

sea watch FOUNDATION



Editorial

The wintery weather seen in the months of December to March inevitably meant that there were fewer sightings reported than in the summer months. Nevertheless, nine species were recorded and there were a few surprise sightings. This is my last edition of the news sheet since I have now changed position at SWF. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the new Sightings Officer, Danielle Gibas (danielle.gibas@seawatchfoundation.org.uk) and wish her the best of luck in her new role. Many thanks to all the observers that have contributed to the sightings network in my time as Sightings Officer and a special thanks to the Regional Coordinators.

Best wishes, Gemma Veneruso



Bottlenose dolphins

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NEWS

Dates set for National Whale & Dolphin Watch, 5th-7th August 2011

Dates for National Whale & Dolphin Watch (NWDW) 2011 have been set for the 5th-7th August. 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. Everyone can get involved by taking part in

organised land watches or boat trips around the UK that are currently being planned or by doing their own watches. We can provide the training needed to collect important data on cetaceans meaning that anyone can help actively take part in the research and conservation of these animals. Everyone is welcome and Sea Watch also invites all environmental organisations, university groups, and boat operators to be involved.

Keep checking our website for updates and if you would like further information contact sightings@seawatchfoundation.org.uk.

SWF presents at the 25th European Cetacean Society conference

The annual European Cetacean Society (ECS) conference was this year held on the 21st-23rd March in Cadiz, Spain. The objectives of the Society are to promote and co-ordinate the scientific study and conservation of cetaceans in Europe; and to gather and disseminate information about cetaceans to members of the society and the public at large. SWF representatives gave a number of presentations including a talk given by SWF Director, Dr Peter Evans making use of long-term datasets to identify areas of high risk to cetaceans of ship strike in the ASCOBANS region. Dr Evans also organised a workshop reviewing current knowledge and trends in pollutant levels and their effects upon marine mammals identifying key findings and making a number of recommendations. The results of this workshop will be published shortly.

Poster presentations were also given by a number of SWF staff including Daphna Feingold (Feingold, D., Baines, M., Evans, P.G.H.: Cardigan Bay bottlenose dolphin social and population structure - findings from a ten-year photo ID dataset.), Gemma Veneruso (Veneruso, G., Magileviciute, E., Nuuttila, H., Evans, P.G.H.: Habitat use and effects of boat traffic on bottlenose dolphins at New Quay Harbour, Cardigan Bay) and Danielle Gibas (Gibas, D., Feingold, D., Evans, P.G.H.: Environmental correlates of behaviour and group composition of bottlenose dolphin in Cardigan Bay, Wales).

Premier screening of SWF Environmental Community Film Project

Last year, SWF undertook an environmental film project, which was funded through a grant from Environment Wales. During the project, two short environmental films were



produced by pupils from coastal-based schools in south-west Wales to raise their awareness of conservation issues in their local coastal & marine environments while at the same time providing them with new skills in film production techniques.

SWF Adopt a Dolphin Administrator and freelance professional filmmaker, Kirsten Hintner, ran the

project during September and October 2010. Pupils from Pembrokeshire's Greenhill, Fenton, Broad Haven and St Mark's schools, took on the challenge to create two striking films with a strong environmental message. Pupils at Greenhill worked on one film, 'Plastics and Pollution', while pupils from the three primary schools wrote and produced 'Listen to our Cautious Tales'.

The premier of both of the films took place on the 31st March 2011, at the Torch Theatre in Milford Haven. The budding filmmakers, and their families, were joined by the Welsh Assembly Government Minister for the Environment, Jane Davidson, and Councillor Huw George, Pembrokeshire Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. The films received positive praise; everybody found them very enjoyable and educational.

Jane Davidson said about the project: "It had been an inspirational challenge as well as an excellent learning activity for students."

Dr Peter Evans described the project as: "A unique opportunity for young people to get directly involved in conservation issues at a grass roots level and in their local area. The lessons these young people have learned about local conservation will stay with them

for life, and will help them to inspire other young people to value their local environment.”

Readers can now enjoy the short films themselves at Sea Watch's YouTube page (www.youtube.com/user/seawatchfoundation). Many thanks to Kirsten for all her efforts.

Sharron Bosley, SWF

SIGHTINGS SUMMARY, DECEMBER 2010 – MARCH 2011

Despite the very wintry weather we saw this year, certainly not ideal for cetacean spotting, nine species were observed between December and March. As expected, the most common species recorded was the harbour porpoise which was well represented throughout the country. Sightings of the species were dominant off the north and north east coasts of Scotland, Yorkshire (Scarborough in particular, where regular watching has been taking place), East Anglia, Cornwall, North Devon, North Wales, North West England, South West Scotland, and throughout the Republic of Ireland.



Bottlenose dolphins remained prominent in the winter months in many parts of the UK and Ireland, some exhibiting seasonal shifts in range such as the large groups seen off North Wales and the Isle of Man. Sightings were also recorded off the Moray Firth, Dorset, Cornwall, Northern Ireland, Channel Islands and a number of counties in the Republic of Ireland including Dublin, Mayo, Clare, Galway, Kerry, Wicklow and Donegal.

Risso's dolphins were seen off Shetland, Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, and Co. Cork in the Republic of Ireland. Risso's made an unexpected early appearance off the Isle of Man when nine animals were observed in February.

Another unusually early sighting was a minke whale spotted in the Moray Firth by Alan Airey on the 29th March. There were also a handful of Irish sightings from counties Kerry, Waterford and Wexford.

There were a couple of sightings of long-finned pilot whales. In January, a group was observed by a naval vessel offshore, south west of Ireland. Another 20 or so individuals were seen in Bressay Sound, Shetland in March.



Short-beaked common dolphin encounter rates were relatively low this winter with a couple of observations of the species from North Devon and Cornwall but not as many as expected. However, the species was seen regularly off Ireland from counties Waterford, Cork, Kerry and Mayo. A number of sightings from the Irish coast were of large groups including an estimated 1000 individuals observed off Inishkea Islands, Co. Mayo on the 11th

February.

Killer whales were reported from Shetland on a couple of occasions in March. However, the highlight for this species must be the 75 individuals spotted offshore, north west of Tory Island, Co. Donegal at the end of January.

Humpback whales were recorded from the regular spots in Ireland in counties Wexford and Waterford. There was also the surprise sighting of two humpbacks in Scotland, first seen off Lybster, Caithness at the end of December. The next day, one humpback was

reported off Portlethen, south of Aberdeen. Then, on the 6th January, Ian Sim watched a humpback whale in Stonehaven Bay, for one hour and a half. The animal was observed feeding and came to within a quarter of a mile of the shore. The whale was then seen on a couple of occasions towards the end of January further south at St Cyrus and



Montrose. Humpback whales occasionally visit the coastline of North East Scotland but are uncommon, and represented a nice addition to the normally quieter months of the year.

Further south, on the 19th January, an unusual sighting of a humpback whale was recorded in the Channel at Port of Boulogne in northern France. Two previous sightings

of this animal were revealed, the animal in fact being first seen on the 30th December off the Nord-Pas-de-Calais in the Dover Straits. The whale was then seen again on the 11th January at Sangatte. It is unusual to see this species off northern France and in fact this is just the third sighting in ten years. The first animal was recorded in 2006 in Dunkerque which sadly later stranded on the Belgian coastline. A mother and calf pair was also spotted in 2008.

Fin whales were seen only off Ireland in counties Waterford, Cork and Wexford. There was a large whale reported on the 23rd January off Prussia Cove, Cornwall. However, from the description given it was thought to be a sperm whale, if the ID is correct this is a very unusual sighting.

There was a rare and unhappy sighting on 3rd March of a sperm whale stranded at Pegwell Bay, near Ramsgate, Kent. The animal was confirmed dead early morning. The post mortem revealed that it was an immature male that had a very thin blubber layer and no stomach contents so it is likely that the whale died of starvation. It is an extremely rare event to see a sperm whale on this part of the coastline. These animals normally inhabit the deep waters of the North Atlantic feeding off the continental shelf edge, rarely venturing into the shallower waters surrounding the British Isles. Despite this there were a few sperm whale encounters in 2010 including a group of six or seven animals reported in the Moray Firth in October, and in June and July there was the very unusual case of a sperm whale being seen repeatedly off Torbay, South Devon in extremely shallow waters. Luckily these animals did not strand to our knowledge.

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 kindly forwarded by Shetland Sea Mammal Group)

Six cetacean sightings were recorded between December and March, involving four species.

On 1st December, observers reported six Risso's dolphins off the west coast of Unst. It is unusual for this species to be seen in the region during winter.

It wasn't until the 19th January that the next sighting was reported when eight harbour porpoises were spotted at Aithsetter.

There were no reports for the month of February; however, the number of sightings picked up in March, with an estimated 20 long-finned pilot whales seen in Bressay Sound, Lerwick and five killer whales seen in Yell Sound on 5th March. On 12th March four killer whales were seen off Boddam, and on 29th March another sighting of five killer whales in Yell Sound was recorded.



ORKNEY & NORTH SCOTLAND

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland

The north coast of Scotland and the Orkney Islands bore the brunt of the strong north winds that brought the horrendous weather that struck Scotland during December, January and to some degree February, and this is reflected in the number of sightings that have been sent to the Sea Watch Foundation.

The first sighting reported for these months did not come until the 19th January, when Kenny Sinclair of Sea Orkney spotted a single harbour porpoise in Deer Sound, Orkney.

Just over a month later, Steve Hicks, a work colleague walking at Holborn Head, Thurso, spotted three harbour porpoise on the 27th February.

Paul Castle, Highland Ranger for the far north of Scotland, spotted two groups of harbour porpoise numbering a total of five animals while fishing off Strathy Point, North Sutherland on the 24th March.

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

Written by Colin Bird, Regional Coordinator for North East Scotland

December must have been one of the coldest on record for many years with lots of ice and snow laying about, this made travelling to a watch site very difficult if not downright dangerous at times. Despite the conditions, sightings were reported by a hardy few who ventured to the coast.

At Swiney Hill, Lybster, one group of harbour porpoise was reported on the 4th and four small groups were reported on the 12th.

The highlight of the month was a surprise visit to the outer Moray Firth of two humpback whales on the 30th December. I observed them passing Swiney Hill heading east and, due to the weather and the fact they only surfaced twice, I failed miserably at trying to get a photo. There was also an unconfirmed report that a local fisherman had seen them feeding to the west of Swiney Hill.

January was very much the same as December in terms of weather, again making life difficult, but I was able to walk to Swiney Hill and observe three small groups of harbour porpoise. I spotted a group of three porpoise on the 1st and two groups of two and three on the 2nd. On the 29th, I spotted a further two small groups, again from Swiney Hill.

February, although a better month in terms of temperature and sea conditions, was



quite poor for most of the time. This did not stop George Campbell reporting a surprise visit to Wick by a pod of four bottlenose dolphins who were probably hunting for salmon just 100m offshore near the Wick river estuary on the 4th.

Two harbour porpoise sightings were recorded in February at Swiney Hill, on the 26th and 27th February.

March produced very few days with calm seas but when such days occurred I did spot harbour porpoise off the coast of Lybster. There were five sightings on the 12th and a single sighting on the 27th.

MORAY FIRTH

Written by Alan Airey, Regional Coordinator for North Grampian

Despite the bitterly cold winter weather and the lack of daylight hours, cetacean sightings along this stretch of the Moray Firth coast were not too bad in the circumstances. The only exception was the Inner Moray Firth where sightings of bottlenose dolphins were relatively poor.

Only bottlenose dolphins were seen in December, with seven reported sightings at Chanonry Point/Fort George, Burghead and Spey Bay. The biggest group size was 14 off Burghead on Dec 27th.

January produced another seven sightings but this time the bottlenose dolphins were seen further east at Burghead, Findochty and Portknockie, apart from one encounter off Spey Bay on the 10th. There was a sighting of eight dolphins, the species of which could not be confirmed off Macduff on the 13th by Peter Stainthorp. The biggest group seen in January was again off Burghead where 30 bottlenose were observed on Jan 10th.

February brought a few calmer days, a little bit more daylight and over double the number of sightings. There were 13 bottlenose dolphin sightings seen throughout the month, all of which were either off Burghead or Findochty. Sightings ranged from single animals to a group of 40 off Burghead on February 6th. Good sized groups of 15 and 25 were seen off Burghead on the 2nd and 4th respectively, and 20 animals were recorded off Findochty on the 9th. There were five records of harbour porpoise seen off Chanonry Point, Burghead and Covesea.

The highlight of March for me was definitely the minke whale seen feeding 2km off Burghead on the 29th at lunchtime. I'm used to seeing minkes in the Moray Firth but this was the earliest in the year I've seen one. It was feeding along a tide line not far from four porpoise and gannets. Porpoises were only seen off Burghead in March when they were spotted on five occasions. It was good to see a



group of 11 feeding in the very calm conditions of the 15th. There were 14 reported bottlenose dolphin sightings in March that were generally in smaller groups than in February. They were reported off Chanonry Point, Burghead, Hopeman, Lossiemouth, Findochty and Portknockie and Banff. The larger groups that were spotted included groups of 30 and 17 animals seen off Burghead on the 5th and 16th respectively.

SOUTH GRAMPIAN & SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND

There were no sightings reported in December. However, five encounters of humpback whales in January certainly made up for that! The New Year started with two humpback whale sightings in the Portlethen area, Aberdeenshire on 1st January. On 6th January, the whale was sighted by Ian Sim feeding off Stonehaven. The humpback whale was

reported again at the end of the month on the 23rd and 24th January. The animal was clearly heading south with the first spotted surfacing and blowing at St. Cyrus Nature Reserve, Aberdeenshire; then the second sighting was reported in Montrose, Angus.

This is most likely the same whale that was spotted off Lybster, Caithness in December. It is pretty rare to have humpback whale sightings in this region but they are seen now and again, and tend to stay in an area for a while, as this particular whale has done.

Ian Sim also spotted around 30 bottlenose dolphins off Stonehaven on the 6th January, the same day that the humpback whale was in the area. Further north at Torry Battery, Aberdeen, eight bottlenose dolphins were spotted on the 15th. Bottlenose dolphins were recorded once again in the month on the 28th, leaping in Stonehaven Bay.



There were three cetacean sightings reported in February. On the 1st February the humpback whale was spotted once again in Montrose Bay, with a large number of gulls marking the position of the whale. On the 3rd February, eight bottlenose dolphins were seen in Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, with another

report of eight individuals the following day in the same area.

Just one sighting was reported in March, with eight bottlenose dolphins spotted feeding in Aberdeen Harbour on 29th March.

NORTH EAST & EASTERN ENGLAND

Written by Robin Petch, Regional Coordinator for Eastern England

This is generally a quiet period in our region (and in most I guess) due to weather, sea conditions and the corresponding difficulty in seeing anything and/or persuading anyone to look!

However, thanks particularly to Stuart Baines, we have a substantial number of harbour porpoise sightings from Marine Drive in Scarborough. He has single handedly contributed 48 separate sightings since Boxing Day with a total of 107 animals! Dave Parker, Charles Spencer and Maggie Lean have each contributed a further sighting adding 18 more! Breaking this down, four porpoise sightings were recorded in December, 14 records in January, 12 in February and 24 reports in March. This is a great contribution and puts my few sightings from Whitby to shame! If you are reading this



and live on or near the Yorkshire coast or the Humber, why not try and match Stuart's contribution? Give me a call on 07768 592306 or email robin@dolphinspotter.co.uk if you'd like some guidance or support.

Chris Rumbold also added a sighting of bottlenose dolphins off Long Scar near Hartlepool on 24th January, so thanks to Chris also.

The other news is that, following my appeal in the last newsletter, we are pleased to welcome

Dave Miller to the team as Lincolnshire Co-ordinator, assisted by Helen Craven. Dave is the Coastal Action Zone Ranger at Gibraltar Point near Skegness and along with some introductory training for his team in April, I will be handing over responsibility for Lincolnshire. This will allow me to concentrate on Yorkshire and feel less guilty about rarely having time to do Lincolnshire justice! I know there is a huge amount of enthusiasm for this new role and we should see more sightings, particularly of harbour porpoise, being logged from this area as a result. Dave's contact details are:

Dave Miller
Coastal Action Zone Ranger
Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust
Sykes Farm Nature Reserve Office
Gibraltar Point Nature Reserve
Gibraltar Road
Skegness
PE 24 4SU

Mobile: 07919 326646
Tel/Fax: 01754 898079

EAST ANGLIA

Written by Dave Powell, Regional Coordinator for East Anglia

There were no sightings recorded in December and January but in February, Norfolk once again dominated the sightings for the Anglia region, with the area around Mundesley and Walcott predictably coming out with the lion's share. Harbour porpoises were noted as follows: a single animal was seen off Mundesley on the 1st day of the month; two animals were seen at the same site on the 2nd, and a single, also at Mundesley was spotted on the 3rd. All of these sightings were reported by Mick Fiszer. Mick also found a single porpoise on the 13th February, this time at Walcott.

March sightings are as follows: a harbour porpoise, again noted by Mick Fiszer, was seen from the sea front at Walcott on the 14th. On the 25th, Dominic Spurrier watched a harbour porpoise for over an hour deep into the River Ouse near King's Lynn. Dominic sent in photographs of this animal.



Harbour porpoises were reported twice from Pakefield, Suffolk by David Moore. Sightings of the animals were seen on the 10th February and 22nd March.

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

There were no sightings in December and it wasn't until the 31st January that two harbour porpoises were reported from Thorpe Bay, Thames Estuary. There were no further sightings recorded.

SOUTHERN ENGLAND

Written by Steven Savage, Regional Coordinator for Sussex

There were only two cetacean sightings to report, which is normal for this time of the year, in Sussex. One unidentified cetacean was reported on 13th February off Climping Beach in West Sussex. A harbour porpoise was then spotted off the port at Dover on 26th March.

Despite the lack of cetaceans, there were some interesting seal sightings. Seal sightings in Sussex have continued throughout the last few months. In particular, the tagged common seal yearling Twinkle was seen, whom I have mentioned in the previous newsletter. The seal was successfully released into the Wash on 18th August by the RSPCA and we monitored its movements from November 2010 when it first appeared in the Cuckmere River. This seal can be identified by an orange numbered tag 61940 on its hind flipper. The following sightings are those that have been positively identified as Twinkle by this flipper tag.

On the 10th December, the seal was positively identified much further west in the River Adur. However, on the 30th and 31st December it was seen again in the Cuckmere River. From January to end of March the seal moved back and forth between the Rivers Cuckmere and Ouse (next river to the west) and then the River Adur. It has provided a fascinating insight into the movements of a seal in Sussex.

The River Adur is nearest to where I live and provided the best opportunities for me to get some first hand observations. Best seen at low tide, the seal appeared to be no more wary than would be expected. However, it was also quite curious of passers by. The seal was seen on at least one occasion swallowing a very large fish. I have also been liaising with marine medics from BDMLR who have also been keeping an eye on this seal. This seal is still in the area.



Fish migrations seem to attract a few common seals each year in the winter/spring months so the fact that Twinkle is spending a lot of time in rivers is not that unusual. For many years a common seal (identified by natural markings) has been visiting the River Ouse in the winter months, hauling out on a particular jetty many miles inland. We have received many sightings of this seal during the last few months.

Other seal sightings include a common seal I spotted off the Brighton Marina, on the 2nd December, but it was not possible to see if it was Twinkle. On the 1st January a grey seal was recorded in the Cuckmere River; this species is not commonly seen in Sussex. A common seal was also seen off Shoreham Beach on 27th January.

As Sussex County Recorder, I contribute a yearly round-up for the Record Centre's journal for biological recorders, called Adastral. For anyone who might be interested in the 2011 edition, reporting on 2010, it can be downloaded from the website at <http://sxbr.org.uk/biodiversity/publications/>

More details and photographs of Sussex sea mammal sightings can be seen on my blog: <http://sussexmarinejottings.blogspot.com/>

CHANNEL ISLANDS

There were just two sightings to report in the Channel Islands over the winter. On the 7th January, six bottlenose dolphins were recorded off St Catherine's breakwater, north east Jersey. An impressive sighting of approximately 100 bottlenose dolphins was forwarded by Bertram Bree on the 20th March, when these animals were seen just east of Minquiers Reef, south of Jersey.

DORSET

(Including sightings data kindly forwarded by Durlston Marine Project)

There were no sightings recorded between December and February, but in March seven dolphin sightings were logged. The first occurred on the 13th when three bottlenose dolphins were recorded twice at Anvil Point and Durlston Head. Seven dolphins were then reported on the 19th in Worbarrow Bay. Two days later, a group of 15 bottlenose dolphins was recorded on three occasions at Kimmeridge Bay, St Adhelm's Head and Weymouth Bay. On the 22nd, 15 bottlenose were once again recorded in Weymouth Bay.

SOUTH DEVON

Nine sightings were reported in South Devon over the winter months.

In December, there were two reports of lone common dolphins offshore in the English Channel by Ian Rabjohns on the 20th.

It wasn't until the 4th January, however, that the next sighting was recorded in the region when 25 common dolphins were seen at Start Bay. A few days later on the 9th, ten common dolphins were seen in the bay once again.



Bottlenose dolphins were reported twice in January, with three animals seen off Gammon Head on the 19th and seven dolphins in the Erme Estuary on the 21st. There was a single harbour porpoise sighting of three animals feeding off Berry Head on 17th January.

There were no cetaceans reported in February but bottlenose dolphins were recorded once again in March, this time 11 dolphins in Plymouth Sound on the 6th.

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)

Sightings

The usually quieter winter months for sightings was unusually busy this year, with surprisingly frequent sightings of harbour porpoises making up the bulk of the many records received. There were regular sightings around the Lands End area, especially around Porthgwarra and Gwennap Head, but also small pods were spotted at Porthcurno, Penzance, Marazion and Gunwalloe on the south coast, while another small group revealed themselves off Trevoze Head, to the north of Newquay. Bottlenose dolphins also managed a decent showing and were relatively well distributed, with sightings coming in from Newquay, Perranporth, Godrevy, Gurnard's Head out by Zennor, Sennen, St Michael's Mount off Marazion, and finally Falmouth. One group seen off Falmouth on 27th March was reported to have 30 animals in it, a relatively large number for this area. By contrast, common dolphins, which in previous years have been seen by the hundred during the winter, were conspicuous in their near-absence, with just two confirmed observations, one at Sennen and another near Porthcurno. Risso's dolphins were the only other confirmed species for the period with four sightings altogether – three in the area of Porthgwarra/Gwennap Head and one group off St Michael's Mount to the east.



There were a few unidentified cetaceans seen: a small pod off St Mawes could have been bottlenose dolphin, while a pod of around 25 animals off Lamorna on 22nd March may have been common dolphin. Possibly one of the most exciting records received this winter came on 23rd January, when a 30ft whale was seen off Prussia Cove, near Praa Sands. From the description given it was thought to be a sperm whale.

The only other sighting of note was made by divers off Roskilly, between Newlyn and Mousehole, on 20th March when, while in 8m of water, the first basking shark of 2011 came over to check them out! Since then, other sightings of this enigmatic and mysterious species have been made from a couple of other locations to the south and west of the county, heralding the beginning of what will hopefully be a good year for seeing them.

News and events

The rehabilitation centres at National Seal Sanctuary (www.sealsanctuary.co.uk/corn1.html) and RSPCA West Hatch (www.rspca-westhatch.co.uk) continued to be kept busy by the early influx of rescued seal pups in need of rehabilitation, but with the cold snap in December, the number of callouts dropped off and the rest of the season through until the present remained relatively slow and steady, meaning the animal care staff could finally get some much needed respite! Cornwall Seal Group (www.cornwallsealgroup.co.uk) members have been on the lookout for some of those rescued animals that have since been released back to the wild again with a good deal of success, as many of the earlier releases from January and February have already been reported back doing well. Meanwhile, British Divers Marine Life Rescue (www.bdmlr.org.uk) volunteers were kept busy when the seals weren't around as a spate of cetacean incidents occurred in February, starting off with a live stranded harbour porpoise near Looe that was refloated by members of the public before medics arrived to conduct a health assessment. Shortly after this, a group of dolphins was thought to be in danger at the same location, but nothing was found when Medics attended. A short way along the coast and still near Looe, a common dolphin then live stranded a few days later. Despite the best efforts of those involved, the dolphin was euthanased after it quickly re-stranded, following the standard three re-floatation attempts. Finally, another common dolphin in trouble was spotted just before nightfall close inshore at Portscatho, near St Mawes towards the end of the month. Unfortunately, darkness prevented medics from locating the animal, but a freshly dead common dolphin found on a Falmouth beach the next morning with monofilament net around it was possibly the same unfortunate animal. Cornwall Wildlife Trust Marine Strandings Network (www.cwtstrandings.org.uk) volunteers had a very interesting time as well, as amongst the usual scattering of grey seal, harbour porpoise and common dolphin carcasses came a Cuvier's beaked whale at Port Quin on 27th February. Staff from VLA Truro conducted on site a post mortem of this very rarely recorded species.

NORTH DEVON

Sightings of harbour porpoise continued to be reported fairly regularly over the winter months in North Devon. In December, 25 porpoise sightings were recorded, totaling 89 individuals. The majority of these were logged during timed watches from Capstone Point, Ilfracombe by Chris Blackmore, and Morte Point by Dave Jenkins. The porpoises are mainly seen in ones and twos in this area, but there was a noteworthy sighting of 34 individuals feeding off Morte Point on the 11th December.

The only other species sighted over the winter was the common dolphin. A single individual was seen off Abbotsham on the 17th December.

Porpoise sightings were still relatively regular in January, with 13 records. Once again, these reports came from Capstone and Morte Points.

There was another common dolphin sighting in January, this time of ten animals seen four miles southwest of Baggy Point on the 6th.



There were 21 sightings, all of harbour porpoise, in February. All sightings were recorded by Chris and Sharron Blackmore either from Capstone Point once again, or Ilfracombe Pier.

Sightings frequency dropped significantly in March with just four sightings all from Capstone Point, and all reported within the first two weeks of the month.

BRISTOL CHANNEL & SOUTH WALES

Written by Claire Rowberry, Regional Coordinator for Bristol Channel & South Wales

It has been a quiet few months for the Bristol Channel with just three reported sightings.

February began with an exciting encounter of 15 adult common dolphins following the small boat that Neil Anderson was in, around the Outer Bristol Channel.

The next sighting did not occur until the 15th March when Ian and Judith Rabjohns spotted a porpoise feeding near Ogmores-By-Sea in West Glamorgan. Then on the 29th, contributor Jackie Field spotted a porpoise surfacing off the coast at Portishead, Somerset.

I'd like to thank those who reported the sightings and take the opportunity to welcome Ian and Judith to the area. Ian has been a regular contributor in Dorset, and with his recent move over the border we hope to continue hearing of his sightings.

Last month I spent a fun afternoon promoting the work of Sea Watch and cetacean research at a local secondary school's Science Career week. The children ranged in age

from 11 to 16 years, and there was lots of interest from the children who want to pursue a career in zoology and marine science, as well as those who just wanted to look at the dolphin pictures.

With the sun shining down on us, I have also stepped up my watches, splitting my time between Lavernock in Penarth and Rest Bay in Porthcawl, and while I am yet to spot anything other than the odd surfer I'm hoping my continued patience will begin to reap rewards!

WEST WALES

Written by Gemma Veneruso, Regional Coordinator for West Wales

As seen in previous years, sightings dropped off significantly in the winter months in West Wales with many of our bottlenose dolphins from the Cardigan Bay population venturing further north to Anglesey and beyond. This, combined with the wild winter weather which made watching conditions difficult, meant that there were no sighting reports in December.

In January, harbour porpoise were reported in Pembrokeshire, off Strumble Head on the 13th, and Pen Pedol, Ramsey Sound on the 18th. New Quay Harbour in Cardigan Bay SAC, which is still used by the bottlenose dolphins in the winter months, saw a single animal recorded on the 10th.

Bottlenose dolphins were not recorded in February; however, there were a number of harbour porpoise sightings in the last two weeks of the month. Four porpoises were seen off Whitesand Bay, Pembrokeshire on the 19th. Single porpoises were seen off New Quay on the 22nd and 24th February.

In March, the harbour porpoise was recorded on two occasions. Janet Baxter spotted two animals off Ynylas near Aberystwyth on the 6th and another individual off Mwnt, Ceredigion on the 19th. There was a sign of spring to come when 27 bottlenose dolphins were recorded at Mwnt on the 25th by Tony and Amanda Barber of 'A Bay to Remember'. Three days later 12 bottlenose dolphins were seen leaping inshore from the Ceredigion coastal path in between New Quay and Cwmttydu.

NORTH WALES

Observers in North Wales were busy between December and March, with 48 cetacean sightings in total. Over this time period, two species were seen – harbour porpoises (23 sightings) and bottlenose dolphins (25 sightings).

Bottlenose dolphins were most frequently sighted around Moelfre, North East Anglesey and Trwyn Porth Dinllaen, Gwynedd (with seven and five separate sightings reported respectively). Unlike the previous two winters, the dolphins seemed to use Red Wharf Bay less frequently, occurring more often further offshore. Harbour porpoise meanwhile were most frequently seen off Llanbadrig Church and Bull Bay, both in North Anglesey (with nine and eight sightings in these areas respectively).

The number of sightings per month of bottlenose dolphins generally increased from December to March (with four sightings in December, seven in January, six in February, and nine sightings in March). Sightings of harbour porpoises peaked in February, with eleven sightings (compared with one sighting in December, four in January, and seven in March).



The most common species seen in December was the bottlenose dolphin, with three separate encounters, including a group comprising an estimated 22 individuals, which were spotted leaping at Trwyn Porth Dinllaen. Researchers were also able to catch a couple of brief glimpses

of a harbour porpoise feeding off Llanbadrig Church on the 11th December (despite unfavourable weather conditions!).

Cetacean spotters got off to a good start in the New Year, with nine recorded sightings in January (seven bottlenose dolphins and four harbour porpoise).

On the 3rd January, there were three separate sightings recorded, including one harbour porpoise feeding at Benar Beach, as well as ten bottlenose dolphins spotted at Trwyn Porth Dinllaen, and a further five bottlenose dolphins at Ynys Moelfre.

There were several reports of large dolphin pods in the region during January, with an estimated 30 individuals seen approximately two miles north east of Dulas Island, North East Anglesey and another sighting of 12 bottlenose dolphins on the 13th January, this time half a mile off the East coast of Dulas Island. On the 21st January, an estimated 40 bottlenose dolphins were seen feeding three miles east of Point Lynas, and the following day, two harbour porpoise were also seen feeding off the Point.

February was the busiest month in this region, with 17 cetacean sightings reported. This included six encounters with bottlenose dolphins and 11 harbour porpoise records.

Highlights from February included a number of sightings of large pods of bottlenose dolphins, with 20 bottlenose dolphins spotted near Middle Mouse off North Anglesey on the 10th February, and a second sighting of 20 individuals on the following day, seen four miles east north east of Point Lynas, where the pod was observed feeding around scallopers. On the same date, nine harbour porpoise (including one juvenile) were seen feeding in Bull Bay.

An interesting report was submitted on the 12th February, when three harbour porpoises (including one juvenile) were spotted in Bull Bay, apparently unbothered by a nearby group of six bottlenose dolphins. It is rare to see the two species at the same location and time since bottlenose dolphins are known to attack and kill porpoise and, for that reason, porpoise seem to avoid areas when dolphins are nearby.

Two reports off Llanbadrig Church of harbour porpoise feeding were logged on the 22nd and 24th February.

March was another busy month, with 16 cetacean reports in total (nine bottlenose dolphin and seven harbour porpoise sightings).

Highlights from the month included a large number of bottlenose dolphins with an estimated 200 individuals seen over a half-hour period on the 14th March, between Porth Wen and Amlwch, North Anglesey.

During March, there were two reports of cetaceans interacting with human vessels. The first report (on 17th March) recorded 12 bottlenose dolphins approximately 3.5nm north east of Bull Bay, which were seen associating with a fishing vessel for a while. The



following day, observers recorded four harbour porpoise feeding in Bull Bay and eight bottlenose dolphins approximately one mile north east of there. The dolphins were seen at low water, first travelling north west, then east as the tide started to flood. They then followed a ship in the direction of Amlwch.

Another large group of bottlenose dolphins was sighted on 27th March, with an estimated 60 individuals spotted on the last of the ebb tide, one mile off Cemlyn, North Anglesey.

ISLE OF MAN

Written by Tom Felce (MWDW), Regional Coordinator for the Isle of Man

There were a total of twelve sightings in December, representing two cetacean species, harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphin, with six sightings of each. The group size of harbour porpoise was between four and six individuals, and no calves were seen. All harbour porpoise sightings were near Port St Mary, in the south and east of the island.

As has come to be expected during the winter, some very large groups of bottlenose dolphins were seen in Manx waters. The largest group seen contained between 100 and 150 individuals and was seen on the west coast of the island on the 13th of December. Calves and juveniles were definitely present in this group. Groups numbering between 60 and 80 individuals were also seen on three other occasions.

There were a total of nine sightings in January, comprising three species; harbour porpoise (n=4), bottlenose dolphin (n=4) and Risso's dolphin (n=1). The group size of harbour porpoise sightings was always small (n=2 or 3) and the sightings were reported from three very different locations around the island: Burroo Ned, Marine Drive, Smeale Beach and Castletown.



The four bottlenose dolphin sightings were from all round the island and as is usual in Manx waters in winter, the group size was large, between 20 and 80 individuals.

Perhaps the most surprising sighting, however, was that of nine Risso's dolphins off Langness, south of the island on the 8th January. Risso's dolphins are generally seasonal in Manx waters, being reported between April and September. Since 2006, there have been less than ten sightings between October and April. The reporter of the sighting is very experienced and has seen both Risso's and bottlenose dolphins, so the sighting was treated as very reliable.

Extremely rough weather in February limited us to just four sightings, two of harbour porpoise and two of bottlenose dolphins. Interestingly, the group sizes were all small, between two and five individuals, which is fairly atypical for bottlenose dolphin sightings in Manx waters. The sightings were reported from all round the island.

There was a total of ten sightings during March, comprising three species: harbour porpoise (n=7), bottlenose dolphin (n=1) and Risso's dolphin (n=2). The harbour porpoise sightings again varied greatly in terms of location, though group sizes tended to be three or less. There was one particularly interesting sighting of a group of seven porpoise off Peel, on the west coast, in which all individuals were seen to log for a minute or so.

The bottlenose dolphin sighting, containing ten individuals, is likely to be the last sighting of this species until next winter, although there are sporadic sightings in the summer months (less than five since 2006).

Late March is normally when the first Risso's dolphin sightings are reported to the website and 2011 proved no exception, with two sightings in the last week of the month. In both sightings, group size was small, of two and four individuals respectively, and both sightings were on the east coast of the island, where 95% of Risso's dolphin sightings are reported. Hopefully, there will be many more sightings of this species during April.

NORTH WEST ENGLAND

Written by David McGrath

Along the Lancashire coast, December followed in the same vein as the rest of the year, being poor for cetaceans. Two bottlenose dolphins were seen from Hilbre Island Bird Observatory heading into the Dee estuary on 2nd, and there was just one sighting of a harbour porpoise on 7th from the bird watchers at Formby Point.

However, January saw a change in fortunes with the first sightings coming on the 2nd, when one or two harbour porpoise were spotted from Rossall Point near Fleetwood. On the same day, from Blackpool's North Shore cliffs, at least seven porpoises were seen scattered over an area with possibly as many as ten. The same observer watched two feeding at the same place on 17th.

With no records in February, the chances were that 2011 was going to be another poor year, but March changed that. The first record came on the 3rd with at least three porpoise seen from Heysham Bird Observatory, and another feeding very close to an angler's boat off Cleveleys. Four porpoise were seen the following day at nearby Rossall Point.

A gap in sightings then occurred until 13th when a single porpoise was seen off the southern end of Blackpool at Starr Gate. Three more animals were once again seen by bird watchers from Heysham on 18th. The next day a good sized school of seven porpoise was in the mouth of the Ribble at Starr Gate. Just a single remained off Blackpool's South Promenade two days later on 21st, but two were seen together at the same location two days later. There was also a sighting of a single porpoise in the Mersey estuary near Widnes at Pickering's Pasture nature reserve on 23rd. The final sighting of the month was one porpoise at Bispham cliffs on 26th.

Information gathered from the local fishermen suggests that both 'influxes' coincided with catches of whiting and codling along the coast, although what brought the fish inshore is unknown.

March 2011 became the joint best month (with April 2009) for porpoise sightings along this coast since regular recording began in January 2007. Additionally, the number of animals seen in March 2011 was greater than during April 2009. Despite February being a blank month, there have already been more sightings of (live) porpoises along the Lancashire coast this year than during the whole of 2010.

SOUTH WEST SCOTLAND

December was quiet in terms of sightings in the south west of Scotland. Five harbour porpoise were sighted from land between Wemyss Bay and Inellan on 20th, and ten days later, on 30th, a group of eight individuals was spotted off the Mull of Galloway.

Similarly to December, January had just two reports of harbour porpoise. A large group of 30 animals was sighted in Glencallum Bay on the 22nd, and a lone animal was reported the following day off Largs Marina.

Largs Marina was also where the first harbour porpoise sighting for February was recorded. A single porpoise was seen there on 12th March. Later, on 28th there was another sighting of a single porpoise between West Kilbride and Arran (River Clyde)

March had a single sighting of a porpoise off Airds Point on 24th.

HEBRIDES

(Including sightings data kindly forwarded by the Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust)

There were no sightings recorded in December. In January two sightings were spotted, both on the 22nd. Two cetaceans that could not be identified were seen off Ardnamurchan Lighthouse, Argyll and an aggregation of 30 harbour porpoises was observed from Rubh'an Eun, Glencallum Bay, Bute.

There were no further sightings reported until the last two weeks in March, with three sightings. Bottlenose dolphins were seen on two occasions from the Isle of Mull, the first from Tobermory and the



second from Craig. A harbour porpoise was spotted off Ardmure Point, Isle of Mull. On the 16th March three killer whales were seen in the Sound of Sleat off Mallaig.

NORTH WEST SCOTLAND

One harbour porpoise was recorded on the 13th February off Gairloch, Ross-shire.

In March, two small cetaceans were briefly seen whilst the observer was driving past upper Loch Carron on the 8th. The next logged sighting came on the 26th when two harbour porpoise were spotted from Glenelg, Kyle.

NORTHERN IRELAND

(Including sightings data kindly forwarded by IWDG)

Three sightings were recorded in December. This included one sighting of Risso's dolphins, as well as one definite and one probable sighting of bottlenose dolphins.

Highlights from December include a sighting on the 7th December of a large Risso's dolphin, which was spotted off Portmuck's Island Magee, Co. Antrim. Researchers reported seeing small blows from the animal, and when seen in profile, they were able to get a good view of the animal's bulbous head, and pale, scarred flanks.

On the 12th December, two probable bottlenose dolphins were watched for five minutes to the north of Garron Point, Co. Antrim, and the year closed with a sighting of 12 bottlenose dolphins feeding in Carnlough, Co. Antrim on 31st December.

In January, there were four cetacean sightings reported, including three separate encounters of bottlenose dolphins and one harbour porpoise sighting.

On the 2nd January, three bottlenose dolphins were observed about 1km out from Newcastle, Co. Down, and were interacting with jet skis in the area. On the same date, four harbour porpoise were seen feeding off Portmuck Island.



On the 3rd January, three bottlenose dolphins were observed feeding in Dundrum Bay Co. Down, with another sighting of bottlenose dolphins on 12th January (this time an estimated 20 individuals were seen leaping off Larne, Co. Antrim).

No cetacean sightings were recorded in February.

March was a busier month, with seven sightings recorded, which included five separate encounters of harbour porpoise, as well as an encounter with a large number of dolphins (thought to be bottlenose).

On the 5th there were two separate sightings of harbour porpoise at Bloody Bridge, Newcastle, Co. Down, which were spotted despite the foggy conditions!

The following day, a cetacean was spotted outside Ballycastle, Co. Antrim, and was thought to be a killer whale or another species of large dolphin (although its size, colouration and blow type may suggest the latter).

On the 13th March, a harbour porpoise was seen at Ballyquintin Point, Ards Peninsula Co. Down, and then on the 16th March an estimated 55 dolphins were seen south of White Bay, Glenarm, Co. Antrim, breaching very close to shore, which were thought to be bottlenose dolphins.

On the 19th March, two harbour porpoise were spotted briefly at Burial Island, Ards Peninsula, Co. Down.

The final report of the month was on the 20th March, when four harbour porpoises were observed for two minutes off Marlfield, Strangford Lough, Co. Down.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

(Including sightings data kindly forwarded by IWDG)

The Republic of Ireland had a busy month in December, with 103 cetacean sightings being recorded. Harbour porpoises were prevalent throughout the month, with 34 sightings reported. The animals were widely distributed around the country, with sightings off counties Kerry, Cork, Wexford, Wicklow, Dublin, Donegal, Mayo, Sligo and Galway. Most sightings were mainly of a small group size; however, 25 animals were spotted from Ardnakinna Point, on Bere Island in Cork on the 23rd.

There were 14 bottlenose dolphin sightings logged in December, mostly towards the middle and end of the month. Sightings were reported from counties Kerry, Cork, Dublin, Donegal, Mayo, Galway and Clare. There were a few groups of a moderate size, including 20 animals seen off Kilcummin Head, Co. Mayo on the 31st, 22 dolphins of Buncrana, Co. Donegal on the 14th, and 50 off Doolin, Co. Clare again on the 31st.

Plenty of fin whales were spotted in the earlier part of the month, with 25 sightings overall. However, this did taper off towards the end of December, although there was a festive sighting of three animals from Bunmahon, Waterford on Christmas day, along with a pod of 35 common dolphins at the same location. Fin whales were seen off counties Cork, Waterford, and Wexford with hotspots being Bunmahon and Helvic Heads, Co. Waterford.

There were several sightings of large groups of common dolphins within the month - 15 reports overall, with the largest group size estimated at approximately 100 individuals seen off Garranes, Co. Cork on the 4th. Other sightings were recorded off counties Waterford, Kerry and at other sites in Cork.



Two minke whale sightings were logged at the start of the month, with one animal sighted from Bray Head on Valentia Island, Co. Kerry on the 5th, and two animals spotted feeding off Bunmahon, Co. Waterford on the 8th.

The high volumes of cetacean sightings continued into the New Year, with a further 97 sightings being recorded in January, and a larger variety of species recorded. Harbour porpoises continued to be the most common species recorded, with 33 individual sightings throughout the month. The species was seen off counties Kerry, Cork, Waterford, Wexford, Wicklow, Dublin, Donegal, Mayo and Galway. There were also four sightings of porpoise offshore in the St George's Channel.

Fourteen sightings of bottlenose dolphins of group sizes ranging from one to 16 were logged in January from a variety of areas. Dolphins were observed in counties Kerry, Cork, Wicklow, Dublin, Galway and Clare.

Fin whale sightings were prominent again with 16 sightings. The whales were normally found in twos, threes or fours. However, a group of seven animals was seen feeding off Co. Cork on the 18th. As usual, the remainder of sightings was recorded from Co. Wexford and Waterford.

Humpback whales were sighted in January on ten occasions off counties Wexford and Waterford. The whales were seen particularly from Hook Head and Curracloe, Co. Wexford and Dunmore East, Co. Waterford. From fluke shots, the IWDG team was able to identify at least two individuals with repeated sightings over a number of days.

Common dolphin sightings were thin on the ground at the start of the month. However, numbers picked up as time went on, and there were 11 sightings overall within January, a high proportion of which were in the Wexford region. The species was also recorded from counties Cork, Kerry and Waterford. Group sizes ranged from two to 50 animals.

On the 4th January, long-finned pilot whales were spotted around 150 miles off South west Ireland from a naval vessel, and one minke whale was sighted feeding off Hook Head, Co. Wexford on the 30th. To finish off the month on a high note, Lt Cdr Patrick Harkin reported a sighting of around 75 killer whales on two consecutive days feeding in the area amongst a mackerel fleet around 30-50 miles to the north-west of Tory Island on the 27th and 28th.



February saw a considerable drop in both sightings and diversity of species seen, with a total of 31, twenty of which were harbour porpoise. There were just five sightings of bottlenose dolphins seen, off counties Clare, Wicklow, Dublin and Sligo, with group sizes ranging from two to 12 animals.

Fin whales were recorded once in February when three animals were spotted feeding off Dunmore East, Co. Waterford on the 10th. There were also few sightings of common dolphins with only two reports within the month. However, one common dolphin sighting on the 11th was pretty spectacular as an estimated 1000 animals were seen to the west of Kinsale Gas Fields south of Co. Cork. They were showing on the radar across an area of 0.75 x 1.5 nautical miles.

There were 52 reports of cetacean sightings in March, with common dolphin sightings making a comeback compared to February's low numbers. Fourteen common dolphin sightings were logged overall, eight of which were recorded over several days from various viewpoints in Co. Kerry. Group sizes ranged from four to 800 individuals, the latter spread over an area of about nine nautical miles, travelling fast around the Inishkea Islands, Co. Mayo. Sightings of the species were also reported from Co. Waterford and near Rockall, to the north west of the country.

Harbour porpoises were observed on 19 occasions in March. Killiney Bay, Co. Dublin and Sleah Head, Co. Kerry had the most sightings. Porpoises were also recorded off Counties Cork and Waterford.

Bottlenose dolphins were seen ten times in the month. Sightings were recorded from Counties Dublin, Waterford, Wicklow and Clare.

Three killer whales were spotted on the 1st March around 52 miles north-west of Sleah Head, Co. Kerry. Risso's dolphins were also recorded once in March, unusually early for this time of year, with six animals observed over a five-hour period off Dursey Island, Co. Cork on the 14th.

A single minke whale was sighted in Dingle Bay, Co. Kerry, on the 23rd.

Unless otherwise stated, regional roundups were compiled and written by SWF volunteers Sarah Rakowski and Emma Lockley, as well as by Gemma Veneruso and Danielle Gibas.

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.