

# THE IRISH WHALE AND DOLPHIN GROUP



# news

## Pilot whales mass strand in Kerry

**Pádraig Whooley**

If you could choose the timing and location for a mass stranding event, then you could do a lot worse than pick a Saturday and the sandy beach at Aughacsla in Tralee Bay, where a group of 30 or 40 long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*) mass-stranded on the sunny Saturday morning of 23 March last.

The tragedy of this sorry tale is not that whales stranded, as such events are one of the inherent downsides to being a pilot whale, but that no one informed any relevant agency until 2.00pm, by which time four crucial hours had been lost. It took a further hour before the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group was informed and could mobilise local members.

One of the first to arrive was Kevin Flannery, local sea fisheries officer and regional IWDG contact, who worked with locals to save as many of the stricken whales as possible. Up to 20 whales were successfully re-floated, but a further 17 died on the shore.

Kerry County Council buried the dead with alarming efficiency, no doubt prompted by a rumour that the whales could have TB! Unfortunately, the opportunity to carry out post-mortem examinations was lost, and buried with them was valuable information which could have helped us answer questions on the physiology and social structure of this little-understood offshore species.

Simon Berrow arrived with the IWDG rescue pontoons at 5.30pm. By then the surviving whales were free-swimming between Brandon and Tralee Bay, but as long as they remained close to shore there was every chance they would re-strand. Towards dusk, a female which had been re-floated at least twice already re-stranded

Pádraig Whooley



One of the pilot whales stranded in March 2002

on rocks at Sandy Bay and, despite best efforts to move her to an adjacent sandy beach, she died during the night.

At first light, the IWDG walked the coastline from Tralee Bay to Brandon Point and another dead female was located near Castlegregory. Zoologists from UCC carried out a post-mortem examination on this animal; it was one that had stranded on the rocks the previous evening.

Our sweep of the beaches and waters revealed that no other mass-stranding had occurred overnight, though a group of five pilot whales was observed briefly in Brandon Bay. We did observe a pod of 10-12 bottlenose dolphins breaching spectacularly in the same area off Caher Point, but these were certainly in no need of our assistance or interference.

Finally, at around 3.00pm, when we thought it was safe to wind down the operation, news came from Fenit Lifeboat Station that the missing group of 10-12 pilot whales was off Fenit harbour. The Fenit lifeboat, accompanied by local boats, escorted the group some seven miles out before returning to port.

Overall, it was a weekend that left very

mixed feelings. Locals responded brilliantly to the massive challenge they faced; however, too much time was lost in getting that all-important initial phone call out. A faster alert time would have enabled the IWDG, Dúchas rangers and the coastguard to mount a speedier and more effective response. It was also sad that we lost the chance to learn from the dead animals, but in the absence of best advice and the misinformation about TB, which had people running to Tralee General Hospital for inoculations, burial seemed the only option. This places an onus on us to redouble our efforts to advise coastal communities on best 'live-stranding' practice.

It's heartening to compare the response to this stranding to that of the last mass stranding of 66 pilot whales at Cloghane a few miles to the west in November 1965, when many were promptly dispatched with knives and shovels and sold to a local mink farmer as meal, after the locals satisfied themselves that whale-meat, no matter how it was cooked, did not agree with the Kerry palate.

The IWDG, in collaboration with UCC and the Irish Seal Sanctuary, has requested a meeting with Dúchas and the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources to clarify who is responsible when whales and dolphins strand on the seashore and to discuss a workable protocol before another major incident occurs.

In New Zealand, the Department of Conservation coordinates the response to live-strandings and draws on whale and dolphin volunteer groups to mobilise when physical assistance is needed to refloat stranded animals. The IWDG organised the first live-stranding workshop in Ireland a few years ago and has a network of expertise and people around the Irish coast willing to offer such assistance at short notice.

• For those keen on learning more on this subject, copies of the IWDG live-stranding booklet, *Face to face with a Beached Whale - Guidelines for the Welfare of Live-stranded Cetaceans*, are available from the IWDG (see Contacts, page 8) and *Guidelines for the Identification of Stranded Cetaceans* is available on our website: [www.iwdg.ie](http://www.iwdg.ie) ■

• 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  
• WEBSITE [www.iwdg.ie](http://www.iwdg.ie)

# IRISH NEWS



Peter Evans

Sperm whales (note forward blows) occur off the Mayo coast

## Corrib gas project will impact on whales, dolphins

Shay Fennelly

In April, the Government gave Enterprise Energy Ireland approval to develop the Corrib gas field off Co Mayo. This is the first significant offshore gas or petroleum project since the Kinsale field opened 20 years ago, but it sets a disappointing new precedent for what the Government requires from marine environmental impact assessments.

The Corrib field is expected to produce gas for 15-20 years and is valued at over €2.5 billion. Development will begin this summer and will include a new seismic survey, lasting 50 days, scheduled for 20 May to 10 July.

The IWDG was concerned about potential impact on cetaceans and sought a baseline survey of the area and an environmental impact assessment (EIA) of the seismic surveys.

Seismic surveys and exploration drilling commenced in the early 1990s, but only in 1999 was a baseline cetacean & seabird survey commissioned. So far, no research has been commissioned on the impact of seismic surveys, known to disturb cetaceans and fish.

The continental shelf edge off Co Mayo was historically a most important habitat for whales and dolphins. Between 1908-1923, two whaling stations on the Mullet peninsula caught 894 whales within 95-120km of the coast. Fin whales comprised 66% of the catch, but blue, sei and sperm whales were also taken. Of the 24 species of cetaceans recorded in Irish waters, at least 17 have been recorded off northwest Mayo.

The IWDG made three submissions, to Enterprise Energy Ireland, the Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (see IWDG website for full submissions).

Firstly, the IWDG responded to a scoping document circulated by Enterprise in December 1999. No reference was made to our consultations, or to any of the information we provided, in the first EIA, produced in December 2000.

This EIA contained very few facts or informed opinion on cetaceans, and the IWDG stated:

"The Corrib gas field EIA fails to determine the species potentially affected by this development and makes no attempt to mitigate or monitor the impacts of the proposed works on these species.

"IWDG would expect a baseline survey to be conducted on the appropriate scale, which would be used to minimise impact, develop mitigation techniques and to monitor during and post-construction, for the life of the field."

This EIA was subsequently withdrawn after it was deemed inadequate by consultants retained by the Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources. In November 2001, Enterprise issued a revised offshore EIA which the IWDG commented on and raised the following issues:

- The EIA acknowledges that seismic surveys elicit avoidance responses from whales. However, there was no pre-impact baseline survey carried out prior to seismic surveys or exploration drilling. This makes it impossible to assess the effects on whales and dolphins in the area.
- No research work has been carried out on the effects of the numerous seismic surveys off Co Mayo from 1992-2001, in spite of international scientific opinion that seismic surveys affect cetaceans, fish and plankton.
- No results from the cetacean survey (July 1999-August 2000)\*

commissioned by the Rockall Studies Group oil exploration consortium were presented with this EIA, which precludes any interpretation of the information gathered. The Department's consultants made the following observations on the revised EIA:

- The historical significance of the area for whales is recognised ... but the information on the current status of cetaceans is inadequate.
- Reliable baseline figures are required in order to assess any potential impact.
- The potential impacts of noise from drilling operations are adequately covered. However the duration, severity and nature of the impacts need to be quantified and qualified.

### Environmental monitoring group proposed

The Department's approval for the project was made subject to 28 conditions recommended by the Marine Licence Vetting Committee. The committee's report on the EIA recognised that potential impacts on cetaceans would arise from well-drilling, blasting during pipelaying, and also from vessel operations. It recommended that works which would adversely impact upon cetaceans should be avoided, and that the developer liaise with Dúchas and cetacean experts on future seismic surveys. It also recommended that prior to the commencement of works an environmental management plan be drawn up and an environmental monitoring group be set up

with Mayo County Council. To date, IWDG has received no word on this.

While we accept that Enterprise has part-funded a 30-month cetacean survey of the Porcupine Bank to Rockall area, the results have yet to be made public. Since October 2001, Enterprise has contracted UCC to carry out a baseline survey of cetaceans in Broadhaven Bay, a candidate marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the site for the pipeline landfall. That the EIA legislation is not being enforced is highlighted by the fact that this baseline survey will occur while the pipeline is being laid, rather than at least twelve months before construction. Surely no work should be carried out until the survey in the marine SAC is completed?

This is the biggest Irish offshore project in the history of the State, but the procedures adopted to assess the project have been disappointing and the EIA totally inadequate. If the Government had commissioned a strategic marine environmental assessment (SEA) in 1996, best practice could have been learned.

The Government is still failing to ensure that issues are addressed and surveys carried out despite the fact that all oil and gas exploration development costs can be written off against tax. The monitoring of human impacts on the marine environment is being severely neglected. The Government agency responsible for protecting natural heritage, Dúchas, is so under-resourced it has no marine biologist - a curious situation when one considers our island status and a marine territory several times the land area. ■

\*As of May 2002, no report of this survey has been published.



Broadhaven Bay: site of planned pipeline landfall

Shay Fennelly

## A sense of porpoise

Ruth Leeney

A new MSc research project aims to provide much-needed data on the population of harbour porpoises in and around Dublin Bay. This will give an idea of whether the porpoises prefer certain areas, how they use these areas, how many there are and whether they are present year-round or seasonally only.



Billy Clarke

Harbour porpoises do not generally bear much scarring or colour variation which would allow for individual recognition, but some subtle features of their dorsal fins, such as notches and shape, have enabled the identification of individuals from one photo session at Howth Head. A continuation of this photo-identification work and an enlargement of the database of photos is planned, and the help of any experienced photographers interested in participating in this work would be greatly appreciated.

- For further information, please contact Ruth Leeney, Marine Biodiversity Lab, UCD Tel: (01) 716 2239, [ruth.leeney@ucd.ie](mailto:ruth.leeney@ucd.ie)

# IRISH NEWS

Paddy Crowe



The Inis Oírr bottlenose dolphin attacks a great northern diver

## Have passport, will travel

Graham Timmins



Dorsal fin of bottlenose dolphin 'Dony' (left) and 'Georges' (right): they are the same animal. Dorsal fin shape is the equivalent of a passport photo when it comes to identifying individual dolphins.

### Graham Timmins

Following contacts with dolphin researchers in the UK and France, we are now able to report a unique record of a solitary dolphin's travels through northwest Europe over the last year.

In May 2001, a lone bottlenose dolphin followed a fishing boat from Carrigaholt, Co Clare, to Baile na nGall in west Kerry and from there to the Great Blasket. Over the following two months this small, heavily scarred and very bold animal stayed in this area and many people watched or swam with him. This extremely interactive dolphin, which we nicknamed Dony, disappeared from Kerry at the beginning of July 2001.

The same dolphin, apparently, turned up in Dorset in southwest England at the end of March 2002, having done a tour of Brittany, northwest France and the Channel Islands in the meantime. We have compared many photos of Dony with those of Georges, as he has become known in France and England, and are convinced they are a perfect match. He seems to be even madder now than when he was in Ireland and is sustaining regular injuries from boat propellers in the busy harbour of Weymouth, raising concerns amongst local wildlife groups about his safety.

Dr Horace Dobbs tells the story of a solitary, interactive dolphin which in 1972 moved from the Isle of Man to south Wales and then to Cornwall, but no comparable relocation has been recorded since then. Now for the first time we know of a dolphin moving from the west coast of Ireland to France and then to England within the space of nine months. If Dony/Georges survives the attention he is currently receiving and is

allowed to remain free and follow his own inclinations, it will be fascinating to see where he turns up next.

To have a look at the comparison photos, and for further information check our website at <http://www.irishdolphins.com> ■

## Dolphin dangers

The friendly dolphin is still in Fanore, Co Clare, and attracting bigger crowds every week. Such is the level of interest in her that serious issues of safety and access have arisen. These concerns were discussed at a recent meeting called by the Garda superintendent in Ennistymon and attended by the IWDG.

The water safety officer with Clare County Council is very concerned that a death will occur if people continue to swim with the dolphin as the area is very dangerous, with strong currents and a rocky shore. Access along the road, which is the main access route to north Clare for the emergency services, is severely restricted and gridlock occurred last August.

It is clear that as long as the dolphin remains in the area people will want to swim with her, and some at the meeting suggested that she be relocated. The IWDG suggested that the dolphin has a right to be where it is and that the management problems are with people, not with the dolphin.

Increased education about the risks associated with swimming in the area and with a wild dolphin should be explored, and liaison with the land-owner (whose property people cross to get to the dolphin) is essential.

Management models for similar human-dolphin interaction situations have been developed in other countries, with the problem being sensitively managed by local authorities, and some have become world-famous tourist attractions. It could be an interesting educational experience for Clare County Council to see Monkey Mia in Australia! (see website: <http://www.monkeymia.com.au/resort/dolphins.html>). ■

### Swimmers with the Doolin dolphin

Simon Berrow



## Unfriendly encounter

A dolphin has been inhabiting the bay at Inis Oírr, Aran Islands, since May 2001 and people have been swimming with her daily.

Last August, I went there with my family for a weekend. They had swam with the dolphin on several occasions in the previous two weeks. My father, in his mid-fifties, and my two sisters (mid-twenties) had worn snorkels and swam quite close to the dolphin and found her playful and quite serene.

On this particular day, my father and I swam about a quarter of a mile out to where we had spotted her. She swam between us for about five minutes, coming quite close and seeming quite gentle. We both touched her nose. We both had snorkels on and it was the first time I had been near her or near any dolphin, for that matter.

After about five minutes she began to swim quite quickly towards my father and shaking her head up and down. When my father realised this he turned away and the dolphin butted him on the shoulder. She repeated this manoeuvre on two more occasions. We both started to swim towards the shore but the dolphin continued to butt us. I realise that had she wanted to cause serious damage she could have, but in any event we were butted on a total of perhaps ten occasions on the shoulders and legs.

In each case as she approached we turned away at the last minute to protect our heads. She swam in very close to the shore and, to be honest, the whole experience was quite frightening. She definitely followed us in because it was quite clear after the first butting that we did not want to be around her any longer.

When we eventually reached the shore we were bruised and a wee bit shaken. Needless to say, we did not go out again. I gather from informal chats with people who are knowledgeable in these matters that stray dolphins like this are a little unstable, but I'm curious to know what provoked her on this day and was she being robustly playful or something more sinister? Replies on postcard, please, to IWDG.

(Name and address with editor)

Send your letters, contributions or comments on the magazine to:  
The Editor, IWDG News, 8 Grotto Place,  
Boooterstown, Co Dublin.

# WHALE DIARY

Audra Furnell



Fluking blue whale in the Baja, summer 2002

● By **Pádraig Whooley**

## Big blues in Baja

This trip was a new departure for me as I confess to being a better solo traveller than team player and the prospect of being cooped up in a van with six others of dubious character was one I had misgivings about. A diverse bunch, comprising Dick Coombes, Sandra Jordan, Faith Wilson, Audra Furnell, Simon Berrow, Frances Bermingham and myself, pooling a variety of interests ranging from botany, ecology, marine biology, photography and yes, even birdwatching.

Initial omens were not good, as fog in Heathrow stranded our departures from Shannon, Dublin and Cork, resulting in none of us getting to San Diego quite the way our tickets suggested we might. But we all arrived safely, if a little exhausted, and the following day we broke for the world's busiest border crossing at Tijuana, the gateway to the Baja peninsula, which stretches 1,000 miles south to the Tropic of Cancer and beyond. "The Baja," as gringos refer to it, is the second longest inhabited peninsula in the world, bathed by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez) to the east.

In our rented Dodge, we snaked our way lazily down the peninsula, soaking up the sights, sounds and smells. Baja's distractions, too many to note here, ensured our flight plan was soon consigned to the glove compartment. The first of dozens of unscheduled stops occurred just 30 minutes after crossing the border, when blows were observed offshore.

Within minutes we were watching gray whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*) and bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) from Highway 1, as bemused Mexican drivers sped by. In retrospect, whalewatching from the narrow verge of a major Mexican motorway was crazy, as within days we would be close enough to touch these gentle giants.

Under pressure from the birding contingent we visited Laguna Hanson, a twitchers' mecca, in Parque Nacional de Constitución 1847. Apart from the fact that the lake was dried out and we nearly froze to death in night temperatures that plummeted below freezing, the range of woodpeckers, jays and, surprisingly, bald eagles at the southern tip of their range, made the detour well worth the effort, and who better to have on board than Dick Coombes to help us distinguish our feathered friends from the trees.

Guerrero Negro is exactly half way down the peninsula, forming the state line between northern and southern Baja. The town is still 20 miles from Oje de Liebre (Scammon's Lagoon), the busiest calving area, where as many as 2,000 gray whales reside between January and April before returning to Alaska, a 14,000km round-trip. We arrived at the lagoon on one of those breathlessly still nights where the Milky Way was so bright you could touch it. This visual treat combined with the sound of whales blowing just beyond the sandbar in Coca Cola-calm water created a

sensory overload which was quite moving. With hardly a dry eye in the house, we now felt like we were truly in Baja.

My snoring apart, the whales were the only impediment to sleep as they blew tantalisingly close to our tents throughout the night. The sense of expectation was such that by dawn we were all up to see the first rays of light catching the vapour plumes from the same whales that had kept us from our slumber.

In all, we did three gray whale trips - two from Oje de Liebre and one from Bahia Magdellana, further south. If guaranteed 'close proximity' encounters are your thing, then look no further, as the grays will show off their calves, spy-hop, pec-slap, tail-fluke and on occasion breach spectacularly in front of you. You don't necessarily need to take a boat trip, as ring-side seats can be had from the shore. On one occasion, by simply allowing the incoming tide to lap around our waists, the whales could approach us to within 50m.

Whalewatching just doesn't get any easier, but if you're willing to risk a trade-off then you must travel south to Loreto, some way down the Gulf side, where our sights were set firmly on the planet's largest living animal. This sleepy provincial town must surely offer some of the best whalewatching in the world and the reason I say this is that we're talking about the blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*).

Although our group had had some serious whale experience, none of us had seen blue whales, and this was a situation we hoped to rectify. Our first attempt to see them was from a land-based site on an elevated road about 10km south of Loreto, looking out into the calm waters between Isla Carmen and Danzante. Within minutes of arriving we were watching distant blows several miles off, but the problem was establishing whether the blows were from blue or fin whales.

Yes, in theory you would think this an easy one to sort out, given their differences in dimensions,

**"At 40 metres distance, the claims of the blue whale being the equivalent of 50 African elephants started making perfect sense to me"**

Blue whale surfaces in the Sea of Cortez, Baja, summer 2002

Pádraig Whooley



colour and dorsal fin. However, it took us an hour to establish that among about eight fin whales was a whale that was noticeably larger, paler and with a diagnostically 'puny' dorsal fin, and this was our contender. It wasn't till it fluked at the end of a dive sequence that we could breathe a collective sigh at having had our first blue whale encounter. To be honest, had that been it, we'd have considered the experience an anti-climax, but this was a mere taste of what was to follow.

The following day we negotiated a rate of US\$150 per panga (a 25ft boat that takes four) for an eight-hour trip to the islands around which we had scoped the whales the previous day. Within 15 minutes of leaving the marina we were steaming towards fin-whale blows, and on occasion we got remarkably close to them, but the real treat was when we turned east around Carmen and encountered an adult and juvenile blue whale, which stayed close to us for almost an hour.

The adult caught us on the hop, surfacing within 40m of us. To say we got a shock does the situation no justice. At these distances, the claims of the blue whale being the equivalent of 50 African elephants started making perfect sense to me. The explosive 30ft blow and the subsequent sound of the intake emanating from its cavernous blowhole put me in a potentially awkward situation, as I was already struggling with a nasty bout of Montezuma's revenge (Mexican/Bombay bum) and this almost tipped the balance in Montezuma's favour. With my heartbeat regulated and my body functions somewhat under control, I could only marvel as its expansive body rolled into view, revealing a massive muscular column down its rotund back. Expectations reached fever pitch when the final arch of its tailstock developed into the classic blue-whale fluke. Yes, a Kodak moment... before another dash for the bucket!

We did a total of three trips from Loreto and saw both blue and fin whales with ease on each occasion. On our second trip we had a wonderful bottlenose dolphin encounter, when a pod of 10-12 approached our boat. As if to make the point that Irish bottlenoses can't jump, one of them breached several times its body length clear out of the water. We were all so impressed that everyone froze, forgetting to take a picture, but such wonderful sights, of which Baja has so many to offer, are best kept in memory. As for the money spent and the time lost... well, they're already forgotten, but the memories will surely last a lifetime. ■

• If you have any queries on watching whales, etc, write to Pádraig Whooley, 2 Langford Place, Langford Row, Cork Tel: (021) 431 5723 Email: padraigwhooley@eircom.net



Pádraig Whooley

Blue whale flukes before diving, Baja, summer 2002

## Policy on offshore windfarms

Simon Berrow

The IWDG has been asked to comment on a number of scoping documents for offshore wind farms. The potential impact of offshore wind turbines on cetaceans is not known, but despite the best efforts of engineers there is transmission of sound underwater. The IWDG will be producing policy documents on this and other issues, but in summary we advise developers to consider the following:

- consider migratory species as well as those 'resident' or seasonally occurring;
- identify geographical and seasonal distribution;
- identify potential calving areas and critical habitats;
- remember that cetaceans live in an acoustic world and any effect is much more likely to be acoustic impact rather than loss of habitat, etc;
- we would expect pre-construction and post-construction monitoring to determine whether there has been any displacement, either temporary or permanent.

An important consideration is how the fieldwork on cetaceans is designed, and the

subsequent power of the conclusions regarding impact. It is likely that encounter rates and sightings of cetaceans during fieldwork will be low, due in most part to weather conditions rather than the presence or absence of cetaceans. An approach that the IWDG promotes is to assess the sighting rate (this can be predicted from existing survey results) and then carry out a power analysis. In this way you can predict the number of sightings required to be confident in your conclusions (ie that there has or hasn't been an impact caused by the development). It is likely, however, that to be more than 50% confident in your conclusions, the amount of fieldwork required to obtain the necessary sightings would be unacceptable.

Another approach is to monitor the site acoustically and produce an index of usage based on this.

Some wind farm developments could actually enhance the area for cetaceans by creating an artificial reef. It would be important to detect these positive influences as well as the potentially negative ones. Given the proposals for offshore wind farms on most of the shallow banks in the Irish Sea from Wexford to Louth, this issue is one we need to monitor and continue to act on. ■

## IWDG meets EU commissioner

Shay Fennelly and Faith Wilson of the IWDG had a meeting with EU environment commissioner Margot Wallström during her visit to Ireland in January 2002. They raised the concerns of the group regarding the failure of the Irish Government to implement the EIA and habitats directives to the edge of the 200-mile economic exclusive zone, in relation to offshore gas and petroleum exploration.

The commissioner was asked to clarify whether the habitats directive applied throughout the economic exclusive zone, where blue, fin and humpback whales occur.

Ms Wallström passed the question to adviser Mícheál Ó Briain, who said it was the legal view of the Commission that the habitats directive applied out to the 200-mile limit, and he noted that the UK and other EU countries were beginning to apply this.

Ms Wallström invited the Irish NGOs to write to her regarding this and other issues. The IWDG subsequently submitted a letter to Ms Wallström outlining our main concerns about marine mammal conservation in Ireland (the submission can be found on our website at <http://www.iwdg.ie>). These issues will be raised with the new Government. ■

### IWDG Website:

Visit our website at [www.iwdg.ie](http://www.iwdg.ie)

# EVENTS

Pádraig Whooley



Whale-watching from Bullig Point, Cape Clear Island

## ● Whale-watching and related events 2002

### Whale Watch Day - 18th August

Whale Watch Ireland 2002 takes place on Sunday 18th August to coincide with Ulster Marine Week. Watches will be held mostly between 2.00pm and 5.00pm on the headlands listed below.

We hope that you, as IWDG members, will not only join us but turn up to help on the day. We need people like you to help us find cetaceans, field questions and assist with

stewarding. As you can see, we are increasing our coverage from six to nine locations and need your support if this event is to continue to grow. Please contact the leaders if you wish to get involved.

**We'd like to thank Patagonia for their continued support of this event and the IWDG Sighting Scheme. ■**

Watch location	Meeting point, time	Contact name, phone
Old Head of Kinsale, Cork	Golf course gates, 2pm	Pádraig Whooley (021) 431 5723
Clogher Head, Kerry	Blasket Island Centre, 1.45pm	Mick O'Connell (064) 24 934
Loop Head, Clare	Lighthouse car park, 2pm	Simon Berrow 086-854 5450
Downpatrick Head, Mayo	Car park, 2pm	Tony Murray 087-647 9926
Ramore Head, Antrim	Portrush Countryside Centre, 2pm	Jim Allen 028-7034 7282
Portmuck, Islandmagee, Antrim	Portmuck car park, 10am	Ian Enlander 028-9337 2724
Howth Head, Dublin	Balscadden car park (not summit), 2pm	Dave Wall 087-297 7931
Bray Head, Wicklow	Aquarium, Bray sea front, 2pm	Nick Channon (01) 860 0586
Hook Head, Wexford	Hook lighthouse, 2pm	Faith Wilson 087-637 7328

### Whalewatching Weekends

**August 10th & 11th** - Whalewatch weekend course, Cape Clear Island, West Cork. Leader: Pádraig Whooley Tel: (021) 431 5723, [padraigwhooley@eircom.net](mailto:padraigwhooley@eircom.net)

**September 7th & 8th** - Whalewatch weekend course, Belmullet/Iniskea Islands, Co Mayo. Contact: Anthony Irwin Tel: 087-764 0131, [oceanman1@oceanfree.net](mailto:oceanman1@oceanfree.net)

**Sept 28th & 29th** - Whalewatch weekend course, Loop Head/Shannon estuary, Co Clare. Leader: Simon Berrow Tel: 086-854 5450, [sdwf@oceanfree.net](mailto:sdwf@oceanfree.net) ■

### Heritage in Schools

IWDG committee members Simon Berrow and Pádraig Whooley are Heritage Specialists for the Heritage in Schools Scheme, a partnership between the Heritage Council and

the INTO. This scheme enables specialists to visit primary schools for either half- or full-day visits. If you are interested in Simon or Pádraig visiting a primary school in your area to present a talk, workshop and (where possible) a field trip on Irish whales and dolphins, then contact Simon at 086-854 5450, [sdwf@oceanfree.net](mailto:sdwf@oceanfree.net) or Pádraig at (021) 431 5723, [padraigwhooley@eircom.net](mailto:padraigwhooley@eircom.net) ■

### Shannon Dolphin Festival

The second Shannon Dolphin Festival will be held in Kilrush, Co Clare, from 18-21st July. Throughout the four days there will be marine-themed fun and games, music and other events, including the Whale and Dolphin Roadshow.

● More details from website: [www.shannondolphinfestival.com](http://www.shannondolphinfestival.com) or phone (065) 905 2622 ■

Fin whales: seen regularly along southwest coast of Ireland



Audra Furnell

### New IWDG website

The IWDG is proud to announce the launch of its new website [www.iwdg.ie](http://www.iwdg.ie). It has all the familiar features from the previous site, including Irish news, on-line reporting and photo gallery, but it also has many new tricks. The website will be linked to the IWDG Cetacean Sightings Database. IWDG members will be able to interact directly with the database and get the most recent updates on cetacean sightings in Irish waters. They will be able to sort sightings by species, location or date and to list, tabulate or map the results.

This is one of the first interactive websites linked to a scientific database in Ireland. It will herald a new era for recording cetaceans in Irish waters and make a major contribution to biological recording in Ireland.

**The website received support from the Heritage Council under the 2002 Publications Grant Scheme. ■**

### IWDG and P&O Ferry Survey

The IWDG/P&O Ferry Survey is looking for volunteers to conduct cetacean surveys on board P&O vessels crossing the Celtic Sea to Cherbourg, France.

Surveyors should have some experience of cetacean and seabird identification and be willing to spend long hours surveying at sea in all weathers. Surveys are conducted indoors from the bridge of passenger ferries, but outdoor surveying may be required as well.

Trips are conducted monthly and successful applicants will be allotted one or more surveys during the year. All meals and on-board accommodation will be looked after.

**If interested, please email Dave Wall at [ferrysurvey@eircom.net](mailto:ferrysurvey@eircom.net) or phone 087-297 7931. See IWDG website for more details. ■**

### UK National Whale and Dolphin Watch Weekend

The first ever UK National Whale and Dolphin Watch Weekend is being organised by the Seawatch Foundation and will take place on 27-28 July 2002. Events will take place on headlands around the British coast.

**For further details see [www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk](http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk) ■**

# Research



Simon Berrow

Dolphin-watching in the Shannon estuary

## Clicks and whistles

### Recording dolphins off the west coast

Ewan Wakefield

In August 2001, I spent three days with Dr Simon Berrow and skipper Joe Aston aboard the *Anna M*, recording common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) vocalisations off the coasts of Kerry and Clare. This work was carried out as part of an MSc project, a study of the effects of seismic surveying on the acoustic behaviour of common dolphin, supervised by Dr John Goold of the University of Wales, Bangor.

Much of my project involved re-analysing hours of recordings of dolphin whistles made by Dr Goold before and during seismic surveys in the Celtic Sea. My aim was to look for subtle differences in the whistles the dolphins used in these 'before and during'

contexts, which could indicate a vocal response to seismic surveying noise.

The majority of my time was spent in the lab, listening to whistles through headphones and staring at spectrograms on a computer screen. Thankfully, I also spent some time

at sea making my own observations and recordings. The main aim of the west coast cruise was to record different-sized groups of common dolphins so that I could devise a simple empirical relationship between the number of whistles recorded and the number of animals likely to be within acoustic range.

Despite poor weather, the trip started auspiciously when, sailing down the Shannon, twenty minutes out of Carrigaholt, Co Clare, we were joined by four resident bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*). By midday, we were northwest of Loop Head and in the Atlantic proper. Once we had deployed the hydrophone we began to hear occasional *D. delphis* whistles. Later that afternoon, a large group of diving gannets alerted us to the likely presence of dolphins west of the Aran Islands. Sharing the same school of fish as the gannets, perhaps twenty animals were breaching and diving in pursuit of their prey and, with the hydrophone, I was able to capture their excited whistles. Following this first encounter, we were able to record several more groups that day, each of between five and forty dolphins.

After a night anchored in the lee of Kilronan we sailed south, close under the Cliffs of Moher. The first few hours were uneventful, with no visual sightings and only an occasional whistle faintly audible above the low rumbling of breaking waves. Then suddenly, at midday, the silence was broken by a cacophony of noise as

the boat was surrounded by about fifty dolphins, bow-riding and breaching. With so many vocalising animals within range, individual whistles were inaudible above the high intensity squeals and clicks of dolphin sonar. After half an hour the dolphins began to lose interest in us and headed off northwest. As they receded into the distance their sonar clicks, which although loud have a limited range, faded until their whistles became audible again, allowing us to make a clear recording of about twenty animals. After such a spectacular show the rest of the day was relatively quiet and, having rounded Loop Head once more, we docked in the small harbour at Fenit.

On the final day of the cruise we had fine

weather and a fresh southwesterly breeze, but no more encounters with *D. delphis*. However, around lunchtime, northeast of Kerry Head, we spotted a group of six harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*). These tiny cetaceans are notoriously shy of boats and, true to form,

they swam rapidly away. Unlike dolphins, *P. phocoena* don't produce whistles but they do emit clicks. These clicks have very high frequencies, and unfortunately they were well above the recording range of our equipment.

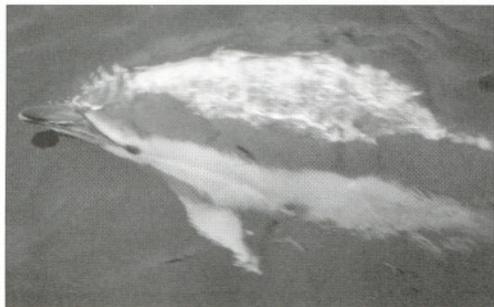
The trip started as it had begun when, returning up the Shannon estuary towards Carrigaholt, we were once again visited by bottlenose dolphins. First, one large adult surged across our bow, then three more adults and a calf joined in.

The recordings and observations I made during the trip identified a real need for new ways of accurately estimating the size and distribution of pelagic dolphin populations. At the moment, using hydrophones, it is only possible to detect the presence of dolphins. My work shows that in the future it should also be possible to accurately relate the number of whistles detected to the number of dolphins in a particular area and hence monitor the impact of activities such as seismic surveying.

A longer version of this article, together with examples of some of the dolphin whistles I recorded can be viewed at [www.gannetsway.com/research/wakefield](http://www.gannetsway.com/research/wakefield).

• Thanks to Joe Aston, Dr Simon Berrow and Dr John Goold for their help with this project. The fieldwork was jointly funded by the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation, the UK Natural Environment Research Council (as part of my MSc studentship) and Joe Aston. ■

Simon Berrow



Common dolphin

## International Year of Eco-Tourism

2002 has been designated International Year of Eco-Tourism by the United Nations.

The opportunity for wildlife-based tourism in Ireland is growing ever stronger and was recently explored by IWDG chairman Simon Berrow in a paper presented to the Marine Eco-Tourism for the Atlantic Area (META) conference in Dublin (see IWDG website for full paper).

Whalewatching in Ireland was worth an estimated €1,480,000 in direct revenues in 1998 and €7,973,000 in indirect revenues, with the majority of the 177,600 whalewatchers in Ireland visiting Fungie in Dingle harbour, Co Kerry.

Dolphin-watching in the Shannon estuary started in 1993 and by 2001 numbers taking dolphin-watching trips had increased to 15,000 people, with a net gain to the local economy of about €400,000-876,000 in 2000. As this economy continues to expand, safeguards must be put in place to ensure that such growth is sustainable and does not adversely affect our whale and dolphin populations.

The IWDG is currently developing policy papers on sustainable whale-watching, amongst other matters, and welcomes any inputs or suggestions on this. ■

## Oiled wildlife response in Ireland

Kevin Mc Cormick

The Dublin Port Authority in conjunction with the Irish Seal Sanctuary recently held a three-day seminar on Oiled Wildlife Care Training, jointly presented by the International Bird Research Rescue Centre (IBRRC) and the International Fund for Animal Welfare.

As a direct result of this course, we now have a better understanding of the major components involved in oiled wildlife response. We envisage that a National Oil Response Team will be set up which can be called upon should we have a major oil spill around our coastline. ■

### Sightings

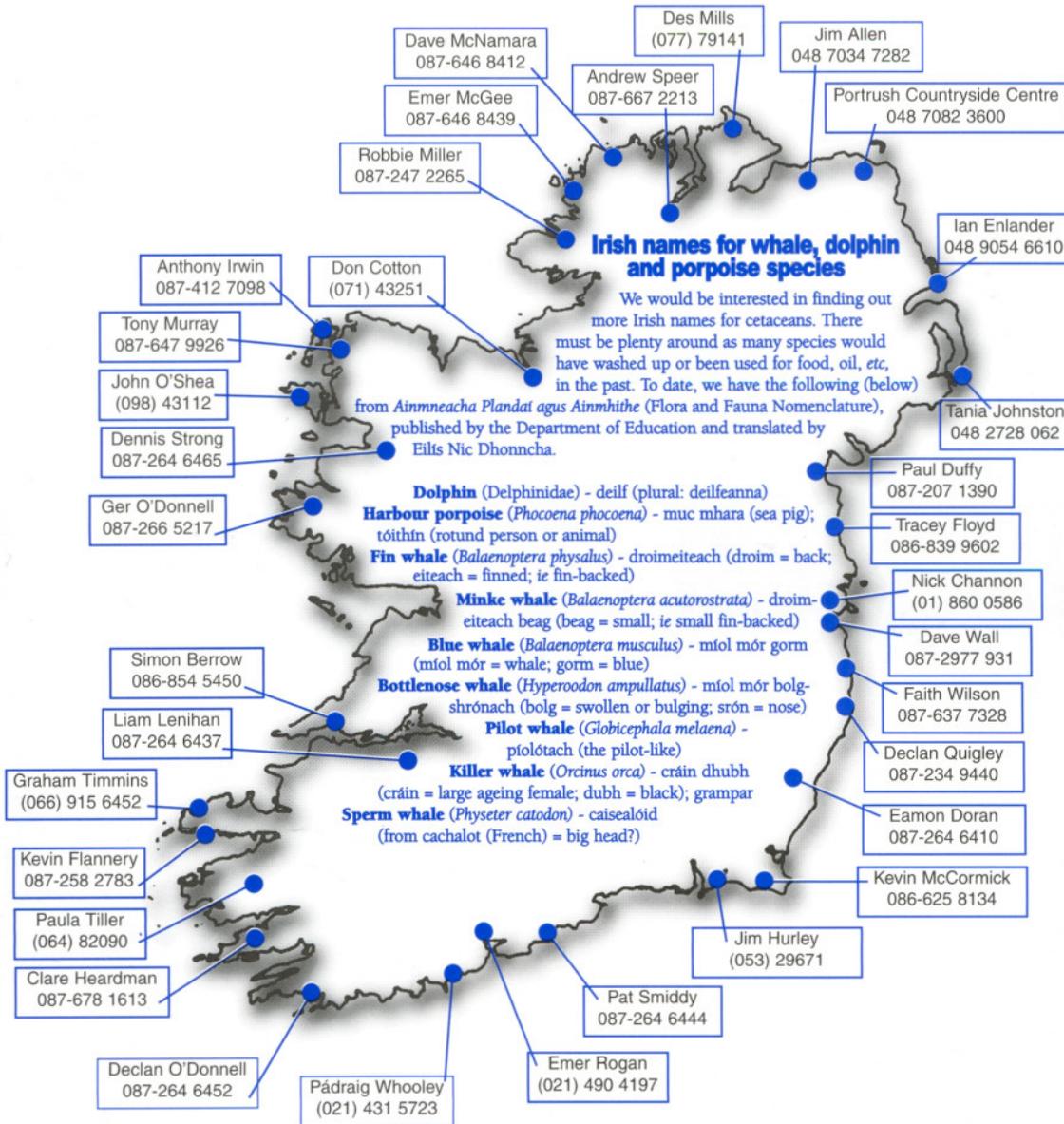
Details of any sightings should be sent to the IWDG Cetacean Sighting Scheme.

# 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

IWDG News is published by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group. You are free to reproduce any of the material contained, but please acknowledge the IWDG.

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www.iwdg.ie

## Membership subs

Student/unemployed/OAP: €10  
 Waged: €20  
 Family: €30  
 Corporate: €125  
 Contact Secretary, IWDG

## Acknowledgements

IWDG would like to thank Ewan Wakefield, Simon Berrow, Pádraig Whooley and Kevin McCormick for written contributions to this issue, and Simon Berrow, Audra Furnell, Pádraig Whooley, Graham Timmins, Paddy Crowe and Peter Evans for photographs used.

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