strandings/>. These not only enable volunteers from the Cetacean Recording Network to view their findings but they also enable the public to view records of cetacean sightings and strandings in a much more 'user-friendly' way. We hope that the presentation of this information will make our website of interest to the general public and recording groups as well as our commercial clients.

BRISTOL CHANNEL & SOUTH WALES

There was just one sighting for this region during the April and May. This was of two bottlenose dolphins swimming fast in Mid Bristol Channel on the 20th May.

WEST WALES

Written by Gemma Veneruso, Regional Coordinator for West Wales

There were 16 sightings reported in May. Half of these were as expected - bottlenose dolphins that were mainly observed from within Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation (SAC). There were also reports slightly north of this SAC, at Borth and Ynylas. There were four records of harbour porpoise within Cardigan Bay SAC, particularly near Penrhyn, and an additional sighting of this species at Ynylas. Further south at Strumble Head, Pembrokeshire, three dolphin sightings were recorded. For two of these, the species could not be confirmed, and the third sighting was a possible Risso's dolphin on the 24th.

The SWF office in New Quay officially re-opened in May, and volunteers from around the world arrived to begin their internships.

Volunteers and staff worked hard conducting 18 dedicated surveys in the month, as



Bottlenose dolphins

© SWF/ G Veneruso

part of the monitoring project for the bottlenose dolphins. These trips resulted in 24 sightings, four harbour porpoise, six Atlantic grey seal and 14 bottlenose dolphin encounters. Sightings of bottlenose dolphins in Cardigan Bay SAC were still relatively low at this time of year with more sightings coming from Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau SAC in northern Cardigan Bay and north Wales. During a survey of the Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau SAC on the 21st May, SWF staff and volunteers were treated to one of our best encounters yet, with around 30 dolphins in a mass feeding frenzy, skimming through the waters in the chase for mackerel.



Bottlenose dolphins

© SWF/ G Veneruso

Data collection from the wildlife watching trips onboard Ermols V and VI (New Quay Boat Trips <http://www.newquayboattrips.co.uk/>) was carried out almost daily in Cardigan Bay SAC. SWF volunteers joined 24 of these trips, which surveyed New Quay to Cwmtedu or Ynys Lochdyn, resulting in 51 sightings (12 bottlenose dolphin, 36 grey seal and three harbour porpoise encounters). From land watches, bottlenose dolphins were most commonly seen off New Quay, and further south at Mwnt.

In Pembrokeshire, there were four reports of unidentified cetaceans off Strumble Head and Fishguard. There were also four reports of harbour porpoise at this location as well as sightings of the species at Turbot Bank and Skokholm Island.

You can follow the volunteer's stories and experiences in New Quay by reading our blog: <http://seawatchfoundation.blogspot.com/> or by joining us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100000907852933&ref=search>.

If you would like to support this project, please adopt a Cardigan Bay bottlenose dolphin, where 100% of the income goes into monitoring the Cardigan Bay population. <http://www.adoptadolphin.org.uk/> Without this support, we will not be able to continue the vital conservation research.

NORTH WALES

Sightings of bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoises were frequent during the months of April and May, with concentrations particularly high off the Isle of Anglesey. There were 27 encounters with bottlenose dolphins, 21 of these encounters taking place in April. Group sizes ranged from one to 100 animals, with sightings well into May. Large groups of 25-60 bottlenose dolphins were routinely seen off the north coast of Anglesey. Two



Bottlenose dolphins

© SWF/ P Evans

encounters of 100 animals took place on the 9th and 22nd of April respectively, off Holyhead, suggesting that the animals may have congregated and started their migration down the west side of Anglesey heading towards Cardigan Bay. There were also regular sightings of these animals in northern Cardigan Bay, particularly around the Llyn Peninsula. The frequency of sightings of dolphins became more regular in this area in May, coinciding with a reduction of reports off Anglesey.

Also off the Llyn Peninsula, in Bardsey Sound, four Risso's dolphins were reported on the 9th April.

There were 25 sightings of harbour porpoise throughout these months, 17 of these occurring in the month of April. Most sightings were of groups from one to nine animals; however, there were two occasions with large congregations of animals. These both took place on 24th April in north Anglesey, with 20 porpoises off Amlwch Port, and 40 porpoises off Point Lynas. On the same day, between 20 and 30 bottlenose dolphins were seen in nearby Bull Bay and travelled for a number of miles to Cemaes within a flotilla of yachts, performing some spectacular antics along the way.



Bottlenose dolphin

© SWF/ P Evans

ISLE OF MAN

Written by Tom Felce (MWDW), Regional Coordinator for the Isle of Man (including sightings data kindly forwarded by MWDW)

By far the most frequently seen species during April and May was harbour porpoise, with 92 sightings containing 169 individuals being reported. The majority of these sightings were of small groups, containing less than five individuals. Sightings of harbour porpoise were reported from all round the island, although the majority of sightings were from the south between Port St Mary and the Calf of Man. Only five of these groups were reported to contain one or more calves.



Risso's dolphin

© SWF/ P Evans

April and May would normally be the time when Risso's dolphins start being reported, particularly on the east coast of the island, just south of Douglas. The last four years have seen around 40 or 50 sightings of Risso's dolphins being reported during this period. This year, however, perhaps due to unusually low water temperatures around the island, there have been only nine

sightings reported, most of which were seen in the south of the island.

Other species seen included common dolphin (one sighting), minke whale (three sightings, all offshore), and one definite orca, spotted and photographed about 20 miles off the west coast of the island. A group of around 15 bottlenose dolphins was also observed during April, unusual since bottlenose dolphins tend to be seen only during the winter months in Manx waters.

SOUTH WEST SCOTLAND

Written by Rowan Fraser, Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park

Sightings

Harbour porpoise were spotted near Kirn (the Firth of Clyde) in April off Sanda and Crinan by Mike Beard, and in the Firth of Lorn by Ann Parker.

Mat Jarvis saw 15 common dolphins off the Mull of Galloway in April, and Sandra Watt spotted five unknown cetaceans off the isle of Arran in May.

Coming up for Air - cetacean monitoring project

My name is Rowan Fraser and I am a Ranger for Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. Many folk will know all about the freshwater lochs and mountains, but we are really lucky to have a bit of coastline and sea lochs that lie within or are adjacent to the Park.

So in terms of whales and dolphins what's out there in the sea lochs and Firth of Clyde?

Well, we definitely have harbour porpoise, with six sighted over April and May, and one being washing up on the shores of the Holly Loch near Dunoon on 13th July. Bob Reid of the Scottish Agricultural Collage (SAC) Wildlife Unit will be carrying out a post mortem to discover why it died. Bob Reid says that the presence of bristle pits on the snout of the harbour porpoise suggest that animal was in the first few weeks of its life. The animal had a number of quite severe lacerations on it (source: www.dunoon-observer.com).

Anecdotal evidence would suggest that bottlenose dolphins were fairly common in small numbers up until about six years ago.

So what else might be out there?

There have been instances of larger whales in area including northern bottlenose whales, minke and humpback whales and long finned pilot whales.

Last summer we had two pilot whales in Loch Long for six weeks. As squid eaters, pilot whales are usually associated with deeper waters. However, the Firth of Clyde and the neighbouring sea lochs have some natural as well as man made trenches that have allowed shipbuilding and Trident submarines to be located in the area.

In truth, we do not have a very clear view of what is out there and with what regularity because most submitted observations either tend to be casual sightings or short studies undertaken by students that offer a small and seasonal snap shot. While these are all worthwhile, we would love to build a much bigger picture of what is out there from season to season and year to year.

As part of the National Park's biodiversity action plan and in partnership with the Sea Watch Foundation, we are running a pilot project 'Coming up for Air' which seeks to encourage and support local people in the systematic monitoring of cetaceans.

Local volunteers are vital as they can respond quickly to the kind of weather conditions that increase the chances of observing cetaceans, and we are asking them to record seals, basking sharks, sunfish, jellyfish and seabirds at the same time.

We hope to encourage local volunteers to continue monitoring after the duration of the pilot project, and to build an ongoing scheme adding to the knowledge of just what is out there in the sea lochs and Firth of Clyde.

If you interested in this project, please contact:

Rowan Fraser on 01389 722106 rowan.fraser@lochlomond-trossachs.org

HEBRIDES

Written by Laura Mandleberg, HWDT & Regional Coordinator for the Hebrides (including sightings kindly forwarded by HWDT)

April

Sightings are now being reported once again after a long winter. As the sea slowly warms up and productivity increases, whales and dolphins will begin to move into the area to feed.



April got off to a good start with two confirmed minke whale sightings within three days (10th and 13th April) in the Ardnamurchan area, Sound of Mull. However, following an optimistic start to the month, there were no further sightings of minke whales for April. This is a little disappointing as the whales are usually back to feed around the west coast at this time of year.

Bottlenose dolphins were more numerous

and were seen on five occasions this month. Four of the five sightings were around Mull whilst the other sighting was made earlier on in the month a bit further south, between the Isle of Arran and Skipness. For the Mull sightings, there were two sightings on the same day at An Doirlinn (Firth of Lorne) and later at Duart Bay which might have been the same group of six dolphins as the sightings were just a few hours apart from each other. Later in the month there was a group of five seen in the Sound of Iona and another, larger, group of twelve at Grass Point.

A group of six unidentified dolphins was seen at Loch Eishort on the south-west end of the Isle of Skye.

May

There was a relatively small rise in sighting reports this May compared to previous years, although there were only two sightings of minke whales reported throughout the month which is lower than we would expect for this time of year. Usually, the month of May sees minke whales arriving in the area to feed, but the low numbers reported this year of not just minkes, but other seasonal visitors too, may indicate a late start to the season.

There was just one probable sighting of common dolphins, whereas previous years have seen a handful of sightings of this species being reported in May.

There was a good spread of harbour porpoise sightings through the month; many of the sightings were reported from areas where there is little or no survey coverage, which was very encouraging. For example, we had a good number of sightings around the Clyde region, and this is an area for which we have very little information on cetacean distribution and abundance.

There was a sighting of four killer whales from Broad Bay, just north of Stornoway, Isle of Lewis. We have contacted the reporter for images which may hopefully reveal to which orca community these whales belong. Finally, we received the first sighting of a basking shark on the 19th May. The shark was seen in Loch Caroy (north Loch Bracadale), Isle of Skye. As with the other seasonal species, basking shark reports during May were down on previous years.

NORTH-WEST SCOTLAND

15 sightings were reported in April for this region. Harbour porpoise were the most commonly seen species in April. A total of nine encounters with groups of between two and six animals were reported by Ian French in Loch Gairloch.

Two groups of killer whales of six and 15 were sighted from land on two separate occasions this month. On the 24th, there was a sighting of group of two Risso's dolphins reported off Handa Island. The next day, two single Minke whale sightings were also reported 25th April by two different observers. The month of April finished on a high note with a sighting of seven common dolphins on the 30th.



There were 20 encounters of cetaceans in May with harbour porpoises continuing to be well with a total of eight reports of groups of two to five animals made by Ian French. Minke whale sightings increased in comparison to April with a total of five sightings of

one to two animals mostly off Longa Island. 89 common dolphins were spotted in just five encounters, the largest school of which was of 40 animals seen off Carr Point on the 25th May.

NORTHERN IRELAND

(including sightings data kindly forwarded by IWDG)

April and May were good months for harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphin sightings, seen mainly off the east coast of Co. Antrim. With ten sightings in total, harbour porpoise were the most commonly observed species, often travelling in twos and threes. There were four bottlenose dolphin sightings in total, with two schools of ten, and one of nine, all seen on the 13th April off the Antrim coast. Two sightings of a lone killer whale occurred on the 24th April, and one pod of four was spotted on the 9th May, all seen off Co. Down. There was also a sighting of an unidentified dolphin species in a pod of 12 individuals on the 21st April in the Irish Sea between Ardglass, Co. Down, and the Calf of Man.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

(including sightings data kindly forwarded by IWDG)

Sightings during April and May totalled 117, with a majority being harbour porpoise, bottlenose dolphin, minke whale, and common dolphin. Most sightings were from Counties Dublin, Kerry, Cork and Donegal. There were 30 sightings reports of harbour porpoise in April but just seven in May. Animals were mostly seen in groups of two or three. However, there was a sighting of six on the 17th April near Dursey Island, Co. Cork, and sightings of five and seven animals respectively on the 7th April off Sleah Head, Co. Kerry and Helvic Head, Co. Waterford. There were 23 bottlenose dolphin sightings in total, with several large pods seen. Again, most sightings were recorded in April with 18 sightings with the remaining five logged in May. Groups of 17, 20 and 40 were seen in April off the west coast. Minke whales were relatively common, with 22 sightings, most of which were lone individuals. However, there were two different sightings of four animals each seen on the 11th and 28th May off Sleah Head, Co. Kerry. In just 15



encounters, an impressive 1,226 short-beaked common dolphins were seen. The highlight had to be the 400 animals seen off Sleah Head, Co. Kerry on the 20th April. There was a single encounter with Risso's dolphins in

April and four sightings in May. seen in groups of two to five animals. Three encounters with killer whale pairs were recorded in early April, off Counties Kerry, Wexford, and Clare. A single humpback whale was spotted off Hook Head, Co. Wexford on the 22nd April. In addition, there were also eleven sightings of cetaceans of which the species could not be confirmed.

Unless otherwise stated, regional roundups were written by SWF volunteers Jenna Peterson and Hélène Roger-Bérubet as well as by Gemma Veneruso.

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.