



## CETACEANS OF WALES

Although the waters along the Welsh coastline are not particularly species rich with around 30% (nine out of 28 species) of the UK cetacean fauna recorded in the region since 1980, eight of those species are either present throughout the year or recorded annually as seasonal visitors. Most nearshore cetacean sightings are of bottlenose dolphin or harbour porpoise. The species most common offshore is the short-beaked common dolphin.

The waters are, however, nationally important for having the only recognised resident community of bottlenose dolphins in England and Wales, with the population numbering somewhere between 200 and 300 individuals. It also has significant concentrations of harbour porpoises, particularly in the south-west. The harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphin are both listed in Annex 2 of the Habitats Directive as species whose conservation require the designation of Special Areas of Conservation.

In the summer, a frontal system develops in the southern Irish Sea, with concentrations of plankton, fish and squid, which attract feeding concentrations of cetaceans otherwise only found in the open sea. Examples of these species include the minke whale, fin whale, long-finned pilot whale and short-beaked common dolphin.

## CETACEAN SPECIES REGULARLY SIGHTED IN THE REGION

### Short-beaked common dolphin

*Delphinus delphis*

Common offshore in the Irish Sea and St George's Channel, particularly over the Celtic Deep west of the Smalls. Some sightings off Skokholm, Skomer, and Grassholm Islands (Pembrokeshire) year round but with greatest numbers July-September.



### Harbour porpoise

*Phocoena phocoena*

Fairly common and widespread year round. Peak numbers April-November, particularly September. Sightings around Skomer, Skokholm, Ramsey Island and St Brides Bay (Pembrokeshire) are high, particularly in June and October. They can be seen in small numbers nearshore around Strumble Head (Pembrokeshire), the Teifi Estuary, Cardigan Island (Ceredigion) and the series of headlands leading up to New Quay. Peak numbers occur between August and November in Cardigan Bay, off headlands, or over sandbanks and undersea mounts.

### Bottlenose dolphin

*Tursiops truncatus*

Bottlenose dolphins are present throughout the year but with peak numbers sighted between June and September. The species is often seen within 10 miles of the coast between Cardigan and Borth (Ceredigion), and at favoured feeding areas around the headlands at Mwnt, Pen Peles, Aberporth, Ynys Lochtyn and New Quay (Ceredigion).





**Killer whale**  
*Orcinus orca*

Killer whale sightings are uncommon, occurring primarily off the Dyfed coast between the months of April-September.



**Long-finned pilot whale**  
*Globicephala melas*

Fairly common. Mainly offshore in the middle of the Irish Sea (southwards to the Celtic Deep). Occurs all months of the year, but most sightings and greatest numbers are between August and December.



**Risso's dolphin**  
*Grampus griseus*

Uncommon. Nearshore. Most sightings occur around the Pembrokeshire islands and the western end of the Llyn Peninsula, including Ynys Enlli (Bardsey Island), mainly between April-September.

**Fin whale**  
*Balaenoptera physalus*

Uncommon, usually seen either singly or in groups of 2-6. Mainly offshore, occurring primarily in the St George's Channel, between June and October. Recent sightings have occurred west of Ramsey Island and near the Smalls, in the north-eastern part of the Celtic Deep.



**Minke whale**  
*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

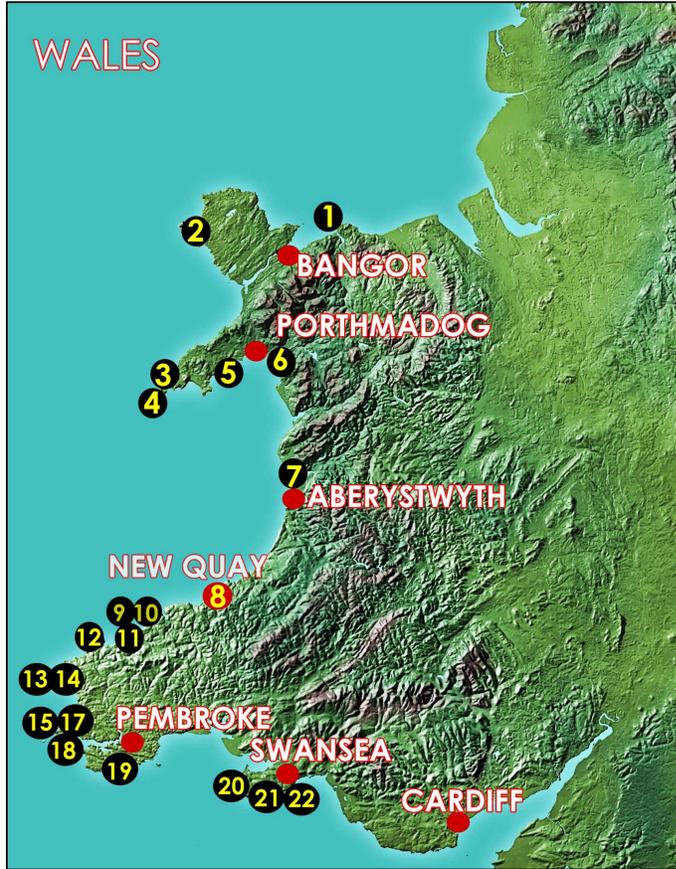
Fairly common but in small numbers. Mainly offshore, in the middle of the Irish Sea south to the St George's Channel (Celtic Deep). Most commonly seen between May and October.



#### Other cetacean species recorded in the region

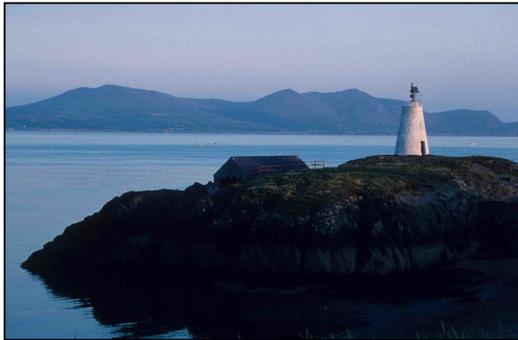
Humpback whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*, Pygmy sperm whale *Kogia breviceps*, Blainville's beaked whale *Mesoplodon densirostris*, Striped dolphin *Stenella coeruleoalba*, Atlantic white-sided dolphin *Lagenorhynchus acutus*, and White-beaked dolphin *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*.

## REGIONAL MAP



### Sighting hotspots

- 1) Great Orme's Head (Conwy)
- 2) Holyhead (Isle of Anglesey)
- 3) Bardsey Island (Gwynedd)
- 4) Braich y Pwil (Gwynedd)
- 5) Pwllheli (Gwynedd)
- 6) Tremadog (Gwynedd)
- 7) Ynyslas & Borth (Ceredigion)
- 8) New Quay (Ceredigion)
- 9) Mwnt (Ceredigion)
- 10) Cardigan Island (Ceredigion)
- 11) Cemaes Head (Pembrokeshire)
- 12) Newport (Pembrokeshire)
- 13) Strumble Head (Pembrokeshire)
- 14) St. David's Head (Pembrokeshire)
- 15) Ramsey Island (Pembrokeshire)
- 16) Skomer & Skokholm Islands (Pembrokeshire)
- 17) The Smalls Rock (Pembrokeshire)
- 18) St Ann's Head (Pembrokeshire)
- 19) St. Govans Head (Pembrokeshire)
- 20) Worms Head (Swansea)
- 21) Oxwich Point (Swansea)
- 22) Mumbles Head (Swansea)



Ynys Llanddwyn (Anglesey) & Caernarfon Bay



New Quay (Ceredigion)



Mwnt (Ceredigion)



Skomer Island (Pembrokeshire)

## THREATS TO CETACEANS

Present day threats to cetacean species include conflicts with fisheries, either through competition for a common food resource or more directly through accidental capture in fishing nets. Tangle nets set for demersal fish in Caernarfon (Gwynedd) and Cardigan Bays (Ceredigion) have been reported accidentally capturing harbour porpoises.

Pollution is also a threat; two bottlenose dolphins were found stranded on the Dyfed coast in 1988 and 1992 respectively containing very high levels of PCBs, DDT, and mercury. The source of such high pollution levels is unknown.

Recreational activities pose a threat. High speed vessels operating in waters around large resorts such as Cardigan, Aberporth, New Quay and Borth (Ceredigion) may result in physical damage to cetaceans. Disturbance from high and low frequency noise generated by these vessels may result in vessel avoidance and increased dive times of the animals; these are seen as negative responses. Seismic exploration has taken place offshore in the past and may pose a threat particularly to baleen whales from the low frequency sound generated.



## THE FUTURE FOR CETACEANS

A code of conduct for boat users has been produced (Sea Watch Foundation, 1992) and distributed to sailing clubs and marinas. ASCOBANS (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas) is an international agreement between countries bordering the North and Baltic Seas, with the aim of promoting the conservation of small cetaceans. It was ratified by the UK in 1993. Participating states agree to cooperate on issues including national legislation and research into, for example, cetacean population sizes and the effects of fishing.

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