

**Editorial**

With National Whale & Dolphin Watch kicking off in August, there were many interesting sightings to note in the month. Sightings continued to come in strong in September, totalling 11 species recorded in the two months. Thanks to all that participated in the event and to all observers or those that sent in casual sightings over the past couple of months. For further information on the sightings network visit: <http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk>.



Gemma Veneruso, Sightings Officer

**National Whale & Dolphin Watch 2010: Results**

National Whale & Dolphin Watch (NWDW), 7th-15th August 2010, was the ninth annual event organised by the Sea Watch Foundation (SWF). NWDW aims to raise awareness of the status of UK cetaceans by involving the public in the collection of data from dedicated watches both from land and sea. The event also aims to record

a large volume of watch data (effort) that can produce a snapshot of the distribution of cetaceans in British waters.



87 manned land watches at 44 sites were performed throughout the country, which were advertised to the public. In addition, 16 commercial operators directly took part in NWDW by collecting data and by providing passengers with information on the event and cetaceans. Approximately 448 hours of effort data from land- and boat- based watches

have been collected and submitted so far (as of 22 Sept 2010). Sightings from 107 land-based sites were recorded, combining effort based and opportunistic records. 168 positions from vessel-based sightings were also recorded. At least 550 people were involved as observers.

At the time of writing, 452 sightings have been reported during the nine-day event. These records consisted of eight species totalling 2012 individual cetaceans. This year the most common species reported was again the harbour porpoise with 203 sightings, followed by the bottlenose dolphin with 148 reports. Sightings of other species were recorded in much lower numbers. The minke whale was the third most commonly reported species with 50 sightings. In past NWDW events, these three species also received the highest numbers of reports. Other species spotted during NWDW 2010 included the short-beaked common dolphin, Risso's dolphin, killer whale, white-beaked dolphin and northern bottlenose whale. There were several reports of unidentified dolphins or cetaceans.

Many thanks to our NWDW sponsor, BG Group and to everyone that took part and supported us in this event: Regional Coordinators, volunteer observers, Cardigan Bay volunteers, the media, Wendy Nekar, Julie Albray and every person that reported a sighting or performed a watch. For further details on NWDW 2010 results, read the full report available at <http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk>.

Large numbers of white-beaked dolphin seen off Aberdeenshire coast

White-beaked dolphins are no stranger to the Aberdeenshire coastline and are in fact the most abundant dolphin species in the North Sea, but are also common off north-west Scotland and occasionally seen in Western and Southern Ireland, the St George's Channel and English Channel. These animals are usually an offshore

species, favouring feeding in deeper waters. In the past months, however, increasingly regular sightings of the dolphins off Aberdeenshire have been seen close to shore in large numbers.

The first encounter of white-beaked dolphins reported this year occurred during a SWF survey on the 29th May. Ian Sim, SWF Regional Coordinator, was onboard and described this encounter as unusual, as these animals are not normally seen in coastal waters until late June or July. At the same time, there were reports from fishermen of mackerel arriving to the area much earlier than expected, which may explain this unusual sighting if the dolphins were following their prey.

By July, sightings of the species were regular with eight reports including 46 animals seen from Souter Head Cove on the 30th. Coastal sightings in August were increasingly frequent and white-beaked dolphins were spotted 11 times. More than 60 animals were watched from Donmouth on the 1st, a very large group size for this species so close to shore. The dolphins were reported to be repeatedly leaping and splashing. Sightings continued to be recorded from Aberdeen, Greg Ness, Newtonhill and the Muchalls. The last reported sighting on the 17th August came from Ian Sim and Caroline Weir, whilst on survey. They spotted ten animals at the Muchalls and the memorable encounter lasted an hour. Some animals approached



White-beaked dolphin

© I Sim

the boat to bow-ride and entertained observers with leaps and by circling the boat.

It is not yet known if these increased movements further inshore are a result of changing prey distribution, and if this is a pattern that we should expect to

see in years to come. You can help us attempt to answer these questions by doing timed watches for cetaceans either from land or sea, or by sending in chance sightings of these animals. Email sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk for further information on how to be involved.

SWF Director, Dr. Peter Evans presents ship strike risk to cetaceans at ACCOBAMS/IWC workshop on reducing risk of collisions between vessels and cetaceans, Beaulieu surMer, 21-24 Sept 2010

The Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS) and International Whaling Commission (IWC) hosted a workshop on assessing and reducing the risk of ship

strikes on cetaceans. Dr. Peter Evans gave a presentation on the risks of ship strikes in the ASCOBANS regions encompassing the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas.

Our seas are ever increasing in traffic and the ASCOBANS area contains some of the busiest waterways in the world. In the past decade, it has become clear that injury and death of cetaceans from ship strikes can be a significant conservation threat. About half the mortality of the highly endangered northern right whale along the eastern seaboard of the United States can be attributed to ship strike.

In the past few years, a global centralised database has been created to collect data on collisions between vessels and cetaceans. The aims of this workshop were to:

- Exchange and evaluate data on temporal and geographical distribution of cetaceans, shipping and reported collision incidents, with a view to: identifying priorities for mitigation in terms of species, populations and areas; and identifying ways to improve data collection and assignment of cause of death;
- Examine and evaluate existing mitigation approaches/regulations, identify and assess the likely efficacy of potential new ones and make recommendations for further work, including identifying mitigation measures for priority populations/areas as appropriate and methods to examine efficacy;
- Develop scientific and conservation recommendations and a two-year work plan for consideration by the IWC, ACCOBAMS, IMO and others.

The study conducted by Peter Evans and Mick Baines of Sea Watch, and funded by UNEP/ASCOBANS, analysed large sightings data sets for NW Europe, and plotted relative densities for all cetaceans so that hotspots could be identified. They then took details of the tracks of shipping of various kinds using two alternative vessel surveillance schemes (one called AIS or Automatic Identification System, and the other called VOS or Voluntary Observing Ships) that provide information on the positions of vessels, their speed and track at regular intervals. From the plots of cetacean and shipping densities, it was possible to create a map that indicated potential high risk areas where the two overlapped.

Risk of mortality from ship strike appears to increase markedly at speeds exceeding ten knots, and large whales such as fin and minke whales and sperm whale appear to be most vulnerable to this in Europe. Comparing the distributions of those species with shipping densities highlighted particular regions as ones where ship strikes are most likely to occur. These were the Bay of Biscay and some parts of the continental shelf edge, particularly off northwest and northern Spain. Measures are being drawn up to reduce the risk of lethal strikes. These include speed reductions at critical areas and the posting of dedicated observers to report sightings so that the vessel can take averse action.

SIGHTINGS SUMMARY, AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2010

There were good numbers of sightings in August and September despite variable weather conditions, with 11 species recorded in total. As per normal, harbour porpoises were the most common and widely distributed species recorded these months.

Bottlenose dolphin sightings were relatively common, as is expected at this time of year. However, their distribution was not entirely predictable. In Wales, for example, at this time of year we expect to see the Cardigan Bay bottlenose dolphins largely in the Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation (SAC) with some moving northwards into the Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau SAC. It is not until the winter months that we tend to see large groups off Anglesey and in the northern Irish Sea around the Isle of Man and North East England. However, these months have already seen a group of 50 animals off Anglesey, sightings again in the Dee Estuary and in Liverpool Bay. There are no photos yet of these animals to confirm whether they are from the Cardigan Bay population or have come from somewhere else.



Bottlenose dolphin sightings were also reported from more expected locations such as Cardigan Bay, Moray Firth, Aberdeenshire, Sussex, Dorset, Channel Islands, South Devon, Cornwall, the Hebrides, Northern Ireland and at a number of sites in the Republic of Ireland.

Short-beaked common dolphins were spotted throughout the British Isles, in North Devon, Channel Islands, Pembrokeshire, Hebrides, Northern Ireland as well as at a number of locations around the Republic of Ireland including counties Kerry, Mayo and Waterford. A group of 300 was also seen off Cape Clear Island, Cork on the 29th September. There was an unusual sighting of ten possible common dolphins in Cardigan Bay. The species has been known to occasionally enter Cardigan Bay, which is particularly shallow. But these dolphins are much more regular further south in the deeper waters off Pembrokeshire. The top sighting of the species, however, must come from the Moray Firth, where SWF Regional Coordinator, Alan Airey who spotted 300 animals whilst on watch from Covesea. The animals were just three kilometres off the coast. Common dolphins are increasingly regular visitors to the Moray Firth but tend to be seen further offshore. It is unusual to see such high numbers from land.

Risso's dolphins were seen off Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland. There were a number of Scottish encounters seen: off Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, and an unusual sighting off Longhaven, Aberdeenshire. In Wales, sightings were recorded at Strumble Head in Pembrokeshire and at Bardsey Island in northern Cardigan Bay. Irish sightings included encounters in counties Wexford and Cork.



Killer whales were seen mainly off north Scotland, in Shetland, Orkney, Hebrides and the Pentland Firth. However, there was also a possible sighting of the species off the Isle of Man and an unusual record in Cornwall.

In North Scotland, Atlantic white-sided dolphins were seen on a couple of occasions in inshore waters. Two sightings were recorded at Weisdale Voe in Shetland in September. In the same month, 11 animals were recorded by Paul Castle at Dunnet Bay, Caithness. These are the first records we have received of the species in North Scotland this year.

White-beaked dolphins were spotted relatively regularly inshore in the North Sea. Sightings occurred mainly in Aberdeenshire but also off the north-east coast of England. For further information on the Aberdeenshire sightings, see the review above.

Minke whales were well distributed in August and September, with sightings covering much of the coastline. Sightings occurred off Shetland, Orkney, North Sutherland, Caithness, Moray Firth, Aberdeenshire, Yorkshire, Channel Islands, Isle of Man, Hebrides, North West Scotland, Northern Ireland and counties Cork and Kerry in Ireland.

Fin whales were spotted off Ireland at the usual haunts in Co. Cork. There was also the uncommon report of two fin whales off the Isle of Harris, Outer Hebrides on 19th September.

An even more unusual sighting occurred in the Wash in Norfolk in August when two northern bottlenose whales were encountered a number of times, close to shore. As a deep diving species normally found in the North Atlantic, it was clear that these animals had lost their way. Happily these animals left the area after a few days and there have been no reports of a stranding.

Sightings of humpback whales were notable in August and September, with a number of unusual encounters. Unfortunately, there are also some sad stories to tell.

As reported in our last edition, the body of a young humpback whale was found washed up at St Ives, Cornwall on the 15th August. This is the same animal that remained at Godrevy Point for more than one month.

However, this is not the only story of a young humpback in distress. In Shetland, near Vidlin, a 25 foot animal became entangled in creel lines on the 9th September. Rescue efforts were planned on the day but due to unpredictable weather, the rescue was postponed. By the 10th, the whale was nowhere to be seen. It is not yet known whether the animal successfully freed itself or unfortunately drowned from the weight of the lines. This individual has just been matched by photographs of the dorsal fin, and was also seen in the area in 2009.



Baleen whale entanglement is a significant issue with fishing ropes now covering thousands of miles of the country's coasts. There is approximately 4500 miles of creel fishing line in Scottish waters. It has been estimated that 50% of all baleen whale strandings in Scotland are due to entanglement.

On a brighter note, a humpback whale was spotted off Whitby by Sea Watch Trustee and Regional Coordinator, Robin Petch, on the 2nd September, in addition to a number of minke whales. This animal was then re-sighted a number of times until the 11th. On the 20th September, observers couldn't believe their eyes as they watched another humpback whale, which was tracked between Spurn and Withernsea always being no more than 500 metres from the coast. This animal was photographed and is not the same animal that was last spotted off Whitby.

Sightings of humpbacks in British coastal waters are on the rise and there has been the occasional sighting in this region in past years. Last year, two humpback whales were recorded off the Farne Islands.

Additional sightings of the species in August and September occurred north of Shetland mainland, in the Hebrides and off the Republic of Ireland in counties Kerry and Clare.

Further afield, a very unusual sighting of a humpback whale was recorded on the 27th August off Viareggio, Italy. Humpbacks are not at all common in the Mediterranean, with the last documented sightings from the Mediterranean all being off Italy at Trieste and Senigallia in 2002, off Siracusa in 2004, and in Trieste in 2009. In the last two hundred years, there have only been 13 humpback whale sightings in total within the Mediterranean.

With the large increase in the numbers of humpbacks being sighted in the Mediterranean since 1990, research is being done to try to find an explanation for these new occurrences. Sightings of humpbacks are increasing generally in Europe, with the recovery of some stocks in the expanding North Atlantic population after the long whaling period, so it is possible that they are also travelling further east.. However, there has also been an increased interest in whale recording, and this may also play a part.

Send in all cetacean sightings to sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk or via our online reporting form found at <http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk>.

Gemma Veneruso, SWF

REGIONAL ROUNDUPS

SHETLAND

(including sightings data kindly forwarded by Shetland Sea Mammal Group)

Shetland had 23 sightings in August. Harbour porpoise were the most abundant species seen in the region with 14 encounters. The species was relatively well spread throughout the Isles with group size ranging from one to three individuals.

There were four sightings of minke whale recorded within two weeks in August. Single animals were spotted off the Out Skerries, Cunningsburgh, West Skeld and Yell Sound.

There were two Risso's dolphin encounters in August including a group of 20 spotted in Mousa Sound on the 20th. Four animals were seen two days later from Sumburgh Head. The remaining species recorded in August included 15 white-beaked dolphins

spotted off Ness of Hillswick on the 16th. A single killer whale was seen east of Sumburgh Head on the 31st of August.

There were 11 sightings recorded in September, consisting of six species. The most dominant species was the minke whale with five encounters and a total of 36 individuals! On the 3rd, up to 30 animals were reported throughout the day from land and vessels between Lamba Ness and Balta. The next day, three animals were again seen from Lamba Ness. Single minke whales were also recorded from Wick of Tresta, Fetlar, and off the Isles of Gletness.

Of dolphin species, Atlantic white-sided dolphins were encountered this month on two occasions. Two animals were spotted on the 2nd and 3rd in Weisdale Voe. Also on the 3rd, six Risso's dolphins were seen at the Wick of Tresta, Fetlar, and two killer whales were recorded at Hamnavoe, Yell.

In contrast to August, there was just one sighting recorded of harbour porpoise. These two individuals were spotted in the Bay of Quendale, Lerwick, on the 25th.

One humpback whale was seen on the 6th of September between Mossbank and Sullom Voe.

ORKNEY

There were 27 sightings reported in Orkney, consisting of five species. Harbour porpoise were most common with 16 sightings. Animals were seen most at Hoxa Head, South Ronaldsay reported by Jenni Kakkonen. However, sightings were also recorded at Herston Head on South Ronaldsay, Cantick Head on Hoy, Tankerness, Sanday, Deersound, and Eynhallow Sound.

Minke whales were recorded four times, with sightings at Burwich, Cantick Head, Herston Head and Eynhallow Sound.

Risso's dolphins were encountered on three occasions including a group of 30, spotted east of Copinsay Island on the 2nd. Small groups of seven and 12 were recorded at Herston Head and Eynhallow Sound respectively.

Killer whales were seen three times in August. The first sighting of the species occurred on the 8th of Loth ferry terminal on Sanday with five animals. It was not until the 30th and 31st that killer whales were observed again, with a group of four seen on both days off North Ronaldsay.

On the 20th, eight probable bottlenose dolphins were spotted east of Shapinsay by Kenny Sinclair of SeaOrkney.

Minke whales were the most commonly reported species in September with four sightings. Animals were recorded at Scapa Flow, Marwick Head, St. Mary's and Hoxa Head. Also at Hoxa, in the Sound, a single common dolphin was recorded on the 5th.

Harbour porpoise were recorded on three occasions at Hoxa Head, Switha Sound and Rackwick.

Four killer whales were seen off Marwick Head on the 14th.

30 dolphins that could not be identified were spotted in Scapa Flow on the 2nd.

NORTH SCOTLAND

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland

The NWDW started on the north coast of Scotland with the sighting of two harbour porpoise in near impossible conditions for any type of sighting when the animals appeared within metres of the coast and looked up at me, leaning over the cliff guard rail. There were 13 further sightings of harbour porpoise during the month at Strathy Point, Duncansby Head, Thurso Bay and John O'Groats.

Karen Munro at Thurso Bay reported a group of four Risso's dolphins on the 8th, with Ivor Thomas reporting three on the same day at John O'Groats from the John O'Groats Ferry. Another group of six Risso's dolphins were seen playing off Strathy Point by Karen Munro and me on the 22nd, last seen heading north-west.



The nine minke whale sightings recorded in August were all seen from Strathy Point, North Sutherland. The whales were usually seen heading east on the rising tide, then going west on the falling tide. I myself recorded these minke whale sightings, apart from one which was

spotted by Tim Haws.

Killer whales were reported by an avid bird watcher, Tim Wootton, who was returning to Orkney on the Scrabster to Stromness lunch-time ferry. The 19 animals were in groups of six, eight and five, with the group of six heading west.

September saw a sudden drop in sightings with strong winds blowing from the north and north-west. Harbour porpoise were seen on five occasions in Thurso Bay, Strathy

Point, John O'Groats and Gills Bay. Gills Bay usually has large groups of porpoise from the end of July through to October, but this year the sightings have been few, and in lower numbers.

As well as the two porpoise sightings recorded on the 11th, my single visit to Strathy Point in the month also rewarded me with two Risso's dolphins.

A single minke whale was spotted on the 9th by Karen Munro in Thurso Bay. The most exciting sighting, however, was reported to me by Paul Castle when he spotted 11 Atlantic white-sided dolphins in Dunnet Bay on the 9th, the only such sighting reported from the north Scotland mainland coast this season.

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland

The NWDW saw sightings of harbour porpoise, Risso's dolphin, minke whale and a single unidentified dolphin species.

The Risso's dolphins were seen on the last organised manned watch of the NWDW at Lybster. I was joined at the watch site by one interested observer who had moved to the area. I had spotted the eight Risso's dolphins several miles to the west of Swiney



Risso's dolphins

© F Ugarte/ SWF

Hill heading eastwards, meaning that they would pass across in front of us. We watched the dolphins for an hour splashing and breaching. My visitor was delighted with his first sighting of dolphins.

Harbour porpoise in August were seen at Wick, Whaligoe Steps, Swiney Hill, and Latheron, totalling 22 sightings. The largest single group seen was ten individuals

reported by Caithness Seacoast wild life tour boat, in addition to a number of basking sharks off Wick on the 15th.

Minke whales were spotted off Wick by George Campbell on the 15th, with three sightings of the species. One animal was spotted at Whaligoe Steps by Dave Nicolson on the 26th, with two at Swiney Hill, Lybster on the 14th and 30th.

A large whale was seen from Swiney Hill, close to the Smith Bank Beatrice oil platforms but was too far offshore for identification.

A rare sighting for the Caithness coast was of a single bottlenose dolphin spotted by George Campbell passing the Wick river estuary on the 24th. A dolphin, of which the species could not be identified, was seen at the entrance to the Whaligoe Steps. The mammal, about two metres in length, breached once then dropped back into the water, all I could see was its dark back.

The weather made September a very difficult month for watching, with some very choppy water.

Two minke whales were seen on the 1st September with one off Lybster and another off Forse, by Colin and Grace Carter from their creel boat. The same minke whale was also recorded by myself at Swiney Hill, Lybster.

Harbour porpoise were seen at Wick also on the 1st. The remaining 13 sightings were in the Lybster area on the 1st, 12th, 18th, and 26th.

MORAY FIRTH

Written by Alan Airey, Regional Coordinator for North Grampian

August seemed to be a strange month both for weather and cetaceans, and the week of the NWDW in particular was not good for either. Sea states seemed to pick up or drop off in seconds, but usually picking up just as I arrived to do a watch.



August is always a good month for bottlenose dolphin sightings in the Moray Firth with virtually guaranteed sightings daily at places like Kessock, Chanonry Point, the Cromarty Sutors, and Spey Bay. Elsewhere along the coast, sightings were rather sporadic. In total, 62 sightings of the species were recorded. Off Burghead, nine bottlenose dolphins were seen on the

2nd and a well spread out group of 26, with the tiniest bottlenose calf I have ever seen on the 25th. On the 16th, a friend, Margaret Sharpe, spotted five animals off Lossiemouth East beach and the Gemini Explorer had a group of 15 around it off Sandend on the 20th. Bottlenose dolphins were also spotted twice during the day off Covesea on the 31st.

Minke whales were rather scarce during August, with five sightings. Two sightings were recorded further west off Fraserburgh and Rattray Head. However, two were

seen feeding off Burghead during NWDW, and another off Covesea on the 31st on a beautiful still evening. The still evening of the 31st was perfect for spotting harbour porpoise and I watched a group of 40+ porpoises spread out feeding off the Halliman Skerries, Lossiemouth. Several more porpoise were also seen that evening off Covesea, and Burghead also recorded several porpoise sightings totalling 17 in the region during the month.

The calm last day of August carried over into September, and I was pleased to see at least 20 of the porpoise that I had seen the previous day still busy feeding off Lossiemouth. Two porpoise were seen off Covesea on the 13th, and 10 on the 22nd. The only other porpoise sighting was of two off Burghead on the 30th. There was also an additional sighting of two animals at Portsoy Harbour recorded by Peter Stainthorp.

Driving up to the cliffs at Covesea, I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw a large disturbance 3km out in the Moray Firth, my initial assessment was confirmed when the eyepiece of my scope was filled with leaping common dolphins. There were at least 300 including many calves. Overhead they were being tracked by several gannets. The common dolphins were generally heading east but occasionally they would backtrack before heading east again. Common dolphins are becoming regular summer visitors to the Moray Firth, but the large groups have only been seen in the outer Moray Firth, with just smaller groups venturing in further.

Sightings of bottlenose dolphins are virtually guaranteed in the Chanonry Point area in September, but elsewhere it was not until the 20th when 22 animals were seen off



Burghead, and eight plus the following day. At Covesea, two bottlenose dolphins were seen on the 21st and a single dolphin on the 29th.

Minke whales were not seen until the 21st when two were seen off Covesea. The next evening, there was a minke again off Covesea, and also another minke whale off Burghead as I passed by.

SOUTH GRAMPIAN & SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND

Fifty-eight sightings were recorded in the month of August for both regions, with a total of 306 animals and four species identified. Harbour porpoise was the most common species, with 31 encounters. These animals were recorded at Donmouth, Aberdeen Bay, Girdleness, Peterhead, Stonehaven, Porthlethen and in the Firth of Forth.

Large groups of white-beaked dolphin were seen this month off the Aberdeenshire coast, with 13 sightings totalling 192 individuals. On the 1st of August, Kevin Hepworth counted 62 white-beaked dolphins at Donmouth during a land-based watch. On the 16th August, Ian Sim counted 20 animals in his encounter at



Stonehaven. Caroline Weir also reported 30 individuals off Girdleness on the 17th of August. Also on the 17th during a vessel-based survey, Caroline and Ian had a great encounter with ten white-beaked dolphins that remained with them for more than an hour.

There were six sightings of bottlenose dolphins

in August. Animals were seen in small groups at Aberdeen Pier, Torry Battery, St Cyrus, Stonehaven, St Andrews and Firth of Forth.

There were three minke whale encounters between the 2nd and 10th of August. Whales were seen off Portthlethen, Strathbeg and en-route the ferry from Lerwick to Aberdeen from a NORCET Survey.

There were also five unidentified dolphin sightings this month.

There were 12 sightings reported in September, with the most common species being the bottlenose dolphin, with six encounters. Dolphins were seen at Girdleness, Torry Battery, Aberdeen Harbour, Nigg and at Stonehaven where a group of 20 animals were recorded on the 25th.

There were five sightings of harbour porpoise this month. Three of the sightings were recorded off Stonehaven by Ian Sim, whilst the other two were seen off Girdleness and Longhaven.

On the same day at Longhaven came the unusual sighting of four Risso's dolphins reported by Kevin Hepworth.

NORTH EAST ENGLAND

There were just three sightings reported for this region in August, which occurred in the first two days of NWDW. Twenty white-beaked dolphins were recorded on the

7th and 8th at Whitburn Country Park and Staple Sound respectively. There was also a harbour porpoise sighting on the 8th off Beadnell Point, Northumberland.

There were no sightings recorded in September.

EASTERN ENGLAND

Written by Robin Petch, Regional Coordinator for Eastern England

This is generally a quiet area compared to some parts of the country. We have quite a porpoise population, sightings even being made well up the Humber or occasionally up the Rivers Ouse and Trent. Minke and white-beaked dolphins are also seen from time to time but this year.....!

The excitement began during National Whale and Dolphin Watch during August. Poor weather and sea conditions limited us to only one "Finding Fins" trip from Whitby, on 11th August, but we quickly found two minke whales, possibly a mother and calf/juvenile. We are fairly certain that we re-sighted these during a further trip on 17th August, as well as probably two more, with dive sequences and feeding behaviour observed. Another large, broad animal was also briefly sighted some distance away, but unfortunately we were unable to spot it again. What intrigued us was that everyone was fairly sure that it did not have a minke-type fin! Further sightings of minke and the large whale were reported during occasional trips over the next two weeks and then on 2nd September.....

During a six hour trip we first found what we believe to have been "our" minke mother and calf/juvenile then heard the breach and saw the splash as a humpback announced its presence! An hour was spent observing it feeding and fluking up, with minke also being seen. After a Trustee meeting I returned to Whitby



Humpback whale

© R Petch

at 6am on Saturday 4th. We found "our" minkes again within an hour and a half but the highlight was five minke and the humpback all feeding for two hours on a huge herring shoal surrounding the boat! The whale was re-sighted on the 11th and has been seen since (date to be confirmed), but unfortunately weather and sea conditions have prevented many further trips, which has been enormously frustrating! Interestingly, however, there is a possibility that a second large whale was seen on this trip, but what is more certain is that a second humpback was followed along the coast from Spurn Point northwards by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

Warden on 20th September. The weather and sea remain poor but sightings of minke have been made well into October in the past, however, so we will not give up!

The tail shots of the Whitby whale have been shared with the North Atlantic Humpback catalogue, and we are hoping to discover where it has been and where it goes in the future – probably the Cape Verde Islands, or maybe even the Caribbean. Most of all, we hope it returns safely next year! Traditionally, the waters of Whitby are important herring spawning grounds, so who knows?

Throughout this period, porpoises have continued to be seen in the area, with ten sightings in August, although none have been recorded in September.

Finally, on 29th September, a group of around 200 large dolphins were reported by the trawler Defiant 7 miles off Skinnigrove, just up the coast from Whitby. I still hope to get more details, Defiant has been a good source of information from time to time, but unfortunately she recently went aground off Sandsend, but happily with no injury or loss of life.

I would like to thank Bryan Clarkson and Juanita Havenga, skipper and crew of Specksioneer, and also the skippers and crew of Esk Belle II who so wholeheartedly support our work from Whitby.

EAST ANGLIA

Written by Dave Powell, Regional Coordinator for East Anglia

At the start of August, two northern bottlenose whales ventured deep into the Wash, Norfolk, and were observed from the 1st to the 9th. Fin pictures were sent to SWF head office, and the animals were identified from these. These are deep water species and it is thought that some lose their way during the migration in the North Atlantic, which is why we sometimes see these animals in coastal waters. Happily, these

individuals seemed to make their way successfully back out to sea.

Also in August, six other sightings were recorded from Norfolk, all being harbour porpoise, and these were spread out



around the coast. I spotted one off Hunstanton and three from Cromer Pier. There were also reports of one from Walcott seafront and three from Mundesley, by Mick Fiszer.

There were no sightings reported in East Anglia in September.

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

There were seven sightings reported in August, most of these being sightings from boats. All of these reports apart from one that could not be identified, were harbour porpoise. These animals were spotted off Albeburgh and Lowestoft in Suffolk, Queenborough in Kent, the Thirslet Spit and off Bradwell in the River Blackwater, and Mucking Bay in the Thames Estuary.

Two sightings were recorded in the month of September, again of harbour porpoise. The first sighting was on the 18th off Dunwich Beach, Suffolk. The remaining sighting was spotted on the 20th near the Greenland Pier at Canary Wharf in the River Thames.

SOUTHERN ENGLAND

There was just one sighting reported in the region in August, of three bottlenose dolphins on the 3rd off Bognor Pier, West Sussex.

Bottlenose dolphins were recorded in the region again in September, when a group of eight were recorded between Bognor Regis and Littlehampton on the 3rd by Sussex Sea Fisheries.

DORSET

(including sightings data kindly forwarded by Durlston Marine Project)

There were three sightings of six bottlenose dolphins in August. Two of these encounters occurred on the 24th at Poole Bay, reported by Ian Rabjohns of Poole Bay Cetacean Watch (PBCW), and off Old Harry Rocks recorded by Durlston Marine Project. The remaining sighting was on the 26th off Hengistbury Head.

There were 18 sightings of dolphins reported in September. Four of these were confirmed as bottlenose dolphins. Group sizes reached up to 15 animals off Old Harry Rocks on the 2nd and 26th. Other sighting locations included Alum and Durley Chine, Swanage, Weymouth, Portland and Poole Bay.

CHANNEL ISLANDS

Written by Bertram Bree, Regional Coordinator for the Channel Islands

August kicked off to a good start when on the 2nd, ten common dolphins were spotted offshore, west of Jersey. On the same day, between Herm and Alderney, an unidentified cetacean species was seen. On the 3rd, four bottlenose dolphins were seen east of Godin near Herm, south-east of Guernsey.

To kick off NWDW, two minke whales were recorded on the 8th. About three miles WNW of Guernsey, Chris Mourant on a seabird pelagic trip from Guernsey with local birdwatchers saw at least two whales which, like the common dolphins, are regular here at this time of year.

On the 13th, three or more bottlenose dolphins were in Grouville Bay off the south-east coast of Jersey. It wasn't until the 23rd at Grosnez on the north-west tip of Jersey, that bottlenose dolphins were seen again, when at least two individuals were recorded.



On 3rd September, four miles south of Sark, about 100 dolphins were reported, which were most likely common dolphins. There was just one more sighting in this month on the 27th, off Gorey in Grouville Bay. Around 12 bottlenose dolphins were seen feeding in Grouville Bay from about 17:30 onwards in this usual location, as the currents push them past this good fishing spot.

SOUTH DEVON

Written by Lauren Davis, DBRC (including sightings data kindly forwarded by DBRC)

The majority of sightings on the South Devon coast were from Berry Head, thanks to long dedicated watches run by Nigel Smallbones during NWDW. Fourteen sightings of harbour porpoise were recorded at this site, as well as four bottlenose dolphin reports.

Four sightings of bottlenose dolphin were also seen in Torbay, observed in early August from Torquay, Paignton and Brixham. One sighting included a group of approximately 25 dolphins.

Following the excitement of the sperm whale in Torbay towards the end of June, many people in the area (including me!) had their eyes peeled for any more glimpses of this amazing animal. On the 5th August, a possible mother and calf were seen by an observer off Preston. This again raised much excitement due to there being a possible calf present. Unfortunately, there was no photo evidence whether this was a definite record so it remains uncertain.

A lone bottlenose dolphin was seen in late September off Slapton Sands.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to these figures.

CORNWALL

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

Once again a large volume of sightings were recorded, similar to the previous couple of months. Six different cetacean species were identified, mostly from sites to the west of the County. Starting as usual with harbour porpoises, they were fairly abundant around the Land's End peninsula with observations coming in from Botallack, Bosigran, Cape Cornwall, Porthgwarra and Porthcurno, plus more sightings out at the Isles of Scilly. Elsewhere they were also seen at Lizard Point.

Bottlenose dolphin pods were very well distributed, from Bude right up near the Devon border on the north coast where a large group of 40 were seen on 1st September, through Port Isaac, Polzeath, Newquay, Gwithian, St Ives, Porthcurno, Mount's Bay and finally



Porthoustock on the edge of Fal Bay on the south coast. The group at Polzeath gave surfers a close encounter as they joined them amongst the waves to play!

Common dolphins were off Port Quin, Padstow, Cape Cornwall, Porthcurno and around the Manacles reef. Pods of them were also seen several times at various locations around the Newquay bay area, including a large gathering of possibly up to 200 animals interacting with divers on 2nd September – must have been a very worthwhile trip for them!

A single sighting of six Risso's dolphins was made from Carn Glouce, near Cape Cornwall, on 1st September, and one individual was noted to be almost completely pale grey/white in colour. Unidentified groups of dolphins were seen around St Agnes, Pendeen, Cape Cornwall, Wolf Rock, Porthcurno and Lizard Point.

Minke whales were seen on several occasions around the Porthgwarra area, mostly lone animals apparently feeding out near the Runnelstone reef. A single sighting of a lone orca was made on 26th September off Mawgan Porth, near Newquay, while a group of five fast moving whales also thought to be of the same species were seen off Bedruthan Steps, also near Newquay, early in the same month.

Seawatch Southwest survey sightings.

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

The Seawatch Southwest survey continues to churn out daily doses of superb sightings recorded from Gwennap Head. Harbour porpoises and basking sharks were recorded frequently, with ocean sunfish, common dolphins and minke whales also seen fairly often. Bottlenose dolphins were only seen a handful of times however, but there were also two further reports of Risso's dolphins in addition to the one aforementioned, including when three animals were seen on 3rd August with a calf that breached repeatedly. Other sightings of interest were on 7th August when a minke whale gave a spectacular breaching display, and on 17th September over 100 common dolphins were present as well as a peak of 21 basking sharks!

News and events.

The rescue season for grey seals began in mid-September and quickly set off a fast paced beginning like last year, as the first two pups were rescued by British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org.uk) and taken to the National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn1.html) for rehabilitation within 24 hours of each other. Also rescued during September was a blue shark – possibly a first for BDMLR. The distressed animal was washing around in the surf during the early evening at Mawgan Porth and the Medics looking for it were lucky to find it. The creature, approximately 3ft long, was carefully taken in a box of seawater to the nearby Blue Reef Aquarium (www.blureefaquarium.co.uk/newquay.htm) at Newquay, where Medics and staff took half hour shifts to support it waist-deep in a tank while walking it around to keep water moving over the gills. Sadly after a few hours the animal was still unable to support itself alone in the water and its behaviour also had not improved, so after consultation with vets it was decided that euthanasia was the most humane option at this point. It was suggested the poor behavioural response may have been due to brain damage, perhaps having been caught and then not returned to the sea quick enough, starving it of oxygen. Certainly being so close inshore is not the normal habitat for this species, which is normally a summer visitor remaining out in deeper waters offshore. The body was taken for post mortem examination at the Marine Biological Association in Plymouth (www.mba.ac.uk), where hopefully more answers may come to light.

The Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings Network (www.cwtstrandings.org.uk) have been getting busier throughout this period, mainly with young seals that haven't survived their first few weeks of life, but also with a few harbour porpoises and common dolphins scattered around the County. However a striped dolphin stranded at Perranporth on 3rd August brings the total species count for this period up to 7.

Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) have been monitoring the transition of seals at one particular colony from their offshore haulout ledges to the mainland haulout beach in preparation for the rapidly approaching pupping and breeding season. This also marks the time when many seals recorded in the extensive photo-ID collection are spotted once more for the first time in months, including soon-to-be mothers and certainly a few heavily pregnant females, both known and unknown, have already been noted on several occasions. This is also a strenuous time for the adult male seals, as they wait for mothers to wean their pups (which takes about three weeks) they must defend the territory around them continuously from other adult males that want to take over the area and then get the right to mate with the female once she is ready to leave her pup. Last year the dominant male of several years' experience as the 'beachmaster' was usurped and a period of unrest lasted through most of the remaining season with regular changes in leadership. This led to a lot of nervousness amongst the younger seals, which were frequently chased away when they didn't even pose a threat! Now is the anxious wait until the first pups are born to find out what will happen this season...

NORTH DEVON

Written by Lauren Davis, DBRC (including sightings data kindly forwarded by DBRC)

Harbour porpoise were recorded 24 times in August, with sightings reported at Bull, Baggy, Morte, Downend and Capstone Points, Woolacombe and Tunnels beach.

Common dolphins were spotted from the mainland on two occasions in August, including a single individual from Bideford on the 9th, and 30 individuals seen from Baggy Point on the 15th.

There were a further 15 sightings of harbour porpoise in September, all reported from Chris and Sharron Blackmore at Capstone Point, Tunnels Beaches, and Ilfracombe Pier.



Lundy Island

Written by Sophie Wheatley, Assistant Lundy Warden

Lundy's cetacean sightings in August and September have mostly come from visitors staying on the island. These sightings have been supplemented by the crew of the MS Oldenburg (the island's passenger ferry), which makes almost daily trips to Lundy throughout the summer season. For August and September combined, 30 separate cetacean sightings have been recorded (16 in August and 14 in September) with a total of 550 individual cetaceans being observed.

Out of the total number of individual cetaceans observed, 530 were of dolphins (515 common, three bottlenose, and 12 unidentified species). Nineteen harbour porpoise were also identified during August and September, and although not a cetacean, one sunfish was spotted, which is always worth a mention.

Observations have been recorded from all around the island, including on the crossing to Lundy, with no particular trends in the distribution of sightings.

BRISTOL CHANNEL & SOUTH WALES

There was just one sighting recorded in August of one harbour porpoise at Brean Down, Somerset on the 15th.

On the 2nd September, four common dolphins were spotted in Carmarthen Bay.

WEST WALES

Written by Gemma Veneruso (SWF), Regional Coordinator for West Wales

In the month of August, West Wales received 211 sightings thanks to a big push



during NWDW, during which 116 of these sightings were recorded. SWF volunteers were at New Quay pier every day during NWDW watching for the dolphins and also showing a display with information on the cetaceans of Cardigan Bay and of SWF activities. There were also drawing competitions, sand sculpting and face painting, and merchandise

for sale. Thanks go to the volunteers for their help in the event and to the public for their interest and kind donations.

197 sightings were of bottlenose dolphins in Cardigan Bay. Hotspots included New Quay, Trwyn Crou, Ynys Lochtyn, Aberporth and Mwnt.

Harbour porpoise were spotted on nine occasions, at Cwmtedu, Aberporth, Cardigan Island and Turbot Bank.

Common dolphins were seen in relatively large groups at the start and end of the month in Pembrokeshire. On the 1st, 100 animals were recorded, and on the 30th, 200 were estimated, both south of St Ann's Head. There was also a smaller group sighted of 13 individuals again at St Ann's, on the 8th.

Four probable Risso's dolphins were seen off Strumble Head on the 14th.

Sightings in September were still relatively high, with 153 records. Bottlenose dolphins were recorded 137 times, with New Quay, Trwyn Crou, Ynys Lochtyn and Cardigan Island being the most popular sites.

There were 12 sightings of harbour porpoise this month, with eight of these being spotted around New Quay. Sightings were also reported at Cwmtedu and Ramsey Sound, Pembrokeshire.



Common dolphins were seen in small numbers, reaching a maximum of ten individuals, in September. This included a possible sighting of the species in Cardigan Bay which is relatively unusual. Ten animals were thought to be seen on the 2nd September 1.5 km offshore, between Ynys Lochtyn and Cwmtedu. Six animals were seen in Carmarthen Bay on the 9th. On the 5th, four animals travelled close into Fishguard Harbour where there were fears that the animals would strand. This is the second time this summer that common dolphins have ventured close into the harbour, unusual for a normally deep water species. On the 12th July, 12 travelled into the harbour and had to be coaxed out to sea by volunteers. It is not clear what has caused the animals to venture in so close to shore. It may be that the same group is involved. Happily these animals managed to find their way out to deeper waters.

A possible minke whale was recorded off Strumble Head on the 18th September.

NORTH WALES

There were 38 sightings reported in August. Twenty-four of these reports were harbour porpoise encounters. Hotspots for sightings were based mainly in North Anglesey, particularly from Point Lynas and Bull Bay. However, sightings were also recorded at Llanbadrig, Puffin Island, and further south in Bardsey Sound and between Porthmadog and Mochras Point.

Eleven sightings of bottlenose dolphin were recorded this month. Dolphins were spotted off the St Tudwal's Islands on three occasions, Nefyn, Criccieth, Pen-Y-Chain and Tremadog Bay. There were also sightings of the species off Anglesey, including two encounters at Aberffraw and one at Point Lynas.

Risso's dolphins were spotted twice in August. On the 15th, two probable Risso's dolphins were reported to Jon Shaw, half a mile north of Bull Bay. On the last day of the month, during a Sea Watch/CCW survey, a group of ten were spotted west of the Llyn Peninsula.



There were 16 sightings reported in September. Eight of these were harbour porpoise sightings, with animals recorded off the Llyn Peninsula, Bull Bay, Point Lynas and Llanbadrig. Bottlenose dolphin sightings were on the rise also, with eight sightings. Animals were mainly seen at various sites along the Llyn Peninsula, including Trwyn, Porth Dinllaen and Nefyn. Animals were also recorded off Barmouth and Llanfairfechan. The surprise sighting of the species was a group of 50 seen on 21st September near Moelfre in north-east Anglesey. There had been very few sightings reported through the summer and groups of this size in north Anglesey normally don't tend to form until a bit later in the year.

There was one sighting of three Risso's dolphins spotted 16 miles north-west of Amlwch, north Anglesey.

ISLE OF MAN

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

The continuation of the windy conditions seen during July meant that there were only 30 sightings of cetaceans during August. The most commonly reported cetacean species was harbour porpoise, of which there were 13 sightings reported from all round the island. The same group of Risso's dolphins that had been seen during July, around the Calf of Man, was also seen during August, as confirmed by photo identification. In total, there were ten sightings of Risso's dolphins during August. There were also the two sightings of common dolphin off the south-west of the island, two sightings of minke whales, and an unconfirmed, though likely, sighting of an orca.

Unfortunately, the poor weather during August persisted almost throughout National Whale and Dolphin Watch, with only a couple of land-based watches possible. We did, however, host an event called "*Picnic With a Porpoise*" in the south of the island, which attracted over 250 people, which was more than we probably expected. Everyone attending really liked the theme of the event and we were lucky enough to be graced with a couple of porpoise for the last 30 minutes of the event, so overall, a great success.

There were a fairly average total of 20 sightings of cetaceans during September, although this does not quite tell the whole story. Of these 20 sightings, 14 of them



were seen on one extraordinary day on the 27th September. This included four minke whale sightings, four Risso's dolphin sightings, four harbour porpoise sightings, one sighting of an unidentified dolphin species, and most excitingly, a sighting of two fin whales, all off the west coast of the island.

Other sightings during September included a large group of harbour porpoise, numbering at least 30 individuals in a small area on the first day of the month, a group of 20 Risso's dolphins on the 25th, and several minke whale sightings.

NORTH WEST ENGLAND

Written by Dave McGrath

National Whale & Dolphin Watch – Blackpool Promenade

Once again the Blackpool watches of National Whale and Dolphin Week coincided with poor weather. Winds generally force 4/5 from the north- west made viewing conditions difficult with it being very hard to spot our harbour porpoises in a choppy sea. As a consequence no cetaceans were seen despite some excellent volunteer assistance most days. Seabirds were also few and far between, but we did have a close encounter with a grey seal.

Four bottlenose dolphins passed Hilbre Island in the mouth of the River Dee, heading upstream on 9th August.

Two stranded harbour porpoises were found along the Fylde coast in August, on the 8th and 31st.

In September, at Blackpool's South Promenade, a female and juvenile harbour porpoise were seen fairly close inshore on 2nd September.

Approximately eight bottlenose dolphins seen from the Isle of Man ferry in the Outer Morecambe Bay area on 3rd September were a taste of things to come. Other reports from ferry crossings towards the end of the month suggested that there was a small population of perhaps a dozen or more animals feeding on bait balls of fish in the northern half of Liverpool Bay between the east coast of the Isle of Man and Southwest Scotland.

After the fierce storm in Irish Sea mid-month, a harbour porpoise was seen off Walney Island on 18th September.

Hilbre Island bird watchers once again saw a single bottlenose dolphin on 29th September.

There was another stranded harbour porpoise during September, again along the Fylde coast, on 12th.

SOUTH WEST SCOTLAND

Written by Rowan Fraser, Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park

In August, Tanya Sheaff reported harbour porpoise off Portrye, Cumbrae in Ayrshire, and Stephen Park reported common dolphins off Hunterston. I had to stare at the web entry, "SBCD" for several minutes before I realised this meant short-beaked common dolphin. I don't think I have been lucky enough to see one, although they are known to make their way up the Firth of Clyde. Last year, I was shown an amazing picture taken George Patterson of a common dolphin and harbour porpoise feeding together in very close proximity near to Cumbrae. They appeared to be on their own so this might be an interesting behaviour to keep your eyes out for if you are watching in that area.

I also recorded three sightings of harbour porpoise off Dunoon in August.

In September, Catherine Forbes saw a group of up to 12 bottlenose dolphins feeding near Campbeltown in Argyll on the 1st and 2nd. I'm turning a little green. Bottlenose dolphins were quite common around here until fairly recently, and we did have one possible sighting near Kirn, but no back-up confirmation.

Coming up for Air is a pilot project coordinated by the National Park in partnership with Sea Watch Foundation. Its aim is to encourage and support local people in systematically monitoring of cetaceans in the sea lochs of the region and in the Firth of Clyde.



So far, we have managed to recruit a few wonderful local folk, including Amanda Joaquin who is undertaking ferry-based observations, Rodger Parramore who keeps me company on land-based surveys, and Kathy Harper who has become the queen of spotters. In September, she has clocked a fair number of harbour porpoise and seen a minke whale on two different occasions, and has been over the moon with excitement on every occasion. Kathy's minke spotting was backed by independent sightings by ferry staff, and makes the report by a member of the public of something "awffy big" just at the side of Dunoon Pier, as very likely to have been a minke whale.

Rodger and I do a land survey from Strone, and one of the lovely things about starting this project has been bumping in to local children who see us surveying and then going into the school to talk about cetaceans and to give them a shot of using binoculars and telescopes to look for wildlife in our seas.

My colleague Jim Downie, the local vet, and I were involved in the rescue of a common seal pup, (not the ones you usually see at the top of the beach without their mother, that's the grey seal pup). Sadly this one had a deformed pelvis and intestinal system, and died a few days after its rescue.

As well as the systematic watches, we have been receiving a lot of casual sightings of harbour porpoise. We are still very keen to recruit more local volunteers, so if you are at all interested please get in touch (telephone: 01389 722106 / e-mail: rowan.fraser@lochlomond-trossachs.org).

WEST SCOTLAND & HEBRIDES

Written by Sandra Koetter, HWDT (including sightings data kindly forwarded by HWDT)

August

Harbour porpoises have been seen on numerous occasions, with a high proportion of sightings around the Small Isles and Skye. Similarly to previous Augusts, sightings of common dolphins were rare, with six encounters reported this month, locations ranging from Raasay to Coll, Mull and Colonsay.

Bottlenose dolphins have been spotted on five occasions. Westport, Kintyre and Ardnòe Point (near Loch Fyne) - areas in the southern limits of our study area - have all seen encounters, with a relatively large pod of up to 25 individuals in Westport.

Killer whales have been spotted on seven occasions this month, which is very exciting for us as we usually receive only a handful of sightings per season. Reports are mainly from around the Small Isles, Skye, and Arisaig. We have also received a sighting off Caillean Beach which we are trying to validate at the moment.



Minke whales were still reported throughout August with the majority of sightings off Arisaig, Skye and Eigg. A more unusual sighting was received from the Firth of Clyde. We have very few sightings reported from this area and are keen to learn more.

The August highlight was the sighting of a humpback whale off Camas Tuath, Mull. This is the second sighting of a humpback whale this year off the west coast of Scotland. Unfortunately, we did not receive any photographs so we cannot identify the individual from the North Atlantic Humpback Catalogue.

September

September sightings haven't been as frequent by comparison to previous months, as the summer season draws to an end, less seasonal visitors are encountered reporting their observations.

Minke whales have been spotted on three occasions this month: at the beginning of the month off the east coast of Rum, and towards the end of the month off Reinish Point, Harris, and Mallaig.

There have been several sightings in the Little Minch during September, mainly of common dolphins. Although, there was also a report of a small pod of four bottlenose dolphins..

Undoubtedly, September's highlight was the report of two fin whales off Reinish point (Isle of Harris) on the 19th September. Fin whale sightings are rare in the Hebrides – historically, HWDT has only three other reported sightings; in 2009 off St. Kilda, and other reports in 2007 and 2006. Sightings generally occur during the summer months, suggesting that the whales move inshore then, taking advantage of the food resources available. However, relatively little is known about their movements and migration patterns.

Harbour porpoise sightings were reported in the first and last week of September, predominantly off Skye, Mallaig, Eigg and Ardmore Point (Mull).

NORTH WEST SCOTLAND

There were 25 sightings of harbour porpoise in August. Common sites included mid Loch Gairloch and Kerry Bay as reported by Ian French, Gairloch Marine Centre.



Minke whale
© P Anderwald/ SWF

The most common species seen by far this month was the minke whale with 49 reports. Animals were normally seen alone but sometimes occurred in twos and threes. Sightings were reported by Nick Davies, Hebridean Whale Cruises from a number of sites. Hotspots included Longa Island,

off Rona Bank and west of Carr Point.

Common dolphins were seen on 14 occasions in August, often in relatively large group sizes. 200 animals were reported 10 km W of Melvaig on the 30th and 250 were seen on the 26th and 27th east of the Isle of Skye.

A single killer whale was reported on the 11th one nautical mile west of Arisaig.

There was also four unidentified dolphin encounters reported whilst on the ferry between Stornoway and Ullapool by Claire Bailly.

Minke whales continued to be common in September with 26 sightings. Reports were common at the north end of Skye, Staffin Island, and around Rona Bank.

There were six reports of common dolphin including 200 animals in North Minch on the 26th and 250 six km north-west of Rubha Reidh, near Gairloch on the same day.

Harbour porpoise were encountered seven times with sightings off Gairloch, Ullapool and 25 animals that were seen at An Dubh-Sgeir, north-west of the Isle of Skye on the 26th.

Three killer whales were spotted at Neist Point, Skye on the 11th.

NORTHERN IRELAND

(including sightings data kindly forwarded by IWDG)

Seventeen sightings were reported in this region in the month of August. Harbour porpoise were recorded on eight occasions, with sightings mainly at various sites off County Down, including a group of 11 at Bloody Bridge, Newcastle. There were also two reports from Antrim, at White Park Bay and in Rathlin Sound.

There was a single sighting of three bottlenose dolphins in Co. Antrim at Ramore Head on the 31st. There was one common dolphin sighting in August of 15 animals off Newry on the 22nd. Risso's dolphins were also recorded once on the 31st in Slane's Bay. There were six dolphin sightings that could not be identified, mainly in County Antrim.

In September, ten sightings were reported. Harbour porpoise were the most commonly reported species, with five sightings. Porpoise were spotted at Portrush and Portmuck in Co. Antrim, Portstewart in Co. Derry and Ballywater and Strangford Lough in Co. Down.

Bottlenose dolphins were recorded twice, with sightings at Whitehead and Rathlin Sound, Co. Antrim. There were two groups of dolphins reported, of which the species could not be identified.

A single minke whale was seen on the 27th, offshore of Slane's Bay.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

(including sightings data kindly forwarded by IWDG)

There were 90 sightings during the month of August, with seven different species seen. Bottlenose dolphins were most abundant, with a total of 31 sightings. Sightings of the species were relatively well distributed with encounters in Counties Kerry, Dublin, Donegal, Wicklow, Mayo and Galway. The largest group occurred on the 24th 34 miles offshore of Annagh Head, Co. Mayo, with 135 individuals.

Harbour porpoise were encountered on 17 occasions. The species was relatively well spread throughout the country, with the majority of sightings being reported off Co. Dublin.

The number of harbour porpoise sightings was closely followed by common dolphins, with 16 sightings comprising a total of about 750 individuals. Group sizes reached more than one hundred on a number of occasions in the month, and sightings were reported at a number of sites off the Kerry and Cork coasts. There was also a sighting of two individuals off Achill Island, Co. Mayo and of ten animals off Loop Head, Co. Clare.

Risso's dolphins were reported on three occasions in August. Twelve animals were spotted at Fethard, Co. Wexford on the 11th. Smaller groups of three and five were seen off Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork on the 27th and 29th respectively. There were also seven sightings of dolphins that could not be identified.

Of whales, minke whales were reported on ten occasions, with sightings mainly at Sleah Head, Co. Kerry and at a number of sites off Co. Cork. There was one sighting off Loop Head, Co. Clare on the 2nd. Humpback whales were spotted twice on the 17th at Clogher Head, Co. Kerry and at Bridges of Ross, Co. Clare on the 19th. Fin whales were also encountered twice, with five animals off Galley Head, Co. Cork on the 21st and three animals at Youghal, Co. Cork on the 29th.



In September, there were a total of 28 sightings, of six different species. Bottlenose dolphins were again the most abundant, with ten sightings, including a group of 80 at Mullaghmore, Co. Sligo on the 9th. Sightings were reported in Counties Sligo, Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Wicklow and Dublin.

Harbour porpoises were seen five times, in groups of twos and threes. Animals were seen in Counties Wicklow, Dublin and Donegal.

The largest group of animals seen in September was not surprisingly of common dolphins, when a group of 300 off Cape Clear Island was spotted on the 29th. There were four sightings of the species off the Co. Mayo coast in September, two off Co. Kerry, and one sighting off Ram Head, Co. Waterford. There were six sightings of unidentified dolphins in September

Fin whales were seen four times in three days between the 6th and 8th in Co. Cork. Five animals were seen on the 6th in Courtmacsherry Bay and two animals were at Galley Head on the 7th. There were two encounters on the 8th with a group of three at Seven Heads and five at Mill Cove. There were no humpback whales reported this month, and just a single sighting of three minke whales off Galley Head, Co. Cork on the 7th.

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Unless otherwise stated, regional roundups were compiled and written by SWF volunteers Catherine Fillo and Hanne-Cecilia Smyth-Olsen, as well as by Gemma Veneruso.

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