Sea Watcher

For members of the Sea Watch Foundation *Issue 1 Summer 2020*

Sea Watch FOUNDATION

Contents

Welcome to Sea Watcher

our magazine for members of the Sea Watch Foundation. We hope you like it.

Our aim for the magazine is to appeal to anyone with an interest in whales, dolphins and porpoises.

You may simply want to spot cetaceans, and would like to know where your chances will be greatest. Our regular feature on places around the British lsles, (**UK Hotspots**), as well as locations around the world (**Sea Watching Overseas**) should help you – and don't forget to share any sightings and great photos with us.

If you want to go a bit further and engage with our various citizen science projects in and around the British Isles, our **Skills Clinic** will set out how to undertake effort-related watches from land and sea, and take useful photographs and video to confirm the species and, in some cases, identify individual animals. Here, you can also learn about acoustics, and get tips on species identification.

You will find articles on important marine conservation issues (**Conservation Focus**) and news of different activities that you can take part in (**Sea Watch News**), as well as summaries of interesting publications. If you want to delve deeper, check out our **Species Fact Files**. Finally, meet the Sea Watch extended family, through our **People Profiles**. Read about the people actively engaged in observing, studying and saving cetaceans in the UK and abroad.

When I first set up a network of cetacean observers around the UK in the 1970s, it was in the face of great scepticism. Would it be possible for people to see whales or dolphins, particularly from shore, let alone to identify them or collect information that could be of scientific value? So much has changed since then. Now the richness of our seas and diversity of species to be seen are widely recognised, as well as the fact that anyone can have the opportunity to experience these either from the coast or at sea.

Fewer people, however, realise that they themselves can collect really useful information as they look out for cetaceans; information that scientists can use to learn more about their status and distribution, biology and ecology, and most important of all, contribute to their protection and long-term conservation. *This is at the heart of Sea Watch's mission, as a conservation research charity.* Over the last thirty years we have collected evidence to identify important areas for designation as marine reserves, and the various threats that they face, to lead to more informed conservation management.

Sea Watch works at all levels from young children, who represent the future for our planet, through all marine stakeholders and the concerned public to national governments, international bodies, and intergovernmental conservation agreements.

I hope you find something of interest to you in this first free issue of Sea Watcher. If you do, please join us in our efforts to further understand and protect whales, dolphins and porpoises. As a Sea Watch member, you will join our family of people enthusiastic to learn more about these fascinating animals and contribute to their conservation. You will receive future issues on a quarterly basis, receive discounts on training courses, and have the opportunity to participate in all our citizen science projects.

*You can find out more and sign up at **http://members.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/home**.*
I look forward to welcoming you to the Sea Watch family.

Peter Evans

Dr Peter G.H. Evans
Director, Sea Watch Foundation

UK Hotspots:

Mount's Bay, Cornwall

Hannah & Duncan Jones, Sea Watch collaborators, share their nearest UK hotspot.

Mount's Bay, *in the far south west of Cornwall, is the biggest bay in the county, stretching from Lizard Point in the east to Gwennap Head in the west. It takes its name from the iconic St Michael's Mount, which is three miles to the east of Penzance, just off the ancient town of Marazion. Penzance sits on the western sheltered edge of Mount's Bay and provides a handy access point for exploring the sheltered inner waters of the bay, as well as further offshore to reefs such as the Epson Shoal. Further north-west from Gwennap Head is Land's End itself, the most westerly point of England. These waters are at a unique crossroads with the English Channel to the east, the Atlantic to the west, the Celtic and Irish Seas to the north, and the Bay of Biscay to the south. This results in a wide range of potential predator and prey species.*

Deeper waters come close in towards the western shores of Mount's Bay so the narrow inner shelf slopes away quickly. The tide flowing along the slope and around the reefs and shoals creates ideal feeding habitat for harbour porpoises, which can be seen year-round.

Sightings peak in the late summer and autumn when they can be seen in large numbers, even groups of a hundred or more animals feeding together. In the early summer, we frequently observe young calves with their mothers. In the late summer, breeding porpoises can be seen launching from the water while courting.

Occasionally, leucistic porpoises are seen: these are animals that can be almost completely white.

A harbour porpoise surfacing in Mount's Bay, Cornwall

Land's End, Gwennap Head, and Penlee Point are all good places to visit if you are in search of harbour porpoises

The Bay also is visited regularly by **common dolphins** who often travel in large pods of hundreds of animals. Like the porpoises, they can be seen all year round. However, the best time to look out for this colourful species is between July and March when they are recorded daily in the Bay. They tend to be further offshore but sometimes come closer in where they can even be seen from the shore.

A common dolphin leaps in front of St. Michael's Mount

Flocks of gannets and other seabirds are often found above foraging dolphins and really help with the search. In the late summer and autumn there are always lots of calves travelling with the pods, particularly the ones closer inshore. We suspect they are using the shallow areas of Mount's Bay as a nursery area.

The high cliffs around Gwennap Head and Land's End offer a great vantage point to search for pods travelling and foraging

Risso's dolphins visit in the spring and autumn; they can be found from the shallow inshore waters right out to the deeper water at the edge of the bay. If they have been feeding on cuttlefish, the remains often float with attendant great black backed gulls, a fleeting clue to their presence.

Some years we are lucky and calves are born when the dolphins are present in the Bay. If this happens, the new maternal groups seem to hang around for the whole summer.

Risso's dolphins have striking markings on their bodies and we use these to recognise and track individuals. Through photo identification it has been possible to identify dolphins visiting the Bay which have been photographed as far away as North Wales.

A Risso's dolphin leaps in front of Penzance

Looking out towards the south west from Gwennap Head is the best place to look out for Risso's dolphins

The South West of England has a resident pod of **bottlenose dolphins** numbering around thirty animals.

They travel the coast between the Isle of Wight in the east and Ilfracombe on the North Devon coast. On their travels they pass through the Bay sticking close to the coast. We never record them in water deeper than thirty metres.

We also get visited by their offshore counterparts who arrive in pods of hundreds sometimes, but rarely stray close inshore. Like the Risso's dolphins, we use photographs to identify the bottlenose dolphins so we can understand their journeys around the South West coast.

When the bottlenose dolphins pass through, they are the easiest to spot because they track along the shore of the Bay

In summer, we are lucky to be visited by **minke whales**. They are never present in large numbers but in the late summer they can be recorded daily in the wider Bay area.

They are often seen feeding around the tidal eddies, which attract the harbour porpoises' attention. A sleek back rolling over in the glistening sun is usually what you will see.

A small whale, they spend a lot of time under the water. This makes spotting them tricky but very rewarding.

A minke whale surfaces in front of Longships Lighthouse , off Land's End

If there are a lot of minkes around, then it tells us there is a lot of food in the Bay and it is these periods that attract some of the larger species. **Fin, sei** and **humpback** whales have all been recorded, and their presence generally seems to be increasing. Large flocks of shearwaters usually accompany these baleen whales, including Manx, great, sooty, Cory's and Balearic shearwaters. Late summer, autumn and winter seem to be the months when they are most likely to be present. The places to look out for them are the high cliffs around Gwennap Head, Porthcurno and Land's End, although humpbacks have even been spotted before from the quaint village of Mousehole.

A humpback whale in Mount's Bay

Head for the high cliffs around Gwennap Head, Porthcurno and Land's End to look for larger whale species

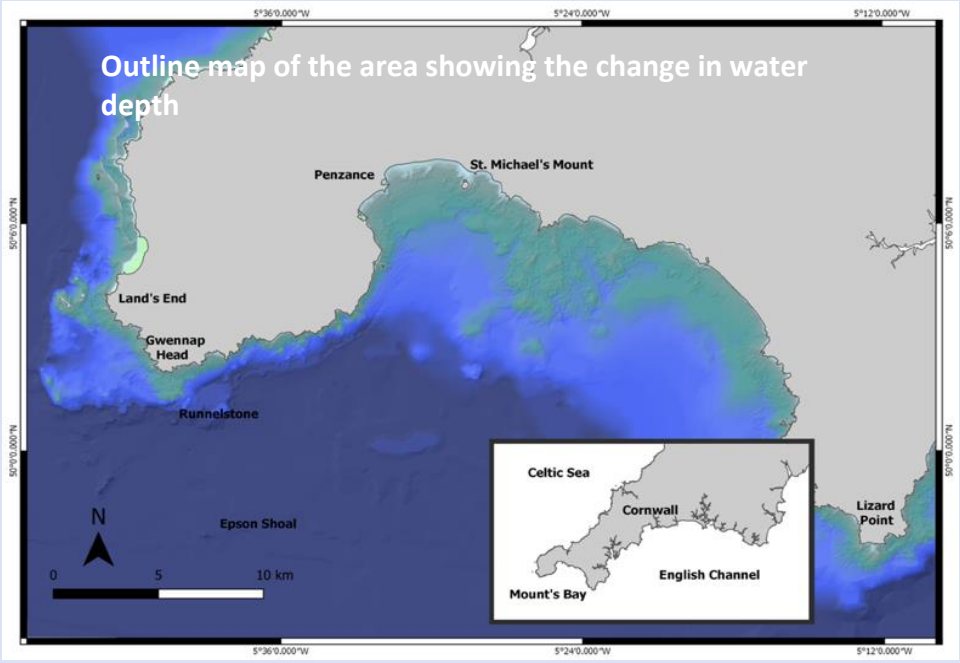
Occasionally, the Bay is visited by rarer species. The most unusual species we have seen is a **bowhead whale,** which was feeding in the shallows off Long Rock beach one May morning. It was quite a surprise for those who were in the right place at the right time.

Kogia sperm whales (both dwarf and pygmy) have also been recorded twice. More commonly, **pilot whales** and **white-beaked dolphins** pass through. Usually, these travel further offshore and they never stay for long.

> *"Wildlife watching in Mount's Bay always has something to offer."*

Aside from the cetaceans, wildlife spotters in Mount's Bay can also be rewarded with seabirds, grey seals, and ocean sunfish. Basking sharks are a bit of a feast or famine species – huge numbers were recorded between 2006 and 2010, but with a massive drop in sightings since then. However, people have been spotting them around our shores during spring 2020.

Once in a while, we have been extremely privileged to encounter the giant ocean wanderers, leatherback turtles. Finally, large shoals of Bluefin tuna have been spotted increasingly since 2011. They are the focus of some intense study.



Further Reading

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Photo credits: Photo of authors: Mike Newman. Bowhead whale: Caroline Weir. All others and outline map: the authors.

Species Fact File: White-beaked dolphin

At a glance…

Scientific name – ***Lagenorhynchus albirostris***

Length – **2.5 – 3.1 m (fully grown)**
1.1 - 1.2 m (new born)

Dorsal fin – **large, sickle-shaped.**

Markings – **variable white, grey and black. The white on the sides reaches onto the back of the animal behind the dorsal fin and over the tail stock.**

Behaviour – **fast, powerful swimmer; bow-rides vessels, often breaches and tail lobs.**

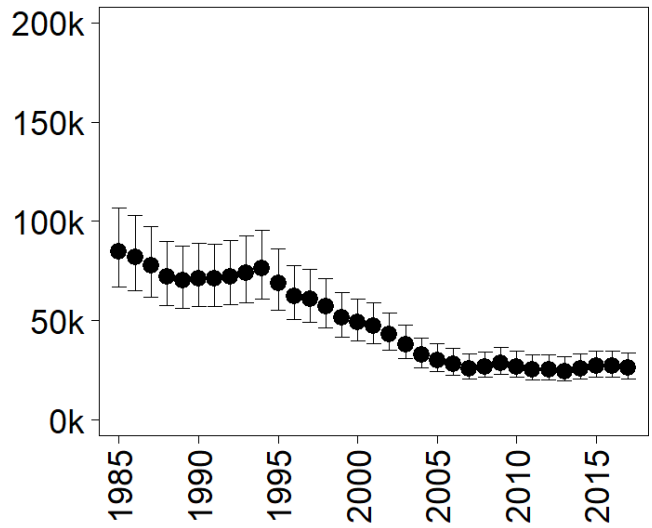
Diet – **variety of fish including cod, whiting, haddock, poor cod, mackerel, blue whiting.**

Photo credit: J Bridda

Range and Habitat

The white-beaked dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*) is more or less confined to temperate and sub-polar seas of the North Atlantic, including a large part of the North-West European continental shelf. It occurs mainly in waters of 50-100 metres depth, and almost entirely within the 200 metre isobath. However, further north, in the Barents Sea and off West Greenland, it can be found in much deeper waters of up to 1,000 metres.

Annual trends in abundance of white-beaked dolphins in NW European seas



(Source: Evans & Waggitt, 2019)

Abundance

It is the most common dolphin inhabiting the cold temperate and low arctic shelf waters of the North Atlantic and North Sea. Wide-scale surveys from southern Norway to Portugal indicate a population of around 40,000 animals. Numbers in the North Sea (counted in July) have not changed significantly between 1994, 2005 and 2016, when the main abundance surveys have taken place, although there appears to have been an overall decline in the wider region.

White-beaked dolphins: note the patterning on the body

Photo credit: PGH Evans

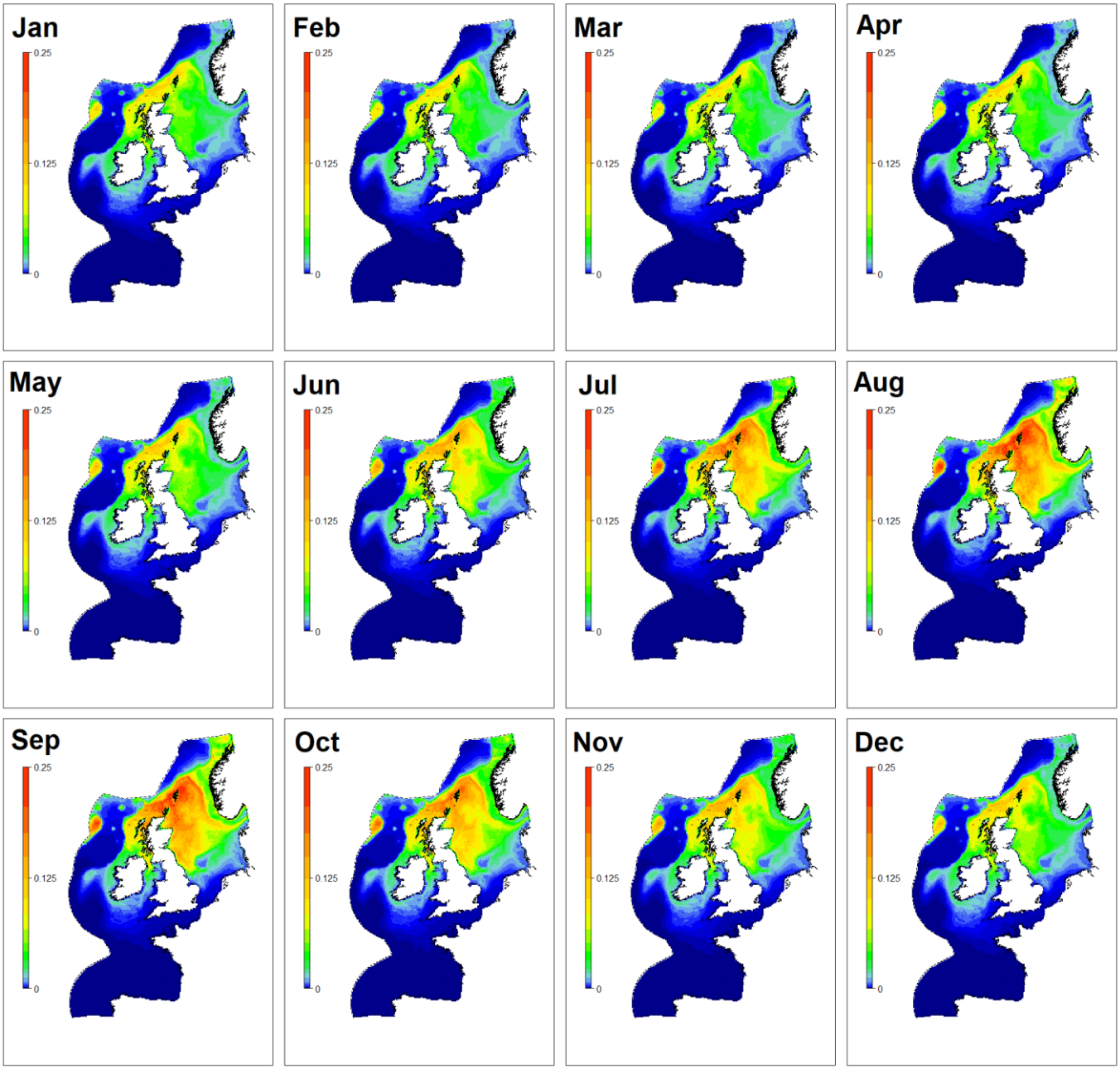
Numbers around Iceland (particularly off the north and south-west coasts) and in the Faroe Islands are rather larger than around the British Isles, with more than 100,000 animals estimated.

European Distribution

There are four principal centres of high density:

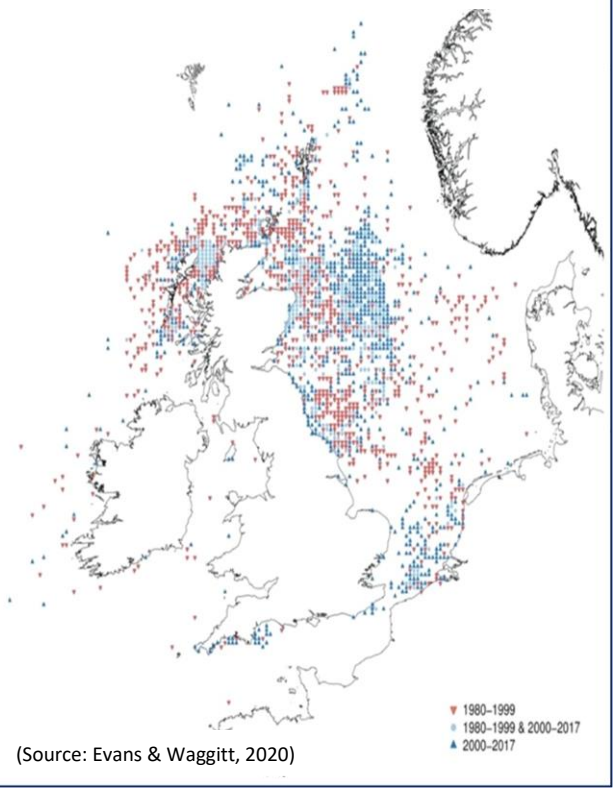
1) The Labrador Shelf including SW Greenland;
2) Icelandic waters;
3) The waters around Scotland and NE England, including the central and northern North Sea and NW coast of Scotland; and
4) the narrow shelf stretch along the Norwegian coast, extending north into the Barents and White Seas.

Maps of white-beaked dolphin monthly density distributions, averaged over the period 1989-2018



(Source: Waggitt et al. 2019)

Map of sightings of white-beaked dolphin



(Source: Evans & Waggitt, 2020)

Distribution in British waters

The species is most abundant in the northern Hebrides and central- and north-western North Sea. However, it occurs also in the southern North Sea, and a small population inhabits the waters of south Devon and Cornwall, generally from Lyme Bay westwards. The species is rare in the Irish Sea and the eastern English Channel. Although recorded in all months of the year, most sightings around the British Isles are between June and September.

Behaviour & Life History

Group sizes in British waters are typically small, fewer than ten, but occasionally can number 100-500 animals. Calves are born mainly between May and September, although births have been recorded outside this period. Females become sexually mature at 6-10 years of age and males about two years later. Gestation period is c. 11 months. The oldest known male was 32 years and oldest female was 39 years of age.

Sample of sightings of white-beaked dolphin reported to Sea Watch Foundation so far in 2020

February

x 2

Long Nab, Burniston, near Scarborough Yorkshire

March

x 20

Off Whitby, Yorkshire

x 4/5

Orkney Barriers, over 3 consecutive days

x 7

Portvoller, Outer Hebrides

April

x 5

Tiumpan Head, Outer Hebrides

May

x 1-21

Portvoller, Outer Hebrides, over six days

Possible threats

We don't know very much about threats to the species but we believe the main ones relate to changes in the distribution and abundance of their food supply either from climate warming or by the decline in the stocks of some fish species from over fishing.

Photo credit: K Hepworth

References

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Sea Watching Overseas:
Whale Watching in Madeira

Luís Freitas, Head of Science at the Madeira Whale Museum, shares his favourite global marine mammal hotspot…

My passion for the sea started early on, as I looked at the vastness and deep blue colour of the Atlantic Ocean from the cliffs of Madeira, the island where I was born. Madeira is the main island of the Madeira archipelago. It is located c. 700 km west of Casablanca (Northwest Africa) and not far away from the entrance of the Mediterranean Sea. Besides Madeira, the archipelago consists of Porto Santo, and the Desertas and Selvagens islands. The last two are land and marine nature reserves.

Madeira island is the visible part of a mountain that rises roughly 7,300 m from the sea floor and reaches, at its highest peak, 1,863 m above sea level. Despite its small size (59 x 23 km), the mountainous landscape with its green valleys cutting deep into the heart of the island, makes it seem several times bigger.

The Madeira Laurisilva forest covers some of those valleys. This is an ancient laurel forest, a type long extinct in southern continental Europe, and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The green of the mountain and the blue of the ocean are hypnotising, especially when seen from the sea. Maybe this is why Madeira is known as the 'pearl of the Atlantic'.

The north coast of Madeira island, seen from the sea

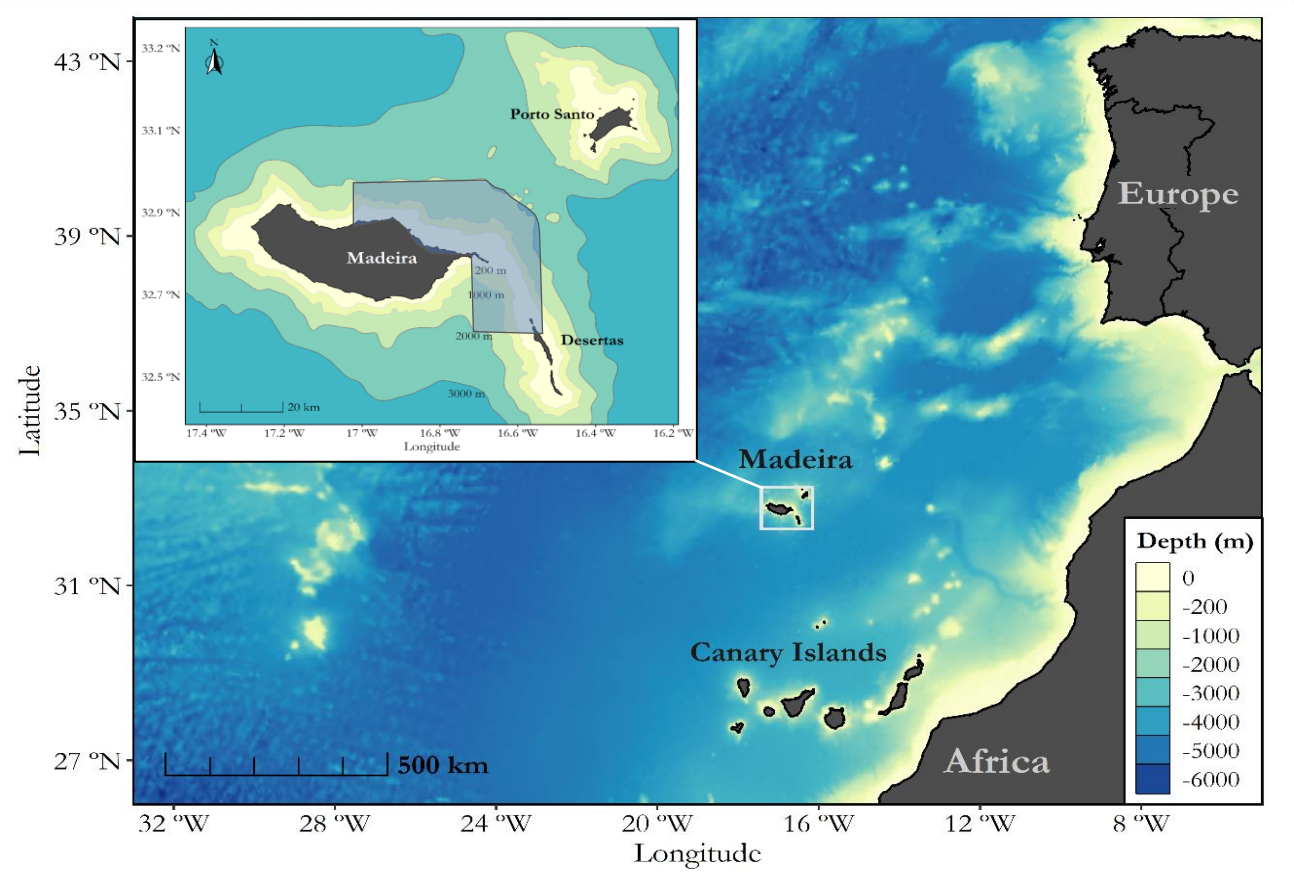
A view of a valley with the Laurisilva forest

The capital of Madeira, Funchal city, seen from Cabo Girão, a promontory 580 m high

A 'til' tree (Ocotea foetens), found among the trees of the Laurisilva forest. It can live for hundreds of years; many on the island date from before 1420, when the island was discovered

Photo credits: L Freitas

The waters around the islands are home to many subtropical marine species. Some are permanent residents, including a colony of **Mediterranean monk seal, bottlenose dolphins** and **short-finned pilot whales.** Others, including many cetacean species, are occasional visitors, passing by on their migrations or as they hunt for food. The volcanic nature of these oceanic islands, with their steep underwater slopes and deep waters close to shore, means that you can see both coastal and deep-water species of cetacean in a small area, relatively close to land. Furthermore, its subtropical location, with water temperatures ranging from 18º C to 24º C places the archipelago at the southern limit of the distribution range of colder water cetacean species and the northern limit of warm water species.



The Madeira archipelago, its composition and bathymetry. The light gray shaded area is the whale watching exclusion zone (see page 19)

Species you might see

Twenty-eight species of cetaceans have been recorded in the waters of the Madeira archipelago. Among the most common species you might see are **bottlenose dolphins** and **short-finned pilot whales.** Both are present all year round, as visitors and as residents. You are more likely to see **bottlenose dolphins** in the shallower waters closer to shore, and in the channel between Madeira and the Desertas islands. Look a little further out to sea to spot **short-finned pilot whales** – they mostly inhabit a small area of deeper waters around 2,000-2,500 m depth, southeast of the island, not far away from the bottlenose dolphins. In fact, it is not uncommon to see some bottlenose dolphins in mixed groups with pilot whales. On the other hand, the **Atlantic spotted dolphin** and **common dolphin** are seasonal visitors, and tend not to overlap. Spotted dolphins occur mainly in the summer and autumn, and common dolphins generally in winter and spring. Although you can sometimes see these dolphin species with the naked eye from land, they tend to be spread throughout a wider range of depths than the bottlenose dolphin.

Bryde's whales visit around the same time as the Atlantic spotted dolphins. If you are lucky you may spot them from land, as they are sometimes seen close to shore, on their own, in mother-calf pairs, or in gatherings of a few animals, to feed.

Three sperm whales resting on the surface a few kilometres from Cabo Girão promontory, near Funchal city

Photo credit: Joan Gimenez © Museu da Baleia da Madeira

Sperm whales are also common in Madeira coastal waters throughout the year, including single males, small groups, and, more rarely, matriarchal groups that can reach thirty or more animals. However, these animals only stay from a few days to a few weeks feeding, resting and socialising as they wander the Atlantic Ocean, possibly migrating between the Macaronesia archipelagos of Azores, Madeira and the Canaries. They were found in such large numbers in the past that they sustained a coastal artisanal whaling operation from 1941 to 1981 in the archipelago.

Some of the scenes from the 1956 film "Moby Dick", directed by John Huston and with Gregory Peck as Captain Ahab, were recorded off the southeast coast of Madeira island close to Caniçal village, from where the small whaling wooden boats operated.

Located in Caniçal village is the Madeira Whale Museum (MWM; www.museudabaleia.org).

Here you can find out more about the historical and cultural heritage of the whaling activity in the archipelago. The museum also promotes the conservation of cetaceans through scientific research, education and awareness.

Besides sperm whales and pilot whales, you may find other deep diving species such as the **Blainville's beaked whales.** They are regularly seen throughout the year in the waters around Madeira, but they are not easy to spot, because of their inconspicuous behaviour.

A Blainville's beaked whale

Photo credit: Elena Gutierrez © Museu da Baleia da Madeira


A Cuvier's beaked whale

Photo credit: Joan Gimenez © Museu da Baleia da Madeira

Less likely to be observed, but still present occasionally, are **Cuvier's beaked whales**.

This species is seen less frequently than Blainville's beaked whales and other cetacean species. This could be because of its lower number, more offshore distribution and /or shy behaviour.

If you are lucky, you might even see **pygmy sperm whales**. They are also deep-water specialists.

Other species have an occasional presence in these waters. You may see **fin whale** – their numbers peak in March and April as they pass through Madeira on their northward migration - or **striped dolphins** and **false killer whales;** they can be seen irregularly throughout the year. On the other hand, **rough-toothed dolphins** and **Risso's dolphins**, visit only in summer.

In my thirty years of research on marine mammals in Madeira, mostly studying cetaceans at the MWM, I never cease to be surprised once in a while by unusual and spectacular encounters. These include: a beaked whale together with a pod of short-finned pilot whales; dolphins bow-riding a Bryde's whale; and four sightings of individual dwarf sperm whales in a single hour. Among the rarer species I have encountered are sei whale, minke whale, blue whale, Sowerby's beaked whale, Gervais' beaked whale, a pod of killer whales, Fraser dolphins and pygmy killer whales.


Dolphins bow-riding a Bryde´s whale off the south coast of Madeira, with Cabo Girão promontory in the background

Photo credit: L. Freitas

Getting out to sea

In my experience, there is a good chance that someone going out at sea will return with good memories, either from encounters with wildlife (cetaceans, sea birds, sea turtles, even the elusive monk seal) or simply the scenery, enhanced most of the times by the mild weather, sun and comfortable air and water temperatures. To have a good chance of seeing the deeper-diving species, as well as to get a better feel for the archipelago, you will need to get out to sea. There are several 'whale watching' companies operating from different harbours – but make sure they are licensed (see box below). Although free swimming with cetaceans is not allowed, you can book underwater observations of common dolphins and Atlantic spotted dolphins only. Up to four people are allowed in the water at the same time, connected to the boat by a rope.

Whale watching boat trips – a historical background

Whale watching boat trips started gently and opportunistically 25 years ago on Madeira island when Peter Bristow, the owner of a big-game fishing boat ('Catherine B'), promoted trips to see cetaceans as a way of complementing the fishing activity.

In 2004, the Madeira Whale Museum (MWM) promoted a whale-watching voluntary code of conduct that was adopted by most companies operating at that time. However, as whale watching grew in popularity, the MWM then proposed to the government that binding regulations should be introduced, and provided scientific advice towards that goal.

In 2013, regional legislation came into force, regulating not only the observation of cetaceans but also of other marine vertebrates such as sea turtles and sea birds. The legislation included the Mediterranean monk seal, in order to minimise negative interactions with this rare and highly protected species.

As a result, a maximum number of whale watching boats allowed to operate per harbour was established and also the maximum number (3) of trips each boat could do per day. A time limit to be with the animals and an exclusion zone (see page 16) were also established to minimise the impact on crucial habitats of the bottlenose dolphin and short-finned pilot whale, both species with resident groups.

Suggested Whale Watching Companies

Calheta, (Southwest Madeira)

Lobosonda (www.lobosonda.com)

H20 Madeira (www.h2omadeira.com)

Funchal (the island capital in the South of Madeira)

VMT Madeira (www.vmtmadeira.com)

Magic dolphin (www.magic-dolphin.com)

Rota dos Cetáceos (www.rota-dos-cetaceos.pt)

Machico (Southeast Madeira)

Scorpio (www.scorpiomadeira.com)

Porto Moniz (Northwest Madeira)

Madeira Wild Blue (www.madeirawildblue.com)

Please note: from time to time there are companies that try to operate without a licence. We recommend that you check that the boat you choose has the flag of a licensed whale-watching operator and that it is operating from the designated harbour.

Further reading

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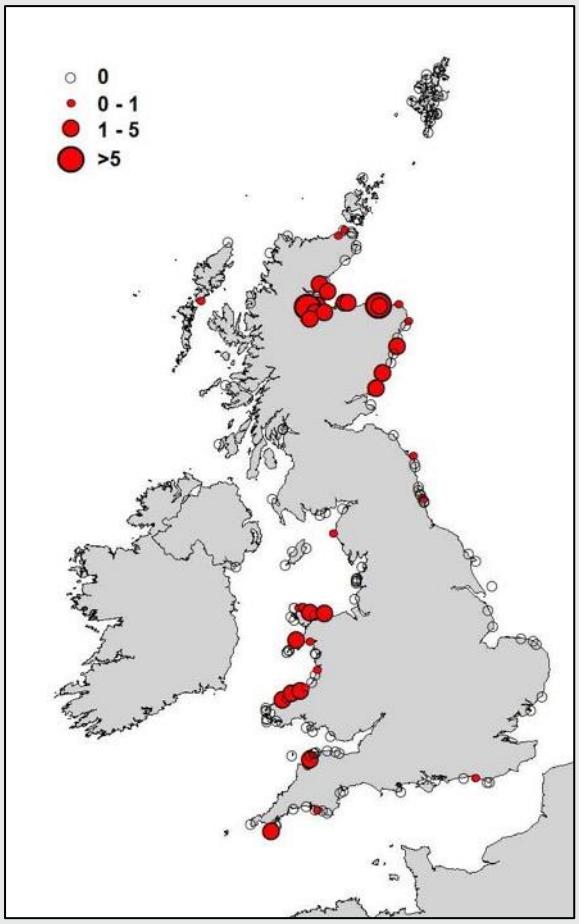
Freitas L., Dinis A., Nicolau C., Ribeiro C., and Alves F. (2012) New records of cetacean species for Madeira Archipelago with an updated checklist. *Bol. Mus. Mun. Funchal*, **62** (334): 25 - 43 (www.museudabaleia.org/en/science-in-museum/whales-and-dolphins-in-madeira)

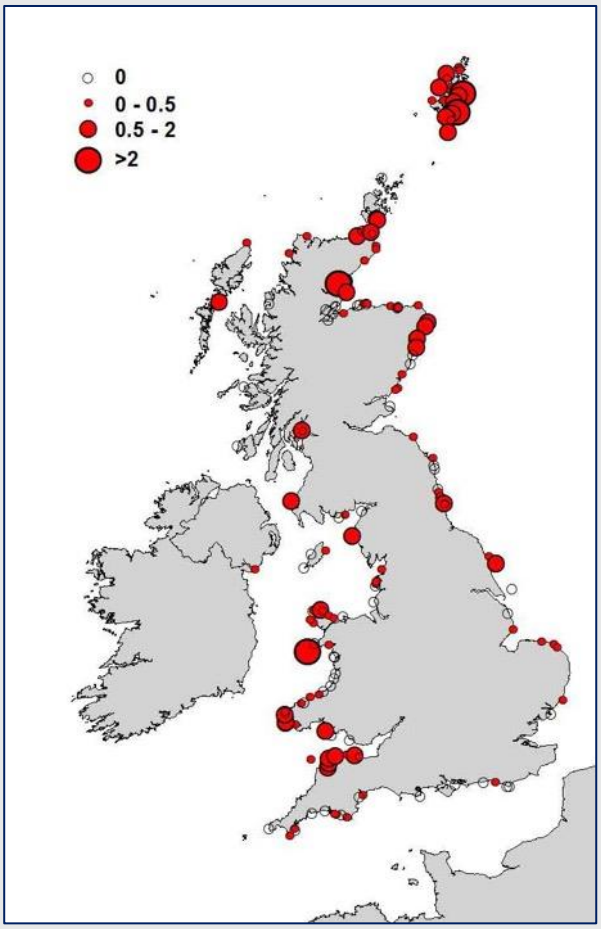
Skills Clinic: Sea Watching from Land

You don't have to go to sea to view whales, dolphins or porpoises. Most species at some time in their lives come close inshore, and some are regular visitors to coastal areas. This means we can monitor their local status and get pleasure from observing them closely but without intruding on them. In fact, much important information comes from those watching from land.

Over the last 40 years, we have developed a monitoring network of sites all around the British Isles. These provide us with really useful information on the distribution and status of our more coastal species, such as bottlenose dolphin and harbour porpoise (see maps below). Although records of casual sightings of cetaceans can provide useful information, their value is greatly enhanced if the amount of time spent observing is recorded, and watches are conducted systematically on a regular basis. This ensures that sightings are not biased towards a particular time of year (e.g. summer holidays) because of greater coverage then.

Sightings rates can only be established if effort is recorded (in terms of the number of minutes watched). For this, watches that yield no sightings are just as important as those with positive results.





Maps of sighting rates (number of animals per hour of watching) for bottlenose dolphin (left) and harbour porpoise (right)

(Source: Evans, P.G.H., Pierce, G.J., Veneruso, G., Weir, C.R., Gibas, D., Anderwald, P., and Santos, M.B. (2015) *Analysis of long-term effort-related land-based observations to identify whether coastal areas of harbour porpoise and bottlenose dolphin have persistent high occurrence and abundance*. JNCC Report No: 543. 147pp.)

Choosing a site

Your regional coordinator will be able to tell you where regular watches take place. And you can go to our website to download regional fact sheets that list key locations. The number of sites used for systematic watches within a region will obviously depend on how many people are involved and the time they can commit to watching, but generally, we prefer it if a few good sites are watched regularly throughout the year than several sites visited only infrequently. Where possible, we aim for a fairly even coverage of sites through each region.

Good sites tend to be headlands, or coastlines overlooking bays or small islands, but even if your region is not favoured with these features, don't be put off. Whales, dolphins and porpoises can pop up anywhere.

The height above sea level is important since it affects the distance over which you can observe cetaceans, particularly when the sea is at all rippled. Ideally, the site should be somewhere between 50 and 150 feet (15-45 metres) above sea level. If it is possible to get close to the cliff top by watching from a car or building, this makes viewing conditions much more comfortable, an important consideration when it is cold or windy, or there are rain showers. This obviously applies particularly to winter watches. Also, please be aware of your safety when out on cliffs or headlands.

Conducting the watch

When doing timed watches, it is important to record start and end times of the watch, and in between time, ideally note environmental conditions every ten minutes.

A suitable site, like this one,

- is at least 50-150 feet (15-45 metres) above sea level
- has a good all-round view of the sea
- is relatively easy to reach

We have a land-based effort recording form that standardises the information needed and also enables you to log any cetaceans observed.

Cetaceans are not easy to see, especially when there is a swell on the sea. Often the only view you have is of a small fin (particularly if it is a porpoise), and if the sea is rippled in any way that can be easily hidden. The best way to conduct a watch is to continually scan the sea surface with the naked eye, interspersed at intervals with binocular scans. Binoculars are essential, and in some circumstances a telescope can also be very helpful.

Continually scan the surface of the sea!

During the scans, either with the naked eye or with binoculars or telescope, look for any disturbance of the sea surface. Often this will be the result of a wave breaking the surface, but it could be the first sign of a cetacean as it surfaces.

If seabirds are seen circling or diving in an area, it is worth checking these out with binoculars since dolphins or whales may well be associated.

When to watch

Watches are best conducted on calm days when there is little surface turbulence. If waves are continually breaking it becomes very difficult to pick out instances when the surface has been broken by a whale or dolphin; where there are longer waves, many white caps and even spray, it generally isn't worth carrying on with the watch as distinguishing between a splash from a surfacing cetacean and a wave breaking becomes nigh on impossible.

A wave or a fin? If the sea is too rough it can be very hard to tell

Was that a cetacean?

If you think you've spotted something, for example an unexplained movement or splash, concentrate your binoculars on it for a minute or two. If it is actually a cetacean, it may take that long for it to reveal itself again. Indeed, some cetaceans may remain beneath the surface for several minutes by which time they could have moved some distance away. It is therefore wise also to scan on either side for a while. If it does turn out be a cetacean, note the time and environmental conditions on your recording form, and try to identify the species and number in the group. A note on the behaviour of the animal or animals is also helpful, as well as any associated birds or vessels.

Timing of watches

Systematic watches are best carried out either in the early morning (for example, a couple of hours after dawn onwards) or late afternoon (up to a couple of hours before dusk) because those are the times when lighting conditions are at their most favourable. However, do not be deterred if you have to watch at some other time. Also, it is important that you don't start a watch just because you've spotted a cetacean.

The length of a watch

There is no ideal duration for a watch. Much depends on the frequency with which cetaceans occur in the locality. We recommend one- to two-hour watches because they provide a reasonable chance of seeing a cetacean if any are around while avoiding loss of concentration. Although the duration of watch is best kept fairly constant, this is not essential so long as the start and finish times are recorded.

How frequently to watch

The greater the frequency of watches, the more useful the information collected. This is mainly because it increases the chances of recording cetaceans that at the best of times may pass undetected. Weekly watches are recommended.

Weekly watches are best

The watches need not be spaced exactly a week apart. Indeed, it is more important to pick a relatively calm day where possible. If weekly watches are not feasible, it is also better not to give up entirely - fortnightly or monthly watches are certainly better than nothing.

A note on optics for sea watching

Your choice of binoculars depends upon your personal taste and resources. Obviously the more expensive makes such as Leica, Zeiss and Swarovski give the best results, mainly because of their higher resolution and greater light-gathering power. But there are some other good binoculars on the market at lower prices. Nikon, for example, produces some excellent mid-range binoculars, such as its Monarch range (8x42).

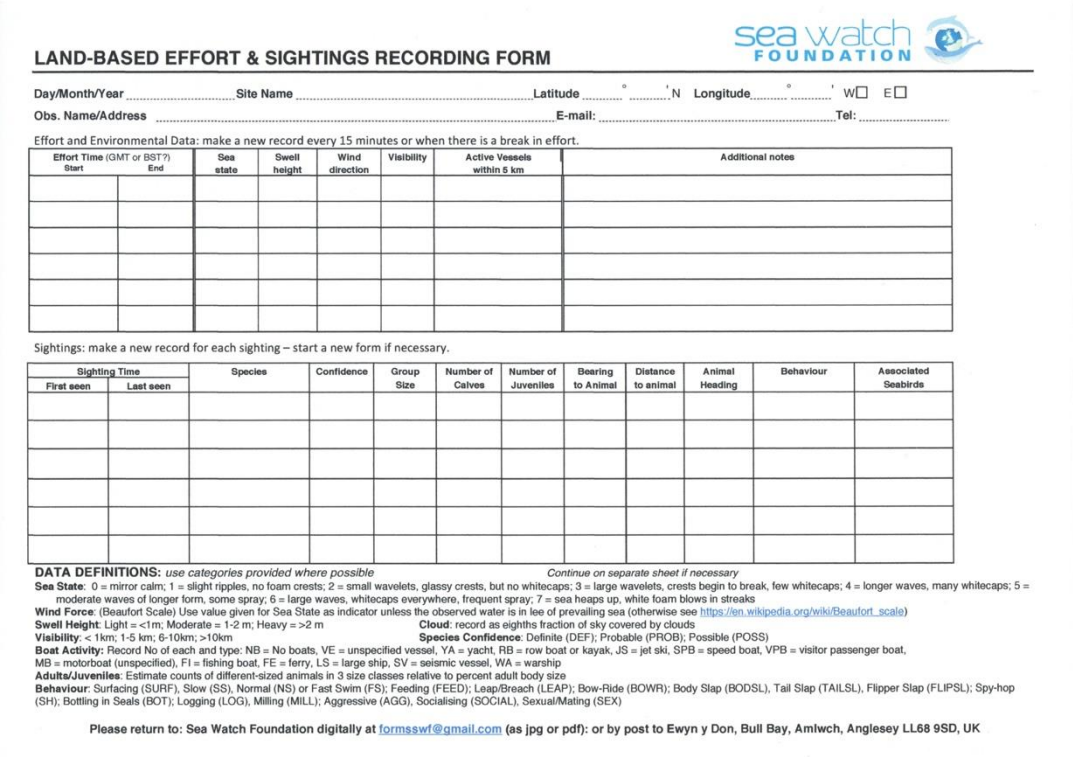
For telescopes, Swarovski are amongst the best, but Optolyth and Nikon are pretty good also, and amongst cheaper models Celestron, Vanguard and Vortex offer good deals. A telescope with an 'angled' eye piece tends to be easier to look through.

Binocular magnification typically can be anywhere between 7 and 10 times - 7x magnification usually has better light-gathering, which can be particularly useful over the sea, while 10x is better for picking out details. For many, 8x is a good compromise. Telescopes are best with objectives around 20-30 times magnification. Greater than this and the image is often too dim and field of view too narrow.

If you use a telescope, it is important to have a steady tripod or, in the case of viewing from a car, a window clamp.

We hope you've found these tips helpful. We'll return to the subject in a future Sea Watcher but, for now, if you can, get out there and practice. With National Whale and Dolphin Watch 2020 coming soon (see page 32), there's no better time to start a regular watch.

For guidance on completing the land-based effort related form, and for hints on species ID, visit our website – www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk – and look under the **Sightings** tab. And why not consider coming on one of our cetacean survey training courses? Look under the **Education** tab for details about the course and how to sign up.



sea watch FOUNDATION

LAND-BASED EFFORT & SIGHTINGS RECORDING FORM

Day/Month/Year ..... Site Name ..... Latitude ..... ° ..... ' N Longitude ..... ° ..... ' W☐ E☐

Obs. Name/Address ..... E-mail: ..... Tel: .....

Effort and Environmental Data: make a new record every 15 minutes or when there is a break in effort.

Effort Time (GMT or BST?) Start	End	Sea state	Swell height	Wind direction	Visibility	Active Vessels within 5 km	Additional notes

Sightings: make a new record for each sighting – start a new form if necessary.

Sighting Time First seen	Last seen	Species	Confidence	Group Size	Number of Calves	Number of Juveniles	Bearing to Animal	Distance to animal	Animal Heading	Behaviour	Associated Seabirds

DATA DEFINITIONS: *use categories provided where possible* *Continue on separate sheet if necessary*

Sea State: 0 = mirror calm; 1 = slight ripples, no foam crests; 2 = small wavelets, glassy crests, but no whitecaps; 3 = large wavelets, crests begin to break, few whitecaps; 4 = longer waves, many whitecaps; 5 = moderate waves of longer form, some spray; 6 = large waves, whitecaps everywhere, frequent spray; 7 = sea heaps up, white foam blows in streaks

Wind Force: (Beaufort Scale) Use value given for Sea State as indicator unless the observed water is in lee of prevailing sea (otherwise see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaufort_scale)

Swell Height: Light = <1m; Moderate = 1-2 m; Heavy = >2 m

Cloud: record as eighths fraction of sky covered by clouds

Visibility: < 1km; 1-5 km; 6-10km; >10km

Species Confidence: Definite (DEF); Probable (PROB); Possible (POSS)

Boat Activity: Record No of each and type: NB = No boats, VE = unspecified vessel, YA = yacht, RB = row boat or kayak, JS = jet ski, SPB = speed boat, VPB = visitor passenger boat, MB = motorboat (unspecified), FI = fishing boat, FE = ferry, LS = large ship, SV = seismic vessel, WA = warship

Adults/Juveniles: Estimate counts of different-sized animals in 3 size classes relative to percent adult body size

Behaviour: Surfacing (SURF), Slow (SS), Normal (NS) or Fast Swim (FS); Feeding (FEED); Leap/Breach (LEAP); Bow-Ride (BOWR); Body Slap (BODSL), Tail Slap (TAILSL), Flipper Slap (FLIPSL); Spy-hop (SH); Bottling in Seals (BOT); Logging (LOG), Milling (MILL); Aggressive (AGG), Socialising (SOCIAL), Sexual/Mating (SEX)

Please return to: Sea Watch Foundation digitally at formsswf@gmail.com (as jpg or pdf): or by post to Ewyn y Don, Bull Bay, Amlwch, Anglesey LL68 9SD, UK

This is what our land-based effort form looks like. As you can see, it is easy to use, and has helpful notes. You can download it from our website under recording and submitting sightings.

Conservation Focus:
Common dolphins dying in fishing gear

by Peter Evans, Director, Sea Watch Foundation.

Dr Evans is Co-Chair of the ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Joint Working Group on Bycatch, and a member of the ICES Working Groups on Marine Mammal Ecology and on Bycatch of Protected Species.

For at least the last 30 years, common dolphins have been dying in the waters around south-west Britain and southern Ireland (often termed the Celtic Shelf), as well as in Atlantic France and Spain (particularly the Bay of Biscay), after becoming entangled in fishing gear.

The background

In the 1990s, driftnet fisheries for Albacore tuna south-west of Britain and Ireland were catching hundreds of common and striped dolphins every year.

For the period 1990-2000, a minimum bycatch of 11,700 common dolphins was estimated from this fishery, with as many as 2,100 taken in 1999.

In 2002, the European Commission banned driftnets used for capturing tuna and swordfish throughout the seas of the European Union because of the damage they caused in catching protected species such as marine mammals, seabirds, and sea turtles.

Unfortunately, that was not the end of the problem. Widespread fishing in the same region during winter months using pelagic trawls (both single and pair trawls) to catch sea bass resulted in further bycatch, particularly of common dolphins. Independent observers placed on a sample of vessels during the late 2000s in the Celtic Shelf and Bay of Biscay estimated that the total bycatch of dolphins per year in this fishery could amount to as much as one thousand animals. The vessels involved were mainly from the UK, Ireland, France and Spain. Overfishing of sea bass led to some measures in 2007 to help protect stocks. These were further strengthened by the EU in 2016, which significantly reduced fishing pressure.

Sea bass were not the only fish species targeted in the region however, with hake in particular taken

by trawls and static nets along the slope of the continental shelf in the northern Bay of Biscay. Between January and March, hake aggregate in this particular area to spawn, although they can be found anywhere from the shelf edge to coastal waters, and fishing using bottom set gillnets and trammel nets also operate further inshore. Other fish taken by trawls or nets in the region have included horse mackerel, mackerel, angler fish, sole, megrim, tuna and sardine, all of which are also eaten by common dolphins.

With several different countries fishing in the Bay of Biscay and Celtic Sea areas using a variety of gear types, it has been difficult to determine which ones are mainly responsible for bycatch of common dolphins, particularly when the dolphins could be taking a range of fish prey. Although independent observers are placed on vessels, the monitoring effort has consistently been too low to obtain adequate estimates of bycatch rates by gear type and country.

The current situation

In the Western Channel and its Approaches, the highest numbers of dolphins caught appear to be from gillnet and bottom otter trawl fisheries targeting bottom living fish, together resulting in a total annual bycatch in recent years (2016-2018) of c. 700 dolphins. In this area, French and UK fisheries dominate.

Further south in the northern part of the Bay of Biscay, more than 90% of fishing effort involves French vessels, the rest largely made up of Spanish vessels. The highest numbers of dolphins caught annually were estimated to be in the trammel net fisheries for bottom-living fish amounting to c. 2,000 dolphins, whilst the overall total annual bycatch across different fisheries in recent years (2016-2018) was estimated to be c. 4,000 dolphins.

The level of bycatch in gillnets is likely to be underestimated as smaller vessels carrying static nets have been under-sampled as have pelagic trawls, and trammel nets are not easily distinguished from gillnets at sea. Trawls that have very high vertical openings are believed to be the more damaging.

Common dolphins are believed to form a single population from Norway south to Portugal, and wide-scale surveys (SCANS-3) across that area in summer 2016 estimated a population abundance somewhere in excess of 630,000 animals. There is some evidence that the common dolphin population has increased in the region in recent years. The species occurs at highest densities in the northern Bay of Biscay (Figure 1).

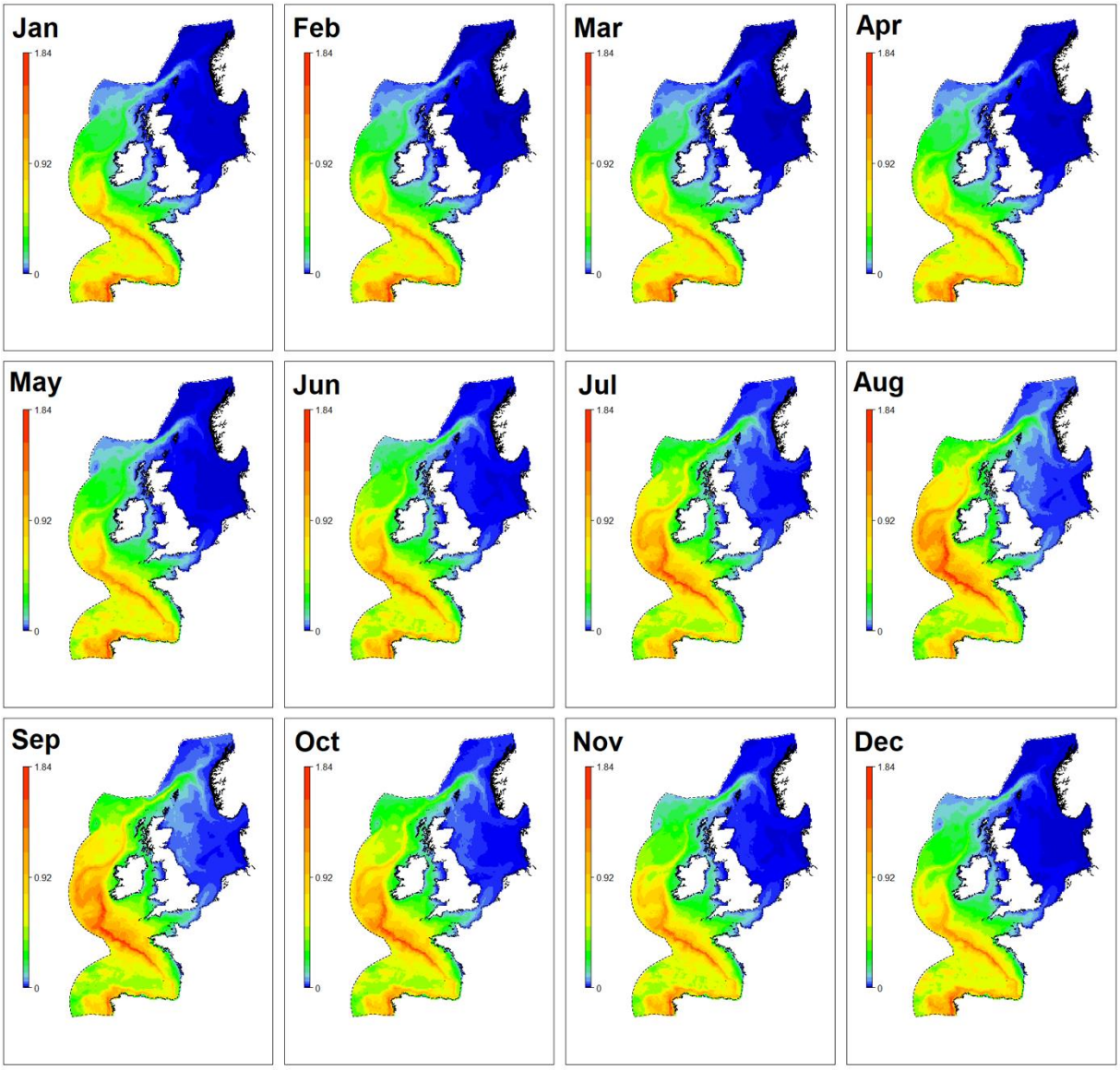


Figure 1: *Modelled density distributions of common dolphins averaged over the period 1989-2018 (Source: Waggitt et al., 2019)*

Evidence from strandings

Another source of information comes from strandings.

In the UK, the two most commonly stranded cetacean species are harbour porpoise and common dolphin. Since 1991, post mortem examinations have been made routinely on fresh animals as part of the UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme, currently funded by Defra. More than 50% of common dolphins washed ashore and whose cause of death could be determined between 1991 and 2010 had evidence of bycatch (net marks, water in the lungs, etc).

Most of these were from the south-west of England suggesting that they had originally died in the western Channel or its Approaches. That percentage has declined somewhat since 2010, and by 2017 was less than 25% of animals whose cause of death could be determined.

On occasions, large numbers of common dolphins have washed ashore on the French coast of the Bay of Biscay, for example in 1991, 1997, and 1999-2002, with up to 500 in a year. Between 2003 and 2015, numbers have fluctuated between 126 and 475, until 2016 when 558 were recorded stranding, and in 2017 this had increased to 908 (Figure 2).

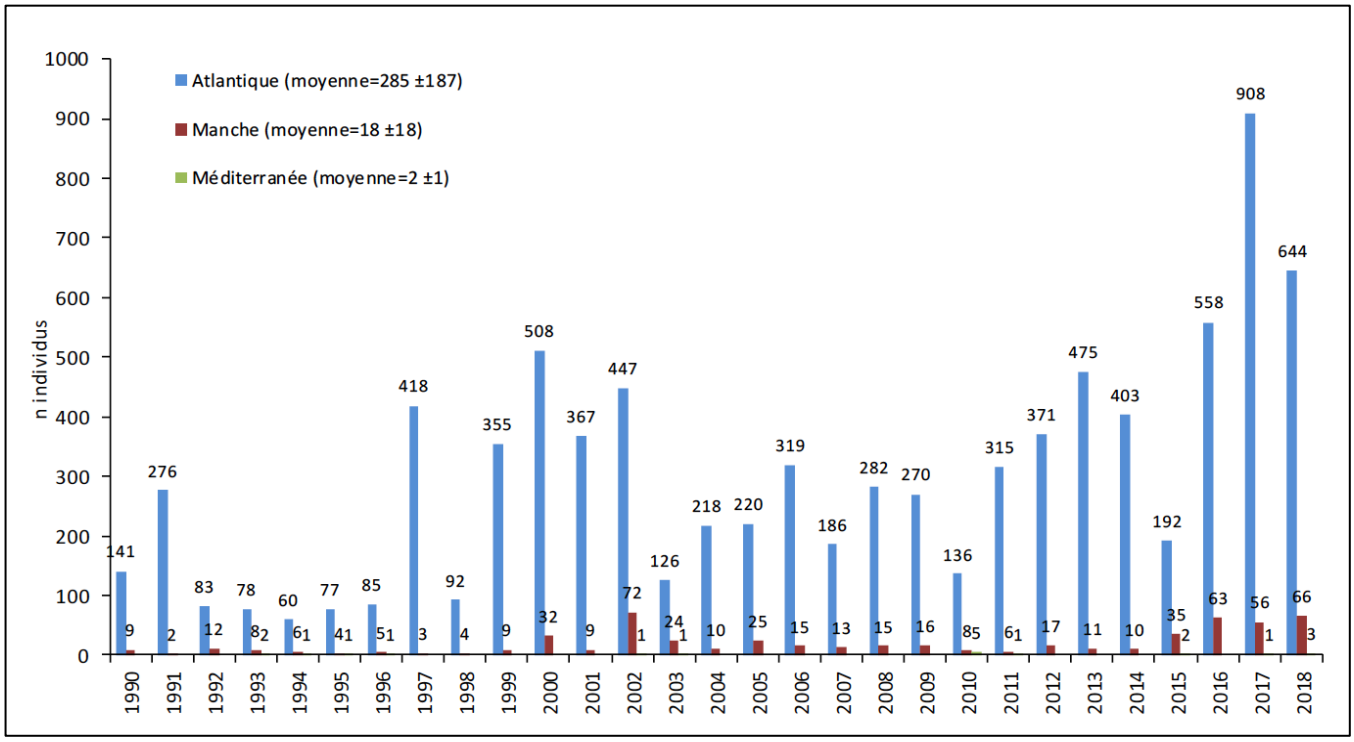


Figure 2: *Strandings of common dolphins along the Atlantic coast of France, 1990-2018 (Source: Dars et al., 2019)*

In 2018, a further 644 stranded, and around one thousand between January and March 2019. Around 85% of the dolphin carcasses found on the beaches bore traces of capture in fishing gear. Given that only about 10% of bycaught dolphins are thought to end up stranding on the beach, the rest sinking to the seabed, the actual annual mortality recently (2017-18) was thought to average c. 9,000 in the Bay of Biscay and 5,400 in the Western Channel. Most mortality occurs between January and April (Figure 3). Between December 2019 and March 2020, several hundred common dolphins have again washed ashore on the French Biscay coasts.

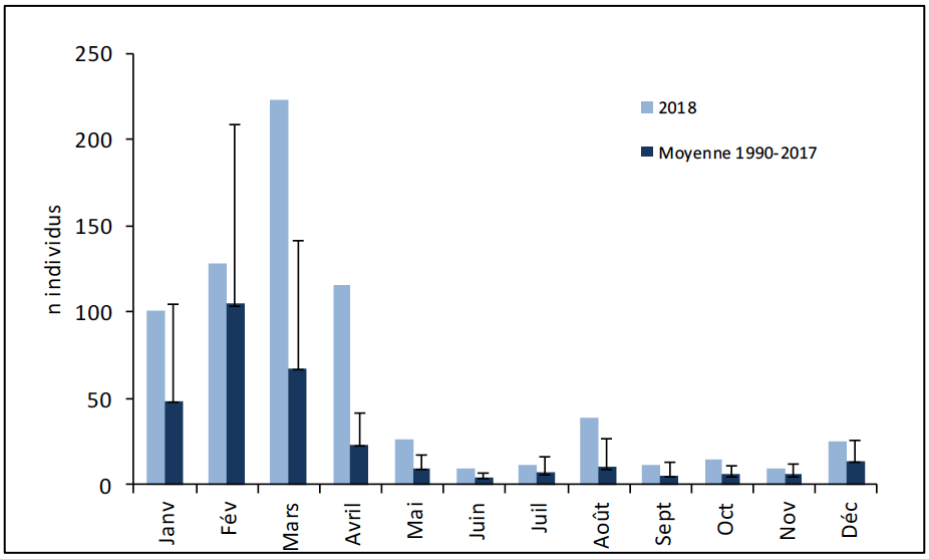


Figure 3: *Seasonal distribution of Common Dolphin strandings along the Atlantic coast of France*
(Source: Dars et al., 2019)

Calls for Action

Concerns over the high numbers of common dolphin deaths led to a call from a number of NGOs to the European Commission for Emergency Measures to be introduced to reduce the levels of bycatch. The evidence was reviewed by two ICES Working Groups, one on Marine Mammal Ecology (WGMME) and the other on the Bycatch of Protected Species (WGBYC) between March and April 2020, and recommendations have been put forward which are currently under consideration.

Over the last two winters there has been improved monitoring aboard some of the French fishing vessels as well as the deployment of pingers, which alert dolphins and porpoises to the presence of a net by making a pinging sound that is directly in their range of hearing. Originally, mainly only effective on static gillnets to reduce bycatch of porpoises, the recent French trials have indicated it may help to reduce dolphin bycatch on trawls, with a 65% reduction in bycatch being observed on those three vessels where pingers were deployed. Nevertheless, such a measure alone may be insufficient and it might also be necessary to close some fishing in particular areas during those late winter months.

The problem is we still don't have a really clear idea whether one particular type of fishing is having the main impact or are they all equally problematic. Closing all fisheries would have a major socio-economic impact when it may be that less drastic measures could be almost as effective. Although modelling the drift of carcasses has led the French scientists from Observatoire Pelagis (University of La Rochelle) to predict which fishing activities may be responsible and where (see Figure 4), it is very difficult to determine these things accurately, when weather and currents can have a big effect on where a carcass will end up. We still have much that we need to better understand.

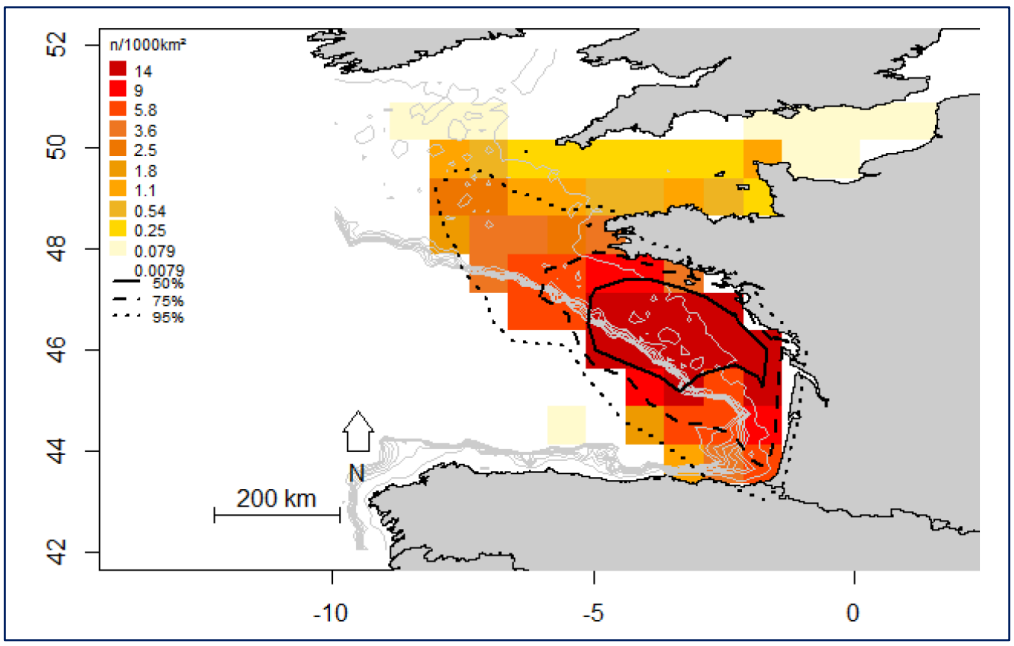


***Figure 4**: Predicted distribution of common dolphin bycatch along the Atlantic coast of France, 2018, from drift modelling*
(Source: Peltier et al., 2019)

Further Reading

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Sea Watch News:
National Whale and Dolphin Watch – 2019 report

by Chiara G Bertulli, Sightings Officer

"I have the privilege of overseeing the organisation of our National Whale and Dolphin Watch. The experience is truly enriching and rewarding."

National Whale and Dolphin Watch 2019 (NWDW), took place from 27th July to 4th August. Taking part were wildlife enthusiasts, the general public, as well as researchers. Around **3,000** people from all over the UK participated, armed with binoculars, our recording forms, and bags of enthusiasm.

While acquiring new skills or refreshing old ones, and sharing time with others outdoors, they collected valuable information on whales and dolphins (and porpoises); information used by the

Sea Watch Foundation to create a snapshot of their relative numbers and distribution.

NWDW 2019, in particular, was a great collaborative effort: **34** different wildlife conservation and recording organisations took part, including ORCA, Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, MARINELife, and Whale & Dolphin Conservation. All contributed data collected from boats (inshore and offshore) and from land watches, in different parts of the UK

It is with the help of all the wonderful dedicated volunteer observers out there that we have compiled 18 years of NWDW data. We use these data to protect and conserve whales & dolphins in UK waters.

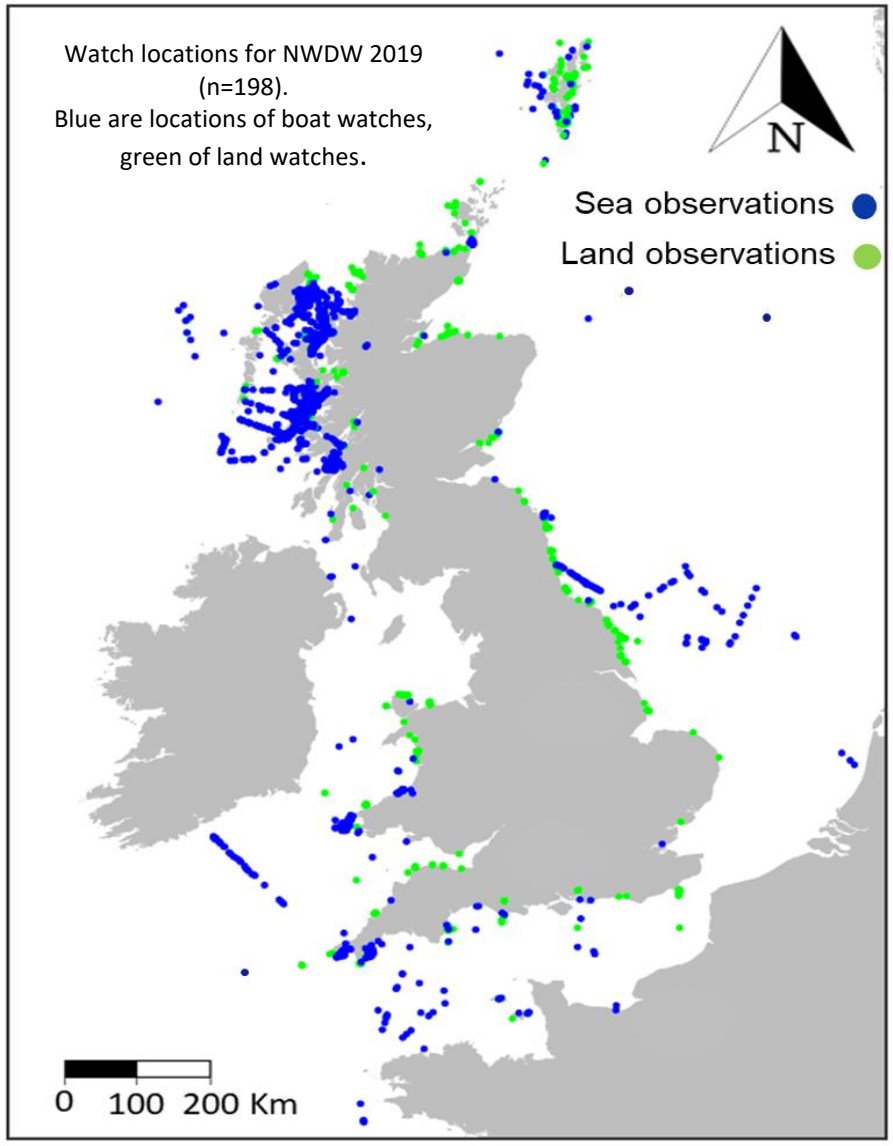
Humpback whale off Penzance (during NWDW 2019)

Photo credit: Rupert Kirkwood

After hours spent watching out for whales, dolphins and porpoises, from land and sea, we recorded **2,130** sightings - the highest number of NWDW sightings ever, beating NWDW 2018 by 500. Scotland recorded the largest number of sightings, especially along the western coasts and in the Inner and Outer Hebrides. In England, the greatest number of sightings were collected in the south around Cornwall and South Devon, with similar numbers also from Yorkshire and the North-East. In Wales, the highest number of sightings was collected on the West coast.

The most memorable sightings from the 2019 National Whale and Dolphin Watch week include:

- ***fin whales*** off Tiumpan Head in the Outer Hebrides
- groups of ***common dolphins*** feeding, off Berry Head in South Devon
- ***humpback whales*** off Penzance in Cornwall as well as off Barra in the Outer Hebrides
- ***long-finned pilot whales*** west of Shetland
- large pods of ***Atlantic white-sided dolphins***, at several locations around Shetland.



NWDW 2019 at a glance

2,130 sightings

11,864 individual animals

13 species

1,406 hours of observation

135 land watch sites

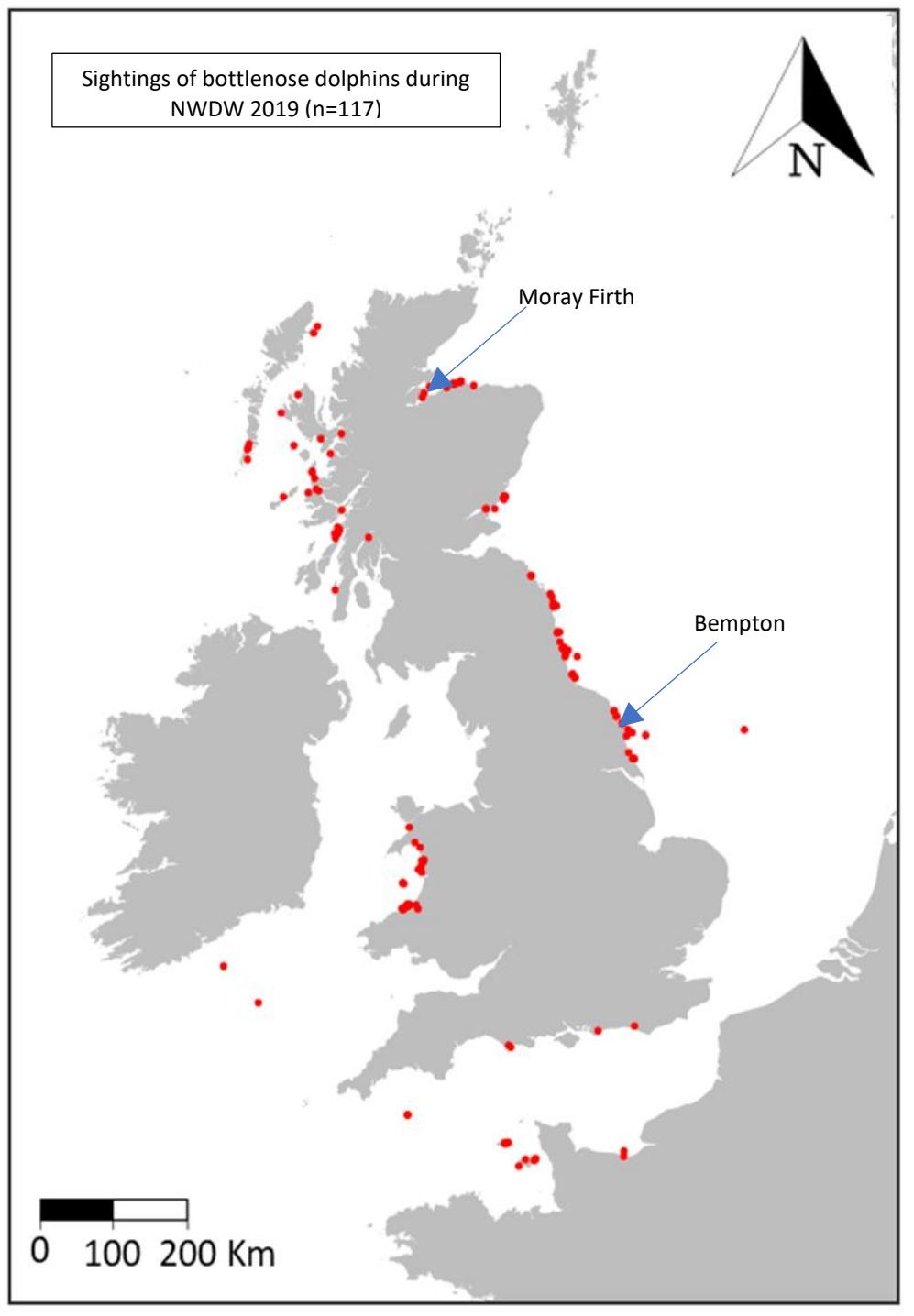
63 vessels

c. 3,000 people involved

34 different organisations

UK sightings rate of **1.05** animals per hour of watching

The sightings records collected, together with the environmental data, have provided us with a more in-depth knowledge of the cetacean fauna that inhabits the seas around the British Isles. Some interesting patterns have emerged over the years, one of these being the extended movements of coastal bottlenose dolphins down from the Moray Firth along the east coast of England as far as Bempton in Yorkshire (see map). The records have also provided the right tools to inform us of important areas and times of year for particular species, enabling better decision making on the risk of harm to local populations from human activities.



Detailed results from NWDW 2019

Species	No. of sightings	%	No. of individuals	%	Av. Group Size
Atlantic white-sided dolphin	8	0.38	150	1.26	18.75
Bottlenose dolphin	177	8.31	1095	9.23	6.19
Fin whale	2	0.09	2	0.02	1
Harbour porpoise	1200	56.34	3119	26.29	2.6
Humpback whale	5	0.23	5	0.04	1
Long-finned pilot whale	5	0.23	24	0.2	4.80
Minke whale	265	12.44	312	2.63	1.18
Orca	36	1.69	248	2.09	6.89
Northern bottlenose whale (possible)	4	0.19	4	0.03	1
***Mesoplodon* spp.**	2	0.09	2	0.02	1
Risso's dolphin	44	2.07	334	2.81	7.59
Common dolphin	308	14.46	5927	49.96	19.24
White-beaked dolphin	30	1.41	278	2.34	9.27
Unidentified cetacean	44	2.07	364	3.07	8.27
Totals	**2130**	**100**	**11864**	**100**	**4.87**

NATIONAL WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCH 2020

This year's National Whale and Dolphin Watch will take place from 25 July to 2 August.

Arrangements will be in place in order to comply with covid-19 government safety measures.

To join in with the 2020 event, contact: nwdw@seawatchfoundation.org.uk

To learn more about National Whale and Dolphin Watch, go to: www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/nwdw

To download the 2019 NWDW report (and those for previous years) go to: www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/nwdw-reports

Sightings summary:

May 2020 – What's been seen and where…

With almost five hundred sightings, and eight species recorded and possibly two more, May was a pretty good month given the covid-19 restrictions we all face on travel, and going to sea.

Weather has a large influence on how many sightings get reported. Although May began with cool showery weather across the British Isles it quickly became more settled as a ridge of high pressure built from the north-west giving plenty of warm sunny weather. Northerly winds from the 10th to 15th then brought cold wintry showers, particularly in the north and east of Scotland, with spells of windy, unsettled weather also in Wales until 23rd. The south of England saw more settled conditions, and in the last week, dry, sunny and warm weather returned to much of UK.

Fine weather means more sightings are reported

The lockdown imposed by Covid-19 limited many of us from taking advantage of the fine weather but, nevertheless, those living along the coast or having to undertake essential work at sea managed to spot sightings in good conditions, and the total for the month increased by around 50% from April to almost 500 sightings.

Sightings increased by c. 50%

As usual, harbour porpoise sightings occurred all around the British Isles but with a general increase compared to April. Although mostly seen singly or in small groups of less than five, there were some larger aggregations including 34 porpoises in the Sound of Jura on 3rd May, and around ten porpoises each at nearby New Ulva, off Skelmorlie in Ayrshire, west Runton in Norfolk, Berry Head in Devon, Port St Mary, Isle of Man, and at Otter's Pool by Liverpool.

A rise in harbour porpoise sightings

The second most frequently reported species in May was bottlenose dolphin. Cardigan Bay and the Moray Firth, the two main centres for coastal populations of the species in the UK, continued to have regular sightings. There were also several reports of animals, probably part of the Moray Firth population, all the way down the east coast from Aberdeenshire and Fife southwards to Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, and Yorkshire. Localities such as Newbiggin-by-the-Sea and Seaton Sluice in Northumberland, Whitley Bay, Tynemouth, and Whitburn in Tyne & Wear, and Scarborough in Yorkshire, had sightings of groups regularly numbering between 10 and 30 animals.

In Cardigan Bay, Wales, small groups were seen at scattered localities including New Quay, Aberystwyth and Tywyn, whilst further north off the north coast of Anglesey, between 20 and 30 bottlenose dolphins were counted in late May, and up to forty counted in the Isle of Man. This is an unusually large number for this time of year since the large pods that inhabit the area over the winter months, tend to split into much smaller groups by May.

Bottlenose dolphins also in large groups in North Wales and the Isle of Man

Elsewhere, small groups of bottlenose dolphins were spotted in the Inner Hebrides from Arran north to Skye, in the southwest of England from Portland Bill and Weymouth Bay in Dorset, and, unusually, in Limeslade Bay near Swansea in South Wales. In the Channel Islands, groups of 20 to 30 were seen regularly in Guernsey. These are likely to be part of the population that also ranges along the Normandy coasts.

As was the case in April, there were few reports of common dolphins around the British Isles, and mostly in northern Britain with groups of up to thirty in the Sea of Hebrides and Minches of West Scotland, but with two spotted in the Moray Firth at Nairn at the start of May. White-beaked dolphins were seen on several occasions off the Eye Peninsula, Outer Hebrides, in groups numbering up to twenty-one individuals, but elsewhere, there were no sightings reports. Risso's dolphins, on the other hand, were recorded at a number of their traditional haunts, with small groups of up to ten in Thurso and Dunnet

Common & white-beaked dolphins scarce

Bays off the Caithness coast, off the Eye Peninsula in the Outer Hebrides, the NW and N coasts of Anglesey, and up to twenty around the Isle of Man.

Small groups of killer whales numbering two to five individuals were seen on a number of occasions off Fraserburgh (Aberdeenshire), in Caithness, Orkney and Shetland, all thought to be part of the Northern Community that ranges from Iceland and Norway to northern Scotland. There were sightings of two members of the West Coast Community off Brevig, Isle of Lewis (Outer Hebrides), and in Strangford Lough, Co. Down (Northern Ireland). They were identified as John Coe and Aquarius, two individuals that we have known for more than 25 years.

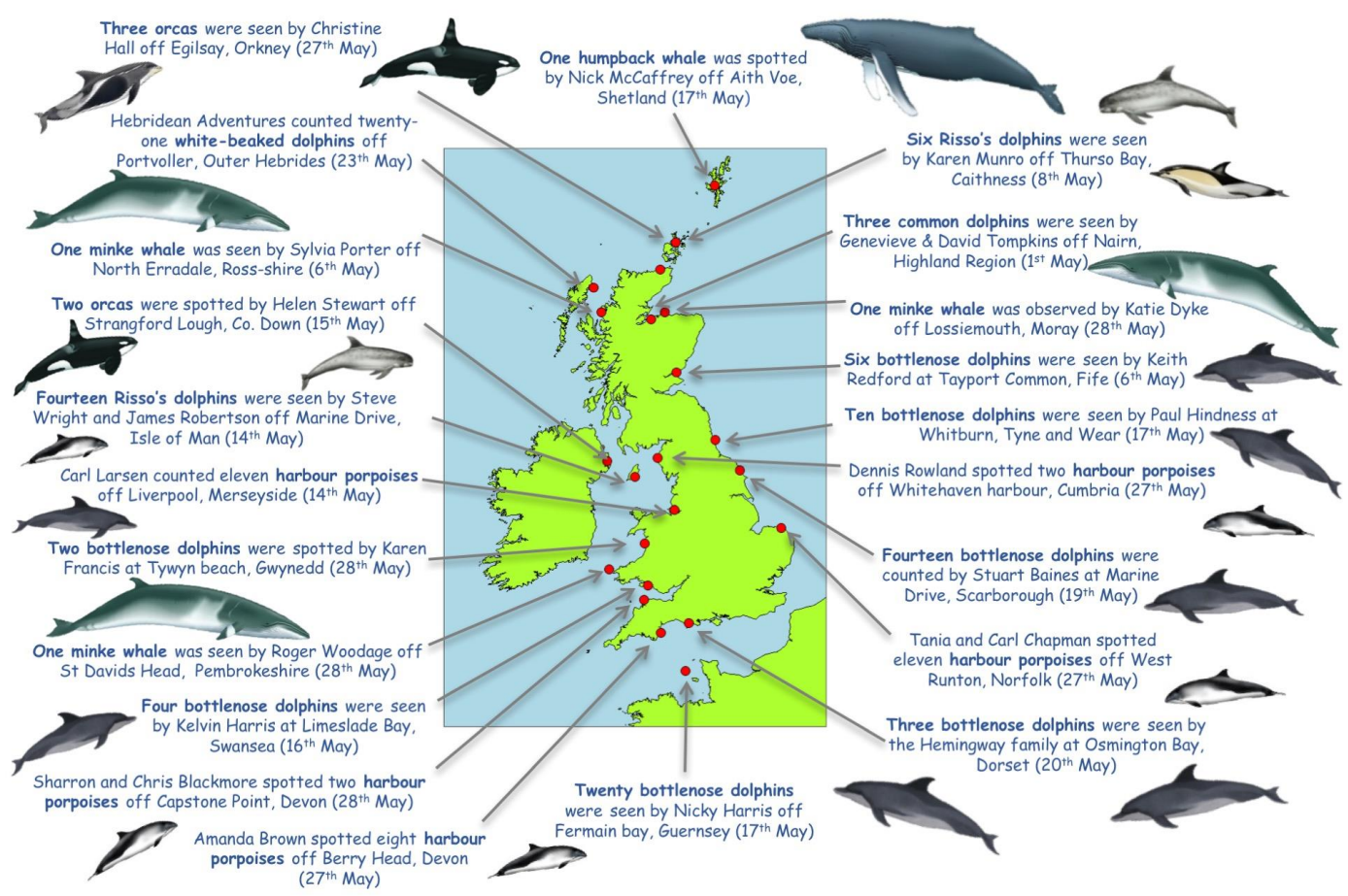
John Coe travels to Northern Ireland

There were many sightings of minke whales this month, all single animals. Most were from the Minches between the west coast of Scotland and Outer Hebrides, but the species was also seen off the Caithness coast and in the Moray Firth. Further south on the west coast, there were minke sightings in the Inner Hebrides from the Small Isles to Mull, and in the Irish Sea, off St David's Head in Pembrokeshire (south-west Wales).

Humpback whales are now regular visitors to British waters at any time of year. Sightings of individuals (possibly the same animals) were reported from several locations in Shetland, from Mid Yell in the north to Easter Quarff in the south-east. At least one humpback was present at Portvoller on the Eye Peninsula in the last week of May.

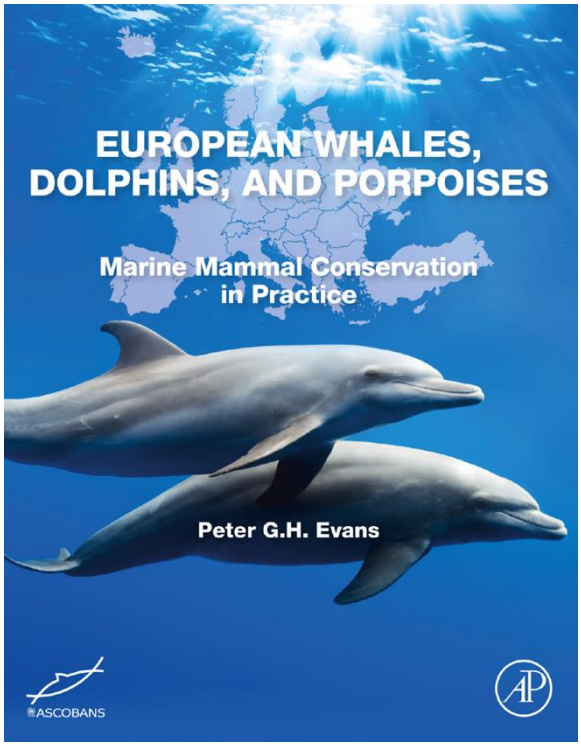
Of whales that are uncommon in coastal waters around Britain, there was a sighting of a possible long-finned pilot whale in Gerrans Bay, Cornwall on 27th May, and unidentified lone large whales off Berry Head, South Devon (9th May), near Auchencairn, Dumfries & Galloway (31st May), and Peterlee, Durham (31st May).

Sightings Map for May 2020



Don't forget – if you spot a cetacean off our shores, please enter the sighting on our website using our online form (go to: www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/sightingsform), or email us at sightingsofficer@seawatchfoundation.org.uk, giving your name, phone number, date of sighting (and, if possible, the time), location, and what you saw.

Recent Publications

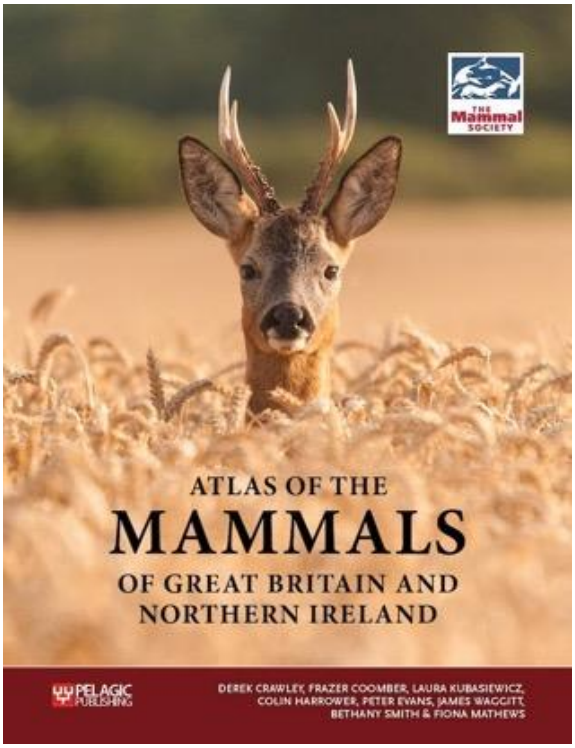


In this book, published at the end of last year, our director, Peter Evans, presents an intimate view of the workings of UNEP/ASCOBANS and other international conservation agreements to protect marine mammals. He details achievements in this area over the last 25 years, while identifying weaknesses, and making recommendations that governments, scientists, marine stakeholders and the public can take to improve conservation efforts.

The book provides a unique synthesis on cetacean species, their status, distribution and ecology in Europe. In addition, it presents detailed information on all the major conservation threats facing cetaceans, including fisheries bycatch, contaminants, noise disturbance, plastic ingestion and climate change.

At the end of March, the Mammal Society published an 'Atlas of the Mammals of Great Britain and Northern Island'. The Atlas provides a detailed picture on the current distribution of mammals in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Peter and James Waggitt, a Sea Watch collaborator, together contributed the cetacean section to the atlas.

Sea Watch's connection with the Mammal Society goes back a very long way - Peter set up the Mammal Society Cetacean Group back in 1973 and it is that group that later turned into the Sea Watch Foundation.



People Profiles:

Introducing Robin Petch

our first Sea Watch ambassador and the man behind the Membership Scheme.

Robin has been involved with cetacean conservation for nearly 30 years. Having resigned from his paid employment as a primary school headteacher in 2014, Robin is now a self-employed naturalist, wildlife photographer, small boat captain and public speaker.

Robin's background is in primary school education, firstly as a teacher from 1985 and then as a headteacher from 2004. He is in fact a great example of how non-scientists can become important contributors to whale and dolphin conservation through citizen science. Always involved in local conservation such as tree planting, recycling and then school wildlife gardens, he also had an interest in the "Save the Whale" campaign. This led to volunteering for International Dolphin Watch and soon after, a role as their Education Director.

"You don't need to be a scientist to contribute to whale and dolphin conservation…"

After setting up the Dolphinicity Surveys and DolphinSpotter projects, which also produced sightings data for Sea Watch Foundation, Robin was invited to become our Yorkshire Regional Co-ordinator in 1999.

Robin continues in this role to this day and has been instrumental in helping develop whale watching on that coast with Whitby Whale Watching and in establishing partnerships with RSPB and Yorkshire Wildlife Trust to record sightings.

In 2009, Robin joined our Board of Trustees and served as Chair from 2012 to 2019. He then became our first Sea Watch Ambassador. Our Membership Scheme is a recent project close to his heart. Robin developed the scheme to help raise vitally needed funds and also to involve people more in the activities of the charity. He has now been joined by a talented team who have brought the project to fruition. This magazine is part of that achievement.

Robin hopes that people who read his story will be inspired to become Sea Watch members and get involved in studying and protecting our whales, dolphins and porpoises. You can find out how on the next page.

"I would never have believed when I began volunteering, helping mail out a newsletter 30 years ago, I would end up where I am now. I have learned so much over the years and have had so many wonderful encounters with cetaceans from land, from boats and even in the sea. I have met and been involved with so many remarkable cetacean scientists, not least Peter Evans, our amazing Director but also the inspirational Horace Dobbs and, most recently, Scott McVay. Scott is an incredible renaissance man who, along with Roger Payne, first identified and analysed the songs of humpback whales. Most of this has happened in my spare time, at weekends and during holidays, whilst holding down a demanding but rewarding job educating young children.

Now I travel the world, speaking on cruise ships, observing and recording cetaceans, and promoting marine conservation. I even have a commercial licence as a small boat captain and take people out to sea to enjoy wildlife! Seriously, opportunities are there for anyone! Please become a Sea Watch Member and help us study and protect the incredible variety of whales, dolphins and porpoises around our coasts. Learn more about the opportunities to get involved and join our legion of volunteers around the coast. You never know where it might take you."

To learn more about Robin's adventures, or book him for a talk, visit his website: www.thewhaleanddolphinman.co.uk

Robin and others observing a humpback, off Northern Iceland

Join Sea Watch!

From as little as £3.50/month you can become part of our team and make a vital contribution to the study and protection of our whales, dolphins and porpoises. You will receive *Sea Watcher* every quarter and, in the months between, a News Bulletin including a Sightings Review. For an extra £1.50/month, you will also receive our monthly Adopt a Dolphin newsletter, focused upon Britain's largest coastal dolphin community, in Cardigan Bay, west Wales. For £7.50 a month, you can become a premium member, and get access to extra, exclusive material.

Go to http://members.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/home to find out more.

We need your help

*If you have joined Sea Watch (see **http://members.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/home**), thank you! Every penny of your regular contribution will go directly to support our work studying and protecting our whales, dolphins and porpoises. With funding priorities changing due to Covid-19 and an uncertain political and economic future, your support has never been more needed. The health and wellbeing of these highly intelligent and sentient creatures should not be forgotten as they are keystone species that shape the health of entire ocean ecosystems.*

There are many other ways you can contribute too, and some of them will cost you nothing at all!

Donate while you shop

Amazon Smile

Shopping on Amazon can help fund Sea Watch Foundation at no extra cost to you.

Sign up at **www.smile.amazon.co.uk** and choose Sea Watch Foundation as your chosen charity. For all eligible orders in future, Amazon will make a small donation on your behalf.

Easyfundraising

Turn your everyday online shopping, with over 4,000 of your favourite retailers, into free donations for Sea Watch Foundation.

Sign up at **www.easyfundraising.org.uk** and choose Sea Watch Foundation as your chosen charity. Then start your online shopping at easyfundraising.org.uk, and shop as normal. Once you have completed your shopping, the retailer will make a small donation to Sea Watch.

Set up or support a fundraiser for us

Facebook Fundraiser

A very popular way for supporters to raise funds is through their Birthday Fundraiser, but it is possible to set up a fundraiser at any time during the year. It's easy to do, just click *Fundraisers* in the Facebook menu and soon you'll be raising money from your on-line Friends.

Charity Checkout

We have fundraisers for specific projects here, as well as a general fundraiser. Many of our supporters set up fundraisers for us on the platform. You can donate or set up your own fundraiser to support us by visting **www.seawatchfoundation.charitycheckout.co.uk**.

Make a regular or one-off donation

PayPal

You can donate directly using your PayPal account or most major credit and debit cards on our website. If you have an existing PayPal account, go to **www.paypal.com/gb/fundraiser/charity/49262** where you can donate easily to our **PayPal Giving Fund**. This helps us even more as we don't have to pay fees on your donation.

Make a donation through your employer

Payroll Giving is an easy, tax-efficient way to make regular donations from your salary or pension. A donation of £5 per month could cost you as little as £3.90 and you can double it by getting your employer to match it! Your donation is taken from your salary before tax is deducted. Information about the scheme can be obtained by speaking to your Employer or from HM Revenue and Customs: Payroll Giving – Donors.

Thank you for your support!

"Whatever you can afford to do to help us study and protect our whales, dolphins and porpoises, please know that we are very grateful. Without funding, our work cannot continue, but of course there are many other ways you can get involved too. Find out more at www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk."

Robin Petch, Sea Watch Ambassador, on behalf of all at Sea Watch

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We are grateful for the support of our contributors, the Sea Watch team and the Sea Watcher editorial committee.

Front cover photo:
Breaching bottlenose dolphin, Cardigan Bay
Photo credit: PGH Evans

Inside cover photo:
Orca seen from the coast at John o' Groats
Photo credit: N Parkinson

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Bottlenose dolphin, Madeira Island

Photo credit: Philippe Verborgh © Museu da Baleia da Madeira

Support Sea Watch and join us!

We hope you have enjoyed reading Sea Watcher. If you would like to receive more and contribute to the study and protection of our whales, dolphins and porpoises, sign up to become a member of Sea Watch.

From as little as £3.50/month you can become part of our team and make a vital contribution to the research and conservation work we do. Every month you will receive a News Bulletin with the latest Sightings Report and Cetacean News and, every quarter, an issue of Sea Watcher will be yours to enjoy! For just £5/month you will also receive our monthly Adopt a Dolphin newsletter, which is for the whole family. Premium membership, at £7.50, gives you even more.

Please, sign up today at http://members.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/home and make a real difference!