Shorewatch News

Issue 22 - Spring 2016

A world where every whale and dolphin is safe and free

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Hello Shorewatchers

2016 has gotten off to a slow start for some of us, with few sightings particularly on the east coast, (of course excluding Torry Battery) our resident bottlenose dolphins have been somewhat shy this year. However we have had Humpback, Risso’s and Orca sightings on the North and West Coast. We have also had Minke sightings throughout the winter. Minkes are migratory and are often only seen from April - October, but we have had sightings during January and February which may indicate that a few Minkes have overwintered in our waters.

With spring on the horizon bottlenose dolphins have been showing themselves more regularly and we are getting the occasional single dolphin sighting at Spey Bay.

Unfortunately Shorewatching has been somewhat disrupted over the last week due to wild winds and snow. But we’re certainly looking forward to the weather improving so we can jump into an exciting season of whale and dolphin spotting.

During 2016 we will try our best to get more volunteers trained, to support the existing team!

Thank you for all your help!

Happy watching
2015 was a great year! Our committed volunteers continued to carry out watches during wind, rain and snow. We also welcomed some fantastic new volunteers to the team. Thank you to everyone for your effort throughout 2015. It is thanks to you we can continue to protect whales and dolphins.

During 2015 we had a grand total of 1190 sightings. The majority of these sightings were bottlenose dolphins (74%) and most were recorded from the East coast of Scotland. However from the small number of Shorewatch sites we have on the West coast, North coast and Outer Hebrides we had an impressive amount of sightings making up 24% of all the sightings.

74% of sightings were bottlenose dolphin

Sightings from the east coast are dominated by bottlenose dolphins where the dominant species to be sighted on the west coast is porpoise along with some other very exciting species, like beaked whales and orca.

Sightings were down in the Moray Firth compared to 2014, although Aberdeen and Burghead had an increase in sightings (Burghead was only active for a few months during 2014) Where as the west coast had an increase in sightings along with more species variety.

"It has been a very exciting year to work on the Shorewatch programme. So many Shorewatch volunteers have gone above and beyond for the programme from collecting record numbers of watches, helping out at events, setting up their own events, fundraising and working on their own Shorewatch research. To add we have seen Shorewatch data being used to benefit and protect whales and dolphins"

Katie Dyke, conservation officer, WDC

Did you know? You can access all your data on the National Biodiveristy Network which is publically available for all: http://nbn.org.uk/
The Rise of the citizen scientist

Science is not just for scientists these days. Going on a scuba-diving holiday this summer? Share the temperature data from your dive computer with researchers eager to plug holes in sparse records for inshore areas. Nervous about possible pollution from a nearby fracking project?

Citizen science has come a long way from the first distributed-computing projects that hoovered up spare processing power on home computers to perform calculations or search for alien signals. And it has progressed further still since the earliest public surveys of wildlife: it was way back in 1900 that the Audubon Society persuaded Americans to exchange their Christmas tradition of shooting birds for a more productive effort to count them instead.

Some professional scientists are snippy about the role of amateurs, but as an increasing number of academic papers makes clear, the results can be valuable and can help both to generate data and to inform policy. Shorewatch is just one example of local communities taking part in active scientific work to help protect the Environment.

This thought cloud was made from a collection of posts from our Shorewatch facebook page. A thought cloud is a cluster of our commonly used words; the bigger the word the more often it is used. It is a nice way to see what topics we collectively talk about.

We are always so impressed by the level of commitment given by Shorewatch volunteers!

Here are examples of some individual Shorewatch achievements during 2015.

Thank you for all the effort.

Individual achievements

Ian Williams 748
Liz Brooker 506

Individual achievements

David Haines 279
Colin Graham 267
Janet Marshall 262
Graham Kidd 252

A world where every whale and dolphin is safe and free

t: 01343 820 339
e: shorewatch@whales.org
whales.org/shorewatch
Shorewatch data review 2015

Thank you for your effort over 2015
Take a look at what we all saw ...

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Take a look at what we all saw ...
**Our online database is ready!!**

You can now enter your own data directly after carrying out your Shorewatch. Making data sharing and analysis instant, easier and consistent.

What’s more exciting is that you can manage your own data with the ability to view all your logged efforts and sightings. You can also search for sightings of other species across all Shorewatch sites so you can stay up to date with recent sightings.

Follow the simple steps below to access the online database and start recording your data.

1. **Go to** [shorewatch.whales.org](http://shorewatch.whales.org) *(don’t include www)*
2. Enter your user name; First name, space, Last name.
3. Enter your personal password

Once logged on you can enter effort, casual data, explore your sightings, access the WDC website, WDC Shorewatch website, Shorewatch Newsletters, the forum and blogs.

**Entering data:**

1. Click Record data tab
2. Follow the steps on the page to record your Shorewatch
3. If click ‘yes’ to Cetacean seen you will be taken to a different page to input sighting details.
4. You can easily enter casual data from any location, by clicking on the report a casual sighting tab under record data tab, you can click on the map to record your location and then continue to record you sighting

**Exploring data:**

Click on the different tabs to look at a breakdown of all your effort and sightings.

You are able to download all your effort and sightings and make graphs of your sightings. You can also explore data collected from previous years and other sites.

**Shorewatch Sheet**

It is important that the Shorewatch effort and sighting sheet remains in the clip box for others to see when the last Shorewatch was carried out.

But you may want to make a note of your Shorewatch on a post it note or a spare effort sheet to take away with you, so you can enter your Shorewatch onto the database when you are home.

After you have entered your Shorewatch onto the database, **please remember to tick off your Shorewatch on the effort sheet** so we know that the Shorewatch has been entered so we do not re-enter it.

Please contact the Shorewatch team, [shorewatch@whales.org](mailto:shorewatch@whales.org) if you have any issues, comments or questions.

**Did you know?** You can also direct non-Shorewatchers to the database, where they are able to log their casuals sightings from any location

| t: 01343 820 339 |
| e: shorewatch@whales.org |
| whales.org/shorewatch |
Sign up to our Happy Orca Fun Fact Friday!
www.whales.org/keep-in-touch

There are different ecotypes of Orca; Transient and Resident and different pods across the world. The transient orcas of the Pacific are also referred to as Bigg’s orcas in honor of prominent orca researcher Dr. Michael Bigg. Transients are mammal-eaters, hunting prey like seals, sea lions, and other whales, dolphins, or porpoises. Transients are a distinct ecotype of orcas who usually live in small family groups, generally comprised of a matriarch and her offspring. These family groups tend to be smaller than those of resident orcas. Once a transient orca reaches maturity, they may separate from the group to start their own family, particularly females with calves of their own. However, many transients remain with their mothers for the rest of their lives, and individuals that leave the group may rejoin again after years of separation. When transients are known to be in an area, their mammalian prey either spends most of their time above water or leaves the location quickly to avoid being eaten. The constant search for prey means they have a large range and are usually on the move, hence the name “transient” orca vs resident. However, recent research has shown that different groups of transients have regular spots that they visit after some time away, either seasonally or after years of absence.

WDC SUCCESSES

While we reflect upon these successes, we must not lose sight of the threats that whale and dolphins face every day. Throughout the year, every WDC supporter, volunteer and advocate makes an invaluable contribution to our work.

During 2015 you helped us fight for the protection of Whales and dolphins;

- Our undercover investigation into the illegal selling of whale meat in Denmark has resulted in law changes in the country.
- We fought for the endangered North Atlantic Right Whale by securing a 10 knot speed limit reducing boat strikes by 90%
- WDC funding kick started the development of a Marine Protected Area in Bangladesh, it’s first MPA.
- After years of campaigning a US court has ruled in our favour and now 18 belugas will not be imported from Russia to the US.
- After pressure from us, the Japan Association of Zoo and Aquariums has banned it’s members from acquiring dolphins from Taiji dolphin hunts.
- We protected dolphins from noise pollution and supported the release and rescue of whale and dolphin species.

20 APRIL 2016 | Tilikum is still on the sick list.

For years WDC have been campaigning for the retirement of Tilikum, the famous Orca of Black Fish. Tilikum is now terminally ill and his health is declining. Last month SeaWorld revealed that his health had declined rapidly in recent weeks and that he was suffering from a serious infection in his lungs. The latest update goes on to say that his appetite has improved in recent days but he remains in the marine park’s medical pool.
Dolphin of the month | Harbour Porpoise

A little guy who needs a lot of help. The harbour porpoise is one of the smallest creatures in the ‘whale and dolphin family, just over a metre long and rarely shows his face being shy and likes to keep a low profile.

The English word ‘porpoise’ is derived from the Latin word for pig – porcus. The harbour porpoise used to be referred to as the ‘puffing pig’ because of the sneeze-like puffing sound it sometimes makes when it breathes. Harbour porpoises are the only member of the porpoise family found in European waters. Both sexes are reported to live up to some 23 years but few survive past 12 years of age. Four subspecies of harbour porpoise are recognised; P. p. phocoena in the North Atlantic; P. p. vomerina in the eastern North Pacific; P. p. relicta in the Black Sea; and an unnamed subspecies in the western North Pacific.

Harbour porpoises are found in coastal waters of the sub-Arctic, and cool temperate waters of the North Atlantic and North Pacific. They frequently visit shallow bays, estuaries, and tidal channels less than 200m in depth, and have been known to swim up rivers; the majority of sightings occur within 10km of land. Due to seasonal prey movements, they usually move inshore in the summer and offshore in the winter. There is some evidence of north-south migrations. Numbers of harbour porpoises in some areas have declined in the past few decades due to human activities and the global population is unknown although estimates have been suggested. The IUCN regards the species overall as of Least Concern (2008) although the subspecies found in the Black Sea is listed as Endangered and the population in the Baltic Sea is considered Critically Endangered. Historically, harbour porpoises were hunted in large numbers but the biggest current threat to harbour porpoises throughout their range is incidental capture in fishing nets with thousands of casualties each year.

Harbour porpoises (HP) need your help. WDC has been campaigning to get protection for HP for many years. Finally, the governments in England, Wales, N Ireland and Scotland are asking for your opinion on creating six special areas in the UK where HP could be protected from dangers like fishing nets and pollution.

We need you to show your support for these sites to make sure they happen.

Don’t be shy like the harbour porpoise. Sign before the 3rd May if you want to protect this small but important chap.

https://uk.whales.org/campaigns/hurry-let-uk-governments-know-you-want-safe-homes-for-harbour-porpoises

Go on - make a BIG fuss over little HP.

To see the full consultations, visit the following websites:
- www.snh.gov.uk/porpoiseSAC
- http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/SACconsultation
- http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/porpoiseSAC/?hpsac1=hpsac1

Positive responses to the consultation will help to provide confidence that communities want to do more to protect harbour porpoises. Sending positive messages now will hopefully also influence future decisions about whether there is a further consultation after the Scottish election on MPAs for minke whales, Risso’s dolphins and basking sharks in the coming months, especially in case we have a new Environment Minister. Your support is always appreciated, but a positive community voice could really make all the difference to designation of sites for porpoises, dolphins and whales this year. More sites means better opportunities to monitor and to manage activities.

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Sarah, – sarah.dolman@whales.org or 0131 661 7722.
Despite a slower start to the year we have had a collection of exciting sightings from across our Shorewatch Sites

**Jaws at Tiumpan**

A shark has been seen trying to take what was believed to be a seabird from the surface of the sea off Lewis. Steve Dodd, Shorewatcher from Tiumpan Head, Isle of Lewis. Steve was unable to identify the shark, but it was big! Large sharks found in British waters include blue shark and shortfin mako. It is believed to be the first recorded observation of a shark taking, or attempting to take, prey in its area of interest.

Steve Dodd, said he was watching seabirds when the shark’s head appeared at the surface about 10 to 20ft from where the birds were.

Steve said: “It appeared to have come straight up and then gone back down again. It did not breach, but I saw its head and its mouth was wide open.”

He described the shark’s head as being about the size of a football and in the brief glimpse was unable to determine whether it managed to grab any prey.

Conservation charity, the Shark Trust, lists 35 species of shark encountered in British and Irish waters, and also 19 other species that have been recorded elsewhere in the northeast Atlantic.

**Sighting updates from Charlie Phillips**

Despite some very iffy weather down at Chanonry Point (snow, hail, sleet etc) there have at least been a few dolphins about but not much social activity really… Zephyr and her wee one from last autumn have been nice and regular, keeping the watchers happy – I mean who doesn’t like a hyper-cute baby dolphin? Zephyr has been doing pretty well salmon wise – making short work of some big powerful fish but (graphic content warning) on one of this week’s pictures… the fish is a bit of a mess but at least it’s still in one whole chunk. Just today, Zephyr was showing her baby how to bow-ride with an inbound tanker – wonderful to watch!

Bonnie and her youngster have been popping by to have a look round and we did have Kesslet and Charlie recently and Scoopy appeared very briefly but no sign of any other adoption dolphins this week – they must still be feasting on the tons of herring that are still in shoals around the outer reaches of this coastline. Hopefully more to report next week but at least it’s getting there – slowly but surely.

We all appreciate Walter Innes’s wonderful photographs of the Bottlenose dolphins he regularly sees from Torry Battery, Aberdeen. This year, with the help of Aberdeen University we were able to identify one of the individuals that Walter regularly witnesses; Crackers, a first time mum with her calf Nuts. Crackers and Nuts have been spotted throughout the Moray Firth, but this was the first time they were identified at Torry

**Did you know?** We see Bottlenose dolphins every month of the year from our Shorewatch site at Torry Battery, but other species have been spotted from the headland including white beaked dolphins, orcas and humpbacks
Save the date.
There will be lots of fun events happening over the summer.
We look forward to catching up with everyone

May
2nd - Really Wild Event at Scottish Dolphin Centre
6th - 9th Tiree Site Visit; lots of Shorewatching
21st Nairn Harbour Day
21st - 28th Orca Week, events and lots of Shorewatching.
21st - 23rd - Shorewatch field trip, Caithness, Orca Week
23rd - Orca evening talk from Rob Lott, Wick
26th - Orca evening - Dunnet
28th - Orca evening - Spey Bay

June
1st - 12th - Volunteer week.
10th - 12th - Big Watch Weekend

July
9th July - Ullapool SeaShore Event
10th - 13th - Isle of Harris site visit, lots of Shorewatching
14th - 17th - Isle of Lewis Site visit lots of Shorewatching.

August
3rd - 5th - Stoer site visit and event

September
9th -12th - Big Watch Weekend

More events, talks and site visits will be planned throughout the summer, keep an eye on Facebook and emails to keep up to date.

Please remember to take care of yourself while carrying out Shorewatches, wrap up warm, wear appropriate foot wear and let somebody know where you are going.

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© Elizabeth Harley
Tales from Harris

Hello everyone, I’m Harris and here’s my account of what happened during April’s visit to the Isle of Lewis and Harris (excuse the pun). The ferry crossing from Ullapool to Stornaway was not as productive as Katie had promised me, with no cetacean sightings and few seabirds. However that would change. A few days in and I spotted a minke whale at Tiumpan Head during one of our Shorewatch Training Days. I saw it surface three times and it was gone very quickly. I also saw a harbour porpoise at Rodel.

But even though I only clocked two cetacean species I heard plenty of lucrative stories of other cetacean encounters by hardcore Shorewatchers Janet, Roger, Paddy, Andrew, Pippa, Wendy and Gordon.

I’d never felt so privileged to be somewhere, to enjoy the places, see the wildlife and make a difference all at the same time. To feel like the host and the interpreter during the Shorewatch Training Days was an empowering experience.

I can now say that I’ve helped to train a new generation of Shorewatchers and pass on knowledge of cetaceans and our wisdom.

But despite my departure from Harris and Lewis the adventure never ends, and I hope I see more cetaceans and train more people before my season is out!
Hi Shorewatchers, I am Charlie McNish. I’m enjoying every minute of being at Spey Bay. The scenery around Spey Bay, and around the whole of Moray for that matter, is fantastic and opportunities to see wildlife are everywhere. After a long wait and plenty of quiet Shorewatches, the bottlenose dolphins are now making their way to Spey Bay, and we are all excited for what we hope will be a busy and eventful eight months working at the Scottish Dolphin Centre. My passion for cetacean conservation has grown through my university studies, during which I was fortunate enough to be able to travel to Tenerife for a placement, researching the resident short-finned pilot whale and bottlenose dolphin populations around the island. As fantastic as my time there was, the opportunity to see dolphins in my own country is one that really excites me. Having grown up in the Highlands, it is perhaps surprising that I hadn’t seen our Scottish dolphins until I came up here to Spey Bay, but now I am here I am eagerly anticipating the months of Shorewatches both here and at all of our Shorewatch sites, and I look forward to meeting all the fantastic Shorewatch volunteers, hearing your stories and hopefully experiencing a lot of cetaceans with you all.

Hello Shorewatchers, I’m Harris Brooker. Cetaceans are my passion and I have come to learn a lot about them. I studied at the Scottish Rural University College in Aberdeen Countryside Management, which gave me a wealth of background knowledge in conservation. I’ve volunteered for various organisations: the Forestry Commission, the Aberdeenshire Council, the Boyndie Trust, RSPB, for Trees for Life, the Nevis Landscape Partnership and now of course WDC. But throughout the years I’ve developed my interest and knowledge of wildlife, especially birds, mammals, fish, reptiles – and increasingly since coming here: plants, insects, and fungi. At the top of my interest in mammals are cetaceans – and because I live by the sea in Banff, the marine environment holds the most sentimental value for me. I’ve always wanted to see wild orcas and I hope this year that dream will come true. There’s so much that I want to see, and so much that I want to do, and hopefully my employability will increase massively. I’m always looking to learn new things and always open to new ideas. Life can only get better, and I can only evolve further.

Hello from our New Residential volunteers at the Dolphin Centre
The work that we carry out at the Dolphin Centre would not be possible during the summer months without the help of our residential volunteers who spend 9 months full time at the dolphin centre. This year we have another great bunch. Harris and Charlie will be volunteering on the Shorewatch project.