

THE IRISH WHALE AND DOLPHIN GROUP

news



What future for the Doolin Dolphin?

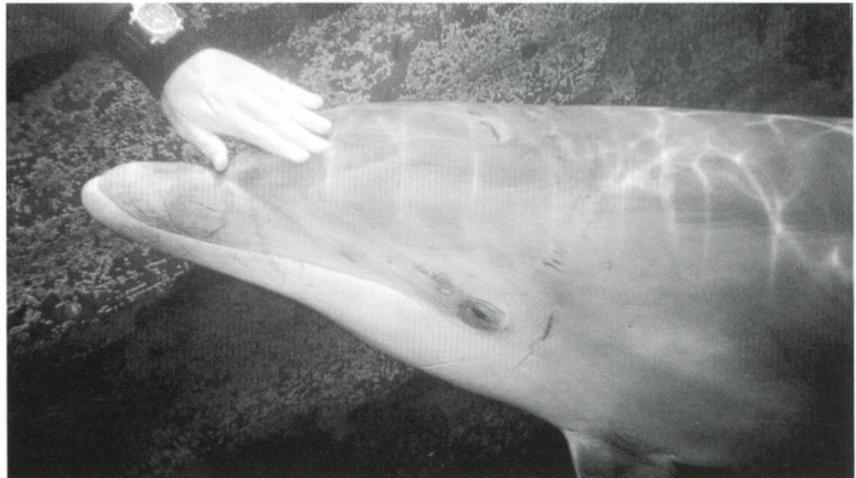
Simon Berrow

Since the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus there have been incidents of wild, sociable dolphins befriending people. At least 65 cases have been documented, each incident being unique. Some of the encounters last only months, others many years. Some dolphins may only follow boats and swim near people; others allow very close, almost intimate contact.

This summer, an immature, female bottlenose dolphin befriended people near the village of Doolin, Co Clare. Although the dolphin has been frequenting an area known as "The Jump" for the last two years, it was only this summer that people started swimming with her regularly.

There are many theories as to why such incidents occur, but clearly dolphins and people are destined to come into close contact. How many other "resident" dolphins are there around the coast, but at sites rarely visited by people? But humans swimming with dolphins may reinforce aberrant dolphin behaviour and can have serious consequences for both human and dolphin alike.

An adult female dolphin in the Red Sea has just had her third calf, but despite obviously associating with other dolphins to breed, she chooses to return to a solitary life. The first two calves died at six months. Two adult male dolphins with whom people swam off Cornwall and Wales in the 1970s and 1980s developed a habit of pushing



Photograph: Simon Berrow

The Doolin Dolphin: viewing poses risks to the public as well as to the dolphin herself

swimmers and surfers out to sea, actively preventing them from swimming ashore. One dolphin's behaviour became unpredictable, with episodes of gentleness, sexual overtures, aggression and even extreme violence, when it would butt swimmers in the chest and smash up surfboards. However, what we may consider an aggressive act may seem like play to a dolphin. Their being marine mammals and our being land mammals hardly equates to a level playing field!

Nobody knows what will happen to the Doolin dolphin, but clearly she has become accustomed to people and the signs are that she may well stay in the area. If she does, there will be varied consequences for the dolphin, the people and the village of Doolin. The IWDG hopes that the dolphin will be respected as a wild animal and that disturbance will be kept to a minimum. In order to encourage the local community to take responsibility for both the dolphin and people wishing to see or swim with her, the IWDG hosted a public meeting in September to inform people about wild, solitary dolphins and help develop a practical management plan. At the meeting, it was felt that although preventing people from swimming with the dolphin may be desirable for safety reasons, this would not be practical, so a number of potential actions were discussed. The path to "The Jump" was considered unsafe and damage had already occurred to fences and walls. Stiles could be provided and the path made safe by consolidation of the cliff edge. Locking the entrance gate could discourage vehicular access. Swimming inside the gully is at best only reasonably safe, and at worst, lethal. Once outside the gully, the risks increase significantly. A rope could be laid across the mouth of the gully, marking the area within which swimmers are asked to remain. Guidelines for swimmers when in

contact with the dolphin should be developed using the experience from similar occurrences around the world, and under no circumstances should people attempt to feed the dolphin.

One local boat owner has already announced his intention to build a dolphin-watching boat for next year, and a code of conduct was recommended for both commercial and recreational craft. Vessels should avoid entering the gully. A second area, defined by buoys, could be marked within which the speed and number of vessels could be limited. A local action committee was established to develop the proposals originating from the meeting. Monitoring was recommended to assess the effectiveness of proposed actions and develop educational material. It is hoped to develop a plan over the winter and implement it in the spring, if the dolphin is still in the area.

Anybody who has swam with the Doolin dolphin has experienced the exhilaration of being close to a wild animal which is completely at home in its marine environment. Being terrestrial mammals, once we enter the water we are in a poorly-understood alien world. The dolphin deserves respect as a wild marine creature. Only then can we hope to embrace the opportunities she presents and avoid the abuses these magnificent creatures have endured in other areas. The IWDG is pleased to help, and wishes the community the very best should the relationship between Doolin and the dolphin continue. ■

• The Irish Whale & Dolphin Group (IWDG) is dedicated to the conservation and better understanding of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoise) in Irish waters through study, education and interpretation

• REGISTERED CHARITY NO CHY11163

IWDG Website:

Visit our website at:
<http://homepage.eircom.net/~iwdg/>

IRISH NEWS

● News from around the coast

Six cetacean species located off Co Mayo

Results from an IWDG visual and acoustic survey of cetaceans off Co Mayo were recently published in the *Irish Naturalists' Journal* (Vol 26, No 7/8, pp251-259). The survey was a collaboration between the IWDG and the IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare) on board their yacht *Song of the Whale*. During 20 days at sea, 26 sightings were made of six species: pilot and minke whales, white-sided, common and bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise. Preferred habitat for minke whales was inshore, close to the Mullet peninsula, and in Donegal Bay, while concentrations of white-sided dolphins and pilot whales were found some 75-90km offshore, along the shelf edge. Despite IWDG evidence that this area is an important habitat for cetaceans, the Corrib gas field has just been granted mining concessions by the Department of the Marine and Natural Resources. ■



Demonstrating inflation of IWDG pontoons

Risso's dolphins off Arklow Bank

A number of Risso's dolphins were sighted during fieldwork for an Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposed offshore windfarm on the Arklow Bank. This species is locally distributed in Ireland (see *Species Profile*, page 6) and such sightings are of great interest, especially if the dolphins are resident here. The IWDG hopes that the developers will take into account the presence of these unusual dolphins in the planning of this development to ensure their habitat is not degraded. ■

Shannon dolphin biopsy study

In September, biopsy samples were taken from dolphins in the Shannon estuary by the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation. Eight dolphins were sampled remotely using a crossbow, and samples were obtained for pollution and genetic analyses. Persistent pollutants, such as pesticides and PCBs, are lipophilic and accumulate in the blubber of marine mammals. The blubber samples obtained will be screened by the Marine Institute Fisheries Research Centre for a wide range of organochlorines to determine their

concentrations in the resident dolphins and assess the potential impact of any contaminant burden. This is the first biopsy study of wild cetaceans in Ireland and one of only a handful in Europe. ■

IWDG cetacean training courses

Two IWDG cetacean training courses were held this summer, one in Portaferry, Co Down, for Exploris Aquarium, the other in

Kilkee, Co Clare, for Dúchas conservation rangers in the mid-west. Attending the Exploris workshop were members of HM Coastguard, Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), The National Trust, Ulster Museum and various NGOs. On both courses, conservation issues were reviewed, with particular attention being paid to field identification of live and dead animals (from skulls) and how to watch for and record cetaceans. In Portaferry, live stranding incidents were also covered, with a demonstration of how to use the IWDG/ISS rescue pontoons. The courses were very well received and more are planned for the future. Let us know if you feel such training would be appropriate in your area or organisation. ■

IWDG wins ESB Environment Award

In September, the IWDG was presented with an award by Prof David Bellamy as winners in the local category of the ESB Community Environment Awards. The scheme, run in association with Conservation Volunteers Ireland, chose some 20 winners out of 300 entrants. The award of £200 will contribute to the IWDG project to erect public noticeboards on known, land-based whale-watching locations. ■



Photo: Eddie Dunne

Letter from the Secretary

IWDG boosts profile

The IWDG profile throughout all media has increased considerably this year. This didn't happen by accident but resulted from the efforts of a number of people who felt they had something to say and were prepared to say it.

Sponsorship by Patagonia USA enabled us to relaunch our Cetacean Sighting Scheme, with posters, new sighting forms and stationery. We thank the staff in Patagonia,* Dublin, for hosting the scheme's launch in August. I hope Enid Woolmington forgives us for posting her photo on our website. A big thank you to Peter Tyndall of BIM for securing funding for the species identification poster, which is now bigger, better and uses more Irish photos.

Funding from the ISPCA and DoE (NI) Environment and Heritage Service enabled us to reprint our popular *Face to Face with a Beached Whale* booklet. The text remains largely unchanged but the contacts page has been updated.

We also produced a booklet aimed primarily at schoolkids, entitled *Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises of Ireland*, in association with ENFO, who printed 10,000 copies, which have been distributed nationwide. Copies can be obtained directly from ENFO, or myself.

I would ask you to spread the word - that the IWDG are worth joining. If you can promote the group in any way, we will support you by sending you additional newsletters, posters, ENFO fact-sheets or membership forms.

Finally, please keep in touch. Drop us a line or an email, or call us, if there are sightings, strandings or local events that we should know about. Also, this is your newsletter, and we ask you to contribute to it, if you feel you have a story worth telling.

For many people, annual membership of the IWDG is nearly up. You will receive a reminder soon in the post. Please rejoin... and remember, membership would make an excellent present for Christmas! ■

Pádraig Whooley

*Patagonia USA, an outdoor clothing company, has a shop at 24-26 Exchequer Street, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 670 5748



Send your letters, contributions or comments on the magazine to: The Editor, Irish Whale & Dolphin Group, Merchants Quay, Kilrush, Co Clare.

WORLD NEWS

● Whale and dolphin news from around the world

Whale-watching in the Bay of Biscay

Dave Wall

At the invitation of Tom Brereton and Andy Williams of the Biscay Dolphin Research Project (BDRP), I left Portsmouth on 21 October to sail to Bilbao in northern Spain. The BDRP has been running surveys for six years from the super-ferry *Pride of Bilbao*, which, for someone who is used to seeing dolphins from the shore or small boats, was a whole new experience.

Surveys ran from first light right through to dusk - and the bridge of the *Pride of Bilbao* is 38 metres above sea level! It's like crossing the sea on a floating apartment block. From our centrally-heated viewing platform, we could see some 12km into the distance. This meant that, with an almost 360° view, we could see over 500km² of ocean. Obviously, this is a wee bit too much to cover, so we focussed on a line 22° either side of dead ahead, although giving an occasional glance to port and starboard, just in case.

We steamed south in a sea state of 2-3 with about 20 birders and whalewatchers on deck, and the two groups kept in radio contact with walkie-talkies. With that many eyes, how could we fail? In the shallows of the Bay of Biscay, we had several sightings of common dolphins. Some groups were small, others had 150 or more animals. Some groups approached to bow-ride the ferry and seemed tiny beside the massive, bulbous bow. We also had a brief sighting of three harbour porpoises. As the day went on, we saw some striped dolphins. They could be seen breaking the water to either side of the ferry, although none approached closer than a few hundred metres of us. We had four whale sightings: two were far off in the distance and only blows could be seen, but we confirmed one minke and a possible northern bottlenose whale.

After a few hours in the port of Santurtzi near Bilbao, we set off on the return journey. As we approached the continental shelf the action took off, with

a sighting of a group of sperm whales. Although off in the distance, we could clearly see the forward-pointing blow and the head, back and finally the flukes as the animals rolled and dived. Soon afterwards, we sighted three beaked whales (most probably Sowerby's), fin whales, large groups of common and striped dolphins and two groups of long-finned pilot whales near the ship. As we steamed up the English Channel, we saw a few groups of dolphins and a minke before arriving back in Portsmouth.

The ferry provided a marvellous platform for viewing cetaceans and allowed us to see much more than we could ever see from a yacht. The only problem is that a ferry steams along at 20 knots, so you have to be quick in identifying what you see and, of course, you can't turn the ferry around to go back for another look. But for abundance estimates along a fixed transect line, a ferry is ideal. The IWDG supported this trip in an attempt to establish a similar scheme aboard ferries crossing from Rosslare to Cherbourg. ■

Roman Governor saves dolphin

Octavius Avitus, the Governor of the Roman town of Hipponne in ancient times, poured scented oil on a stranded dolphin as it lay on the shore. The strange sensation and the smell made it take refuge in the open sea. It did not reappear for many days and then seemed listless and dejected; but as it regained strength, it returned to its former playfulness and usual tricks. Does anybody know the origin of this oil? If so, let us know and we will include it in our live-stranding rescue pack! ■

IWDG patrons

The IWDG is looking for patrons to promote the group and its aims. Any suggestions to the Secretary.

Pat Smiddy

Congratulations to Pat Smiddy on his honorary MSc degree from UCC.



Passengers whale-watching from the super-ferry "Pride of Bilbao." (Photograph: BDRP)

Irish whale-watching now worth \$7 million

According to the excellent new world review on whale-watching (see the website: www.ifaw.org) by Erich Hoyt, Scotland-based Canadian whale biologist and author, 177,600 whalewatchers spent \$1,322,000 on whale-watching trips in Ireland in 1998. This supported 10 full-time and 30 part-time jobs and equated to \$7,119,000 input into the Irish economy in indirect revenues.

Ireland has long been known to have considerable whalewatching potential, but this latest figure is actually only an 18% increase on that reported for 1991. Most of the Irish whalewatching industry is based in Dingle, Co Kerry, but whalewatching has also been carried out off the south coast and is rapidly expanding in the Shannon estuary. An estimated 10-12,000 people paid to see dolphins in the Shannon estuary in 2000, a 250-300% increase on figures for the previous year. ■

Books from IWDG

The IWDG has available limited copies of:

● **Guide to the Identification of Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises in European Seas**

By PGH Evans of Seawatch Foundation

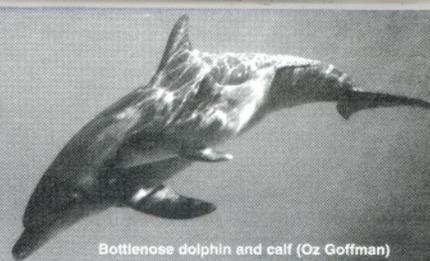
Available from IWDG Secretary for £10.00 incl P&P

● **Face to Face with a Beached Whale Guidelines for the Welfare of Live-stranded Cetaceans (27 pages)**

By the IWDG

Available from IWDG Secretary for £3.00 incl P&P ■

WHALE DIARY



Bottlenose dolphin and calf (Oz Goffman)

DIARY OF AN IRISH WHALEWATCHER ● By Pádraig Whooley

Size matters - if you're a baleen whale!

The end of June saw the south-westerly gales abate, presenting the first window of opportunity in a while. April and May had yet again proved to be quiet periods, drawing blanks on 45% of 11 visits. With no whales and barely a dolphin in sight, I had had to content myself with harbour porpoises, and even they were scarce on the ground. However, if you play the numbers game, your luck will change, and it changed for me on June 24th.

Big whales at Old Head

Within minutes of starting my vigil at the Old Head of Kinsale, I observed eight porpoises in small groups. At 2.45pm I saw my first whale surface (twice), 4-5 miles south-west of the lighthouse, with no visible blow. It was a small minke, and the first whale I'd seen here since January 20th.

Fifteen minutes later, I counted 23 blows in rapid succession and tight formation, east of the Kinsale gas platforms, which lie some 20-25 miles south-east of the Old Head. Despite the distance, in such perfect conditions, with zero wind and glassy calm seas, these giants were easily detected by telescope. On the basis of their size, visibly tall blow and numbers, I ruled out their being minke whales. Besides, seeing minke at such distances would be stretching your optics, imagination and credibility a little too far. These whales were bigger, in fact much bigger. It's difficult to estimate length accurately, but believe me, when you're a baleen whale, size matters!

I observed them surfacing and blowing synchronously in one area for the next two hours, giving me an opportunity to identify them. They were 2-3 times larger than the minke I had observed earlier, and I estimated their length at between 60-80ft, with a tall upright blow reaching impressive heights of 15-20ft. In the windless conditions,

their vapour plumes hung suspended, before dissipating, making my task of counting the quarry somewhat easier. My minimum group estimate was ten, almost certainly fin whales. Given the speed at which they surfaced, the amount of splash produced and the distance from which the action could be seen, it was likely that these, the second-largest living animals on earth, were feeding.

While watching this spectacle, a second group of minke whales swam across my scope's line of sight, while porpoises could be heard blowing within a stone's throw of my perch. I thought to myself, if the Gods were anywhere, surely they were here with me on this cliff-top.

Returning to the Old Head at 6.45am the following day, I scanned the area where I had previously seen the fin whales. Within minutes, my attention was drawn to the familiar blows of what can only have been the same fin whales. Over the next 180 minutes, I also saw three minke whales, several porpoises and, just when I thought that this was as good as it gets, a group of between 40-60 fast-moving common dolphins, which appeared west of the whales. Staying with the dolphins for a while, I noticed they were not alone - they were followed by a small group of 5-8 larger dolphins. Yes, bottlenose. Five species in one short watch. Wow!

I spent the rest of the day vainly trying to beg, borrow or steal a boat which would take me out to photograph the whales. Of all weekends, our visitors coincided with the Round Ireland Yacht Race passing through, so available seaworthy craft were in short supply. What a shame, as we missed a great opportunity to photo-ID the whales. But we'll be better prepared next time. Incidentally, if any readers have a boat in this area and would be prepared to take us out to

photograph similar activity at little notice, and even less expense, please let us know.

I returned to the Old Head later in the evening to get a fix on the whales. They were by now travelling in a westerly direction and closer inshore, surfacing within 8-10 miles of the lighthouse. This encounter highlighted the time-lapse between their blow and the dorsal fin appearing, and their huge dimensions, thus confirming for me their species. They had also split into three groups, making them easier to count. My updated estimate of the movement was 15 fin whales.

Monday 26th brought a sea-watcher's worst nightmare as a heat-haze limited visibility to a few miles. Our visitors may well have been out there, but I had little way of knowing.

My last sighting of the day was perhaps that of a disappearing breed as Charlie Haughey's aptly named *Celtic Mist* motored out of the Kinsale haze, heading towards his Blasket Island retreat into some quite turbulent waters. Despite everything, the IWDG is a forgiving bunch, and we are grateful that back in happier times he had the vision to declare our waters a sanctuary for our magnificent sea creatures.

Always one to spot a PR angle, Shay Fennelly felt we should use the media interest in the yacht race to tell the story. After some "oiling the wheels," as he put it, on June 27th the fin whales made the front page of *The Irish Times* in an article by Lorna Siggins, titled "Round Ireland yachts keep look-out for giant whales." Thanks, Shay and Lorna.

"I saw three minke whales, several porpoises and, just when I thought this was as good as it gets, 40-60 common dolphins"

Wild Ireland magazine

Congratulations to the team at Wild Ireland for their excellent glossy publication, available on newsagents' shelves. We are particularly grateful to Bryan Deegan for giving us access to their platform and enabling us to reach such a wide audience.

Shannon bottlenoses

Shortly after this I headed to the Shannon estuary, home to our resident population of bottlenose dolphins and what seems like 90% of the world's concertina players. Kilrush was to be home for the summer, as I was guiding on the Scatterry Island Ferries *MV Dolphin Discovery* for the season. Thus striking a happy medium between needing to earn some cash and seeing some serious dolphin activity.

Despite the obvious perks, talking dolphins to tourists with varying degrees of interest in the area's rich marine life can be tedious. But no two days were alike and the resident dolphins rarely failed to appear, or inspire. To alleviate the obvious boredom and reduce my chances of throttling a tourist, I made frequent forays up to Doolin to swim with the "new kid on the block."

Doolin dolphin

Now, this was an experience, and I felt honoured to have several quality swims with her, before the media, with nothing better to write about, helped turn her into a freak show. No sooner had *The Irish Times* displayed the Doolin dolphin on the front page than the combi-van brigade started clogging up the once-negotiable access road, which by late summer was taking on a Woodstock-like muddy appearance. The sound of Choughs was replaced by the mantras of well-intentioned but ill-informed cosmic bunny-huggers, swarming to their new Mecca in search of enlightenment. Some proclaimed the dolphin was a messenger and could heal. I pointed out that having completed 150 trips in the company of dolphins, the only healing I experienced was that of a nasty cold sore, which I suspect was due

Dolphin tax

Dingle Harbour Commissioners want to impose a dolphin-viewing tax on the Fungi boats to help fund essential improvements and clean-up operations around the pier. An estimated 150-200,000 people visit Fungi each year and operators are asked to help fund the management of the impact of these visitors.

Sightings

Details of any sightings should be sent to the IWDG Cetacean Sighting Scheme, Merchants Quay, Kilrush, Co Cork.

"The Risso's looked like belugas in the clear blue water, diving and surfacing together in association with the bottlenose dolphins. It was a Kodak moment"

to timely and liberal application of Zovavir.

Loop Head

September gales brought an abrupt end to the tourist season, which allowed me to explore the Loop peninsula and compare this quality whale-watching site with that of the Old Head. I conducted seven watches, drawing a blank on just one. Given that the area west of Loop is a herring spawning-ground in autumn, it's hardly surprising that I saw minke whales on three of my four September watches. Such a high level of cetacean activity compared favourably with that of the Old Head.

This was reinforced on two occasions. September 5th was a glorious day on which I had already observed porpoises feeding under diving gannets, and a small group of 10 common dolphins. Had I seen no more, I'd have left well pleased, as we felt common dolphins had been scarce this summer. My attention was drawn to movement underneath me, as a pod of six bottlenose dolphins appeared swimming slowly in the surf zone. How nice it was to see them from this perspective and not as a tortured soul on a tour boat full of screaming women, bored teenagers and indifferent husbands.

By the time I had finished writing brief notes, something odd had happened. The bottlenose had materialised into large, pale white dolphins with blunt heads and sickle-shaped dorsal fins. Yes, Risso's! My confusion was justified. I was observing my first 'mixed group' of dolphins. The Risso's, looking quite like belugas in the Atlantic's clear blue water, diving and surfacing together, were clearly visible beneath the surface and in apparent association with the resident bottlenose. This was a Kodak moment, with another great day's watching producing four species, three of which were right under my nose.

On September 8th, Faith Wilson and I had barely removed the eyecups from our binoculars when a large minke surfaced just in front

Photograph: Simon Barrow



Fin whale blowing off Old Head of Kinsale

of us. As is so often the case with this species, this was our first and last sighting of the whale. How minke whales leave areas, so effortlessly, without detection, will forever remain a mystery to me.

September 30th found me back on my local patch, the Old Head, where a disturbance some miles south of the lighthouse distracted me from a group of porpoises. The cause of which soon became clear, as for the next 45 minutes I tracked a fin whale through six surface cycles, heading west. Interestingly, I have never seen a large baleen whale easting in this area. Any thoughts?

Despite high winds, on each of all four October watches I saw large baleen whales. Given their size and visible blow, they were most likely fin whales.

So folks, that's what I saw over the summer and autumn. Judging by the numbers of sightings that are now being reported to us, such incidents are being replicated around the coast, and we're asking you to keep those sightings coming.

In November, I travel to my favourite place in the world (Cape Clear excluded), Baja, Mexico, for three weeks travelling around the beautiful Sea of Cortez in search of the largest living animal on Earth, the blue whale. "Stop! you hypocrite," I hear you say; "Haven't US researchers just discovered 50 blue whales vocalising south of the Fastnet Rock?" Yip; but it just ain't the Baja! ■

• If you have any queries on watching whales or on any cetacean-related matter, please write to Pádraig Whooley, 21 Donnybrook Cottages, Donnybrook, Douglas, Co Cork Tel: (021) 489 7312 Email: padwhorca@hotmail.com



Pygmy sperm whale stranded in Galway Bay (Photo: Sinéad Murphy)

NEWS • Cetacean strandings around the Irish coast

Strandings

Table: The cetacean species and their number reported stranded between October 1999 and October 2000:

Species	Number reported
Harbour porpoise	8
Common dolphin	5
Striped dolphin	5
White-sided dolphin	5
Pilot whale	4
Cuvier's beaked whale	3
Bottlenose dolphin	2
Risso's dolphin	1
Sperm whale	1
Unidentified beaked whale	1
Pygmy sperm whale	1
Unidentified dolphins	7
Minke whale	3
Fin whale	1
Unidentified baleen whale	1

Strandings update

Emer Rogan

Between October 1999-2000, 48 individuals comprising 12 species (see Table) were reported as stranded or bycaught from 11 counties. As in previous years, the harbour porpoise was the most commonly reported, followed by common, white-sided and striped dolphins. Striped dolphins continue to be the third most commonly stranded cetacean, particularly on the south and west coasts, as far north as Co Donegal, confirming their continued occurrence at these latitudes. Three Cuvier's beaked whales and one sperm whale were also reported in this period. The sperm whale was an adult male, which is consistent with what is known about sperm whale distribution in the NE Atlantic. Of the larger whales, only two minke and one fin whale were reported. Two animals were reported as live strandings: a harbour porpoise in Dublin, which died despite rescue attempts by Irish Seal Sanctuary personnel, and a striped dolphin in Kerry, which was successfully refloated.

Of the more unusual strandings, the pygmy sperm whale *Kogia breviceps* was reported from Killmeena, Co Galway, in June 2000. This was the 4th reported stranding in Ireland this century. The last stranding of this species was in Westport, Co Mayo, in June 1999, and prior to that in Barna, Co Galway, in 1985 and

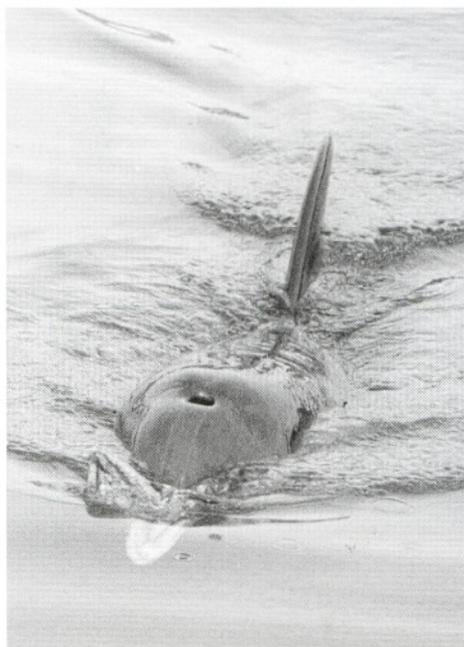
Lahinch, Co Clare, in April 1966. Pygmy sperm whales have a conical, shark-like head with a pale crescent-shaped "false gill" on each side between the eye and flipper. They have a small underslung lower jaw and long, sharp inwardly curved teeth in the lower jaw only. This animal was a 3m female, pregnant with a 0.99m calf.

Most strandings occurred during autumn and winter and from Counties Cork (n = 11), Clare (n = 9) and Galway (n = 7). More strandings have been reported from the south and west coasts, probably reflecting the distribution of the animals. All strandings are submitted for publication on an annual basis to the *Irish Naturalists' Journal*. Prof James Fairley of UCG edited the cetacean notes in the *Journal*, but since his retirement last year, Dr Don Cotton from the Institute of Technology, Sligo, has taken over the editing. We would like to thank Prof Fairley for his careful, thorough and rigorous assessment of all records submitted, and we look forward to working with Don Cotton in his new role. ■

Deformed or damaged?

The bottlenose dolphin pictured below was observed in August in Kilonan Harbour on Inis Mór in the Aran Islands. The dolphin was in some distress, continually vocalising and swimming at the surface in a clockwise direction. As can be seen in the photograph, the upper mandible and tissue were deflected 90° upwards and to the right. Although not known if the injury was recent or whether a collision or aggressive encounter was responsible, it is hard to see how the dolphin could feed and ultimately survive. The dolphin followed one of the Aran ferries out of the harbour, never to be seen again. ■

Injured bottlenose dolphin in Kilonan, Aran Islands



Photograph: Rónán MacGiollaPháraitc



Risso's dolphin

Once you see a Risso's dolphin *Grampus griseus*, you will understand why it is quite a peculiar species. It is a large, slow-moving dolphin which ignores boats, neither avoiding nor approaching them. Grey at birth, they get progressively whiter with age, due to an accumulation of scars and scratches, with older adults becoming almost white. This species is an excellent candidate for a photo-ID study, as they can easily be recognised by their markings. Their casual surfacing pattern, which often produces a little splash in front of their head, is quite distinctive.

In Ireland, they are rather patchily distributed, but regularly seen at sites like the Saltee Islands, Co Wexford, Dursey Island, Co Cork, Connemara, Co Galway, and Benwee Head, Co Mayo. There were quite a few sightings around the Irish coast last summer (see articles by Pádraig Whooley and Michael Moore). Although not exuberant by nature, a group of about two dozen frightened the lives out of a yacht crew off Bray Head, Co Wicklow, jumping and swimming around the vessel. Perhaps these belonged to the same group recently identified off the Arklow Bank (see *Irish News*, page 2). Risso's dolphins feed almost exclusively on cephalopods, which may explain their distribution, being associated with oceanographic features which determine the distribution or spawning of squid species.

Stranded Risso's dolphins have the superficial appearance of a pilot whale, with a domed head and a large dorsal fin. However, the tooth count (usually only four in each lower jaw) is distinctive and the pectoral fins short.

This species occasionally live-strands, the most recent being the 1998 mass-stranding of three mature animals in Ballymacoda, east Cork. With the assistance of Pat Smiddy and UCC personnel, all were successfully refloated. A mass stranding of a suspected Risso's and bottlenose dolphin hybrid form occurred in Co Mayo in the 1930s. The most bizarre incident concerning the species in recent years occurred in June 1999 when a Risso's swam up the River Nore, ending up in Inistioge, Co Kilkenny, some 18 miles from the open sea. It was successfully rescued. (See IWDG Sightings on the IWDG website for this summer's Risso's dolphin sightings.) ■

SIGHTINGS

● Cetacean sightings and related news

In the right place at the right time!

Michael Moore, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Massachusetts

One thousand years ago, right whales in the Atlantic were to be found from West Africa to Spitzbergen, across to Greenland and down to Florida. Today, we know of about 300 individuals remaining. Females occasionally calve east of Florida, and larger groups are found off New England and Nova Scotia in summer. At any one time, about half of the known individuals are missing.

To identify their current habitat is essential in the conservation race against extinction for this species, as they are suffering heavily from fishing-gear entanglement and collisions with ships in the Western Atlantic. With this in mind, the boat *Rosita*, a 17m sailing vessel, came to Ireland this summer to see if any New World right whales had heard the Celtic tiger roaring and thought it time to revisit these hospitable shores. On 3 May, *Rosita* set out from Cape Cod in Massachusetts and made landfall at Kilrush, Co Clare, on the invitation of Dr Simon Berrow. The plan was to first look for right whales off the coast of Co Mayo in early June. In this place, and in this season, right whales were taken by two whaling stations on the Mullet peninsula in the early part of the 20th century. The whale team visually and acoustically surveyed coastal waters from the Shannon to Killybegs, out to the 1000-

fathom contour. The largest marine mammals encountered were Risso's dolphin as well as bottlenose dolphins in the Shannon and common dolphins west of the Aran Islands and in Donegal Bay.

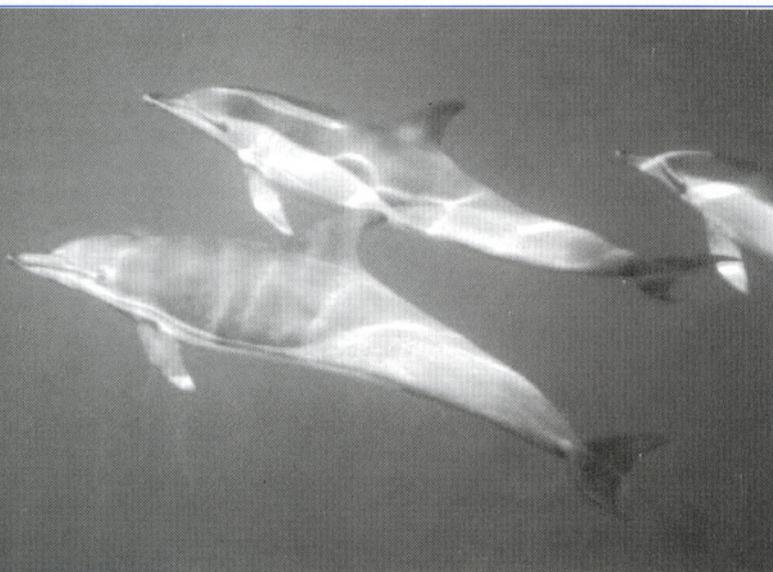
Rosita visited the whaling station at Inishkea South and collected three potential whale bone fragments for DNA analysis. If any of these prove to be right whale bones, their DNA will be useful in current studies about relatedness of remaining right whales in the NW Atlantic.

Failing to find any right whales off the Irish coast was not a surprise, as many scientists have looked hard in the past, but it was still a disappointment. After a three-week cruise, the crew was replaced by my wife Hannah and our four sons. We surveyed old habitat west of St Kilda in Scotland, before heading for the Azores in August, with no greater success. As of October, we are in the Canaries, preparing for more survey work in the Cape Verdes, before crossing to the Caribbean to be ready for further work off Bermuda in May and off Newfoundland and Labrador in the summer of 2001. After that, we will return to real jobs and real school. The crew's children are currently enrolled in correspondence schools, with glorious beaches for playgrounds. ■

NB: A right whale was observed off NW Donegal in June of this year.

Dolphin Competition

A free IWDG Species Identification Poster will be awarded to anyone who can correctly identify the dolphin species swimming just below the common dolphin in the photograph below. Answers to Simon Berrow (contact details, page 8). This excellent photograph was taken in April by Nick Channon of Dublin while on holiday in the Canaries.



Photograph: Nick Channon



Whale/dolphin poster

Many thanks to Patagonia, the US clothing company, and to Bord Iascaigh Mhara, for sponsoring our new **IWDG Cetacean Identification Poster** (above). This is a reprint of the hugely successful IWDG poster, updated, with more photographs from Ireland and 30% larger. The poster was produced once again by John Coleman of LaTene Maps and is available to IWDG members from the IWDG Secretary at a special Christmas price offer of £3 including postage and tube, which covers our costs. Price to non-members is £5. ■

Seabed Survey

The IWDG has been invited to participate in one of the biggest initiatives in marine exploration in Ireland – the Marine Institute Seabed Survey. Over the next seven years, the Geological Survey of Ireland, on behalf of the Marine Institute, will map the entire seabed by cruising back and forth carrying instruments that will characterise sediment and underlying rocks. Trained members of the IWDG will join some of these cruises to survey whales and dolphins in offshore waters, of which we know very little. Who knows what exciting finds are ahead of us? ■

Naval training course

In August, the IWDG carried out a training course in cetacean field identification for the Irish Navy. Officers and cadets from all eight naval vessels attended. The workshop was a good opportunity to strengthen links with the Navy, which has contributed sightings to the IWDG Cetacean Sighting Scheme since 1991. All vessels were supplied with our new posters and a specially-prepared field guide to cetaceans in Irish waters, including sightings forms modified for naval operations.

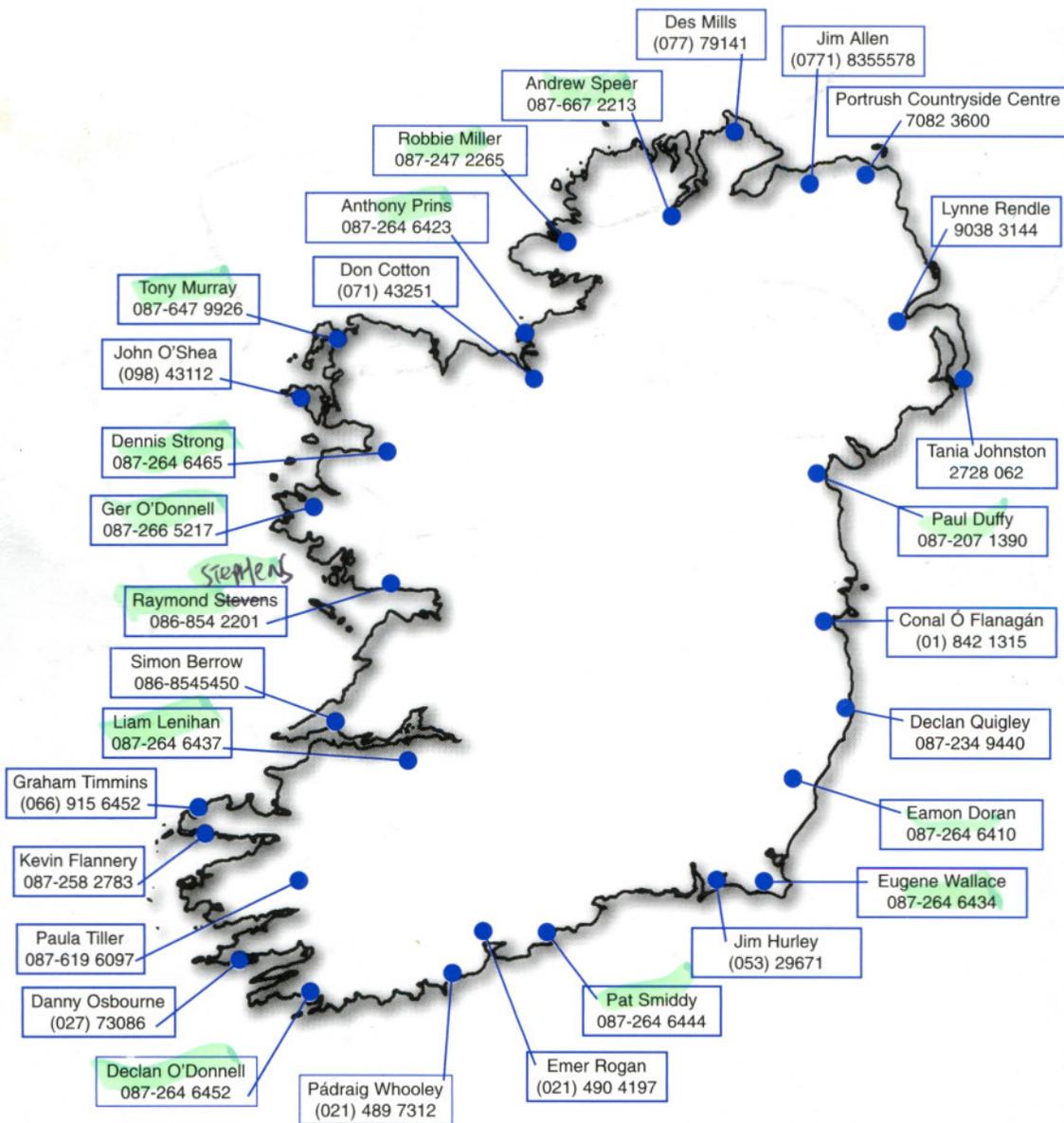
Olan O'Keefe from *LE Aoife* has already sent in 12 sightings made in September, including pilot whales and Risso's dolphins (see *Species Profile*, p6) as well as the frequently-observed common dolphin. Many thanks to Lt Cdr Pierce O'Donnell and staff for the Navy's hospitality and for organising the event. ■

NETWORK



● IWDG contacts around the coast

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group has established a network of contacts who will visit stranded animals and collect records of those sighted at sea. If you find a whale, dolphin or porpoise washed up, or observe one at sea or from the shore, please tell your nearest contact person.



IWDG News

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Waged: £15
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