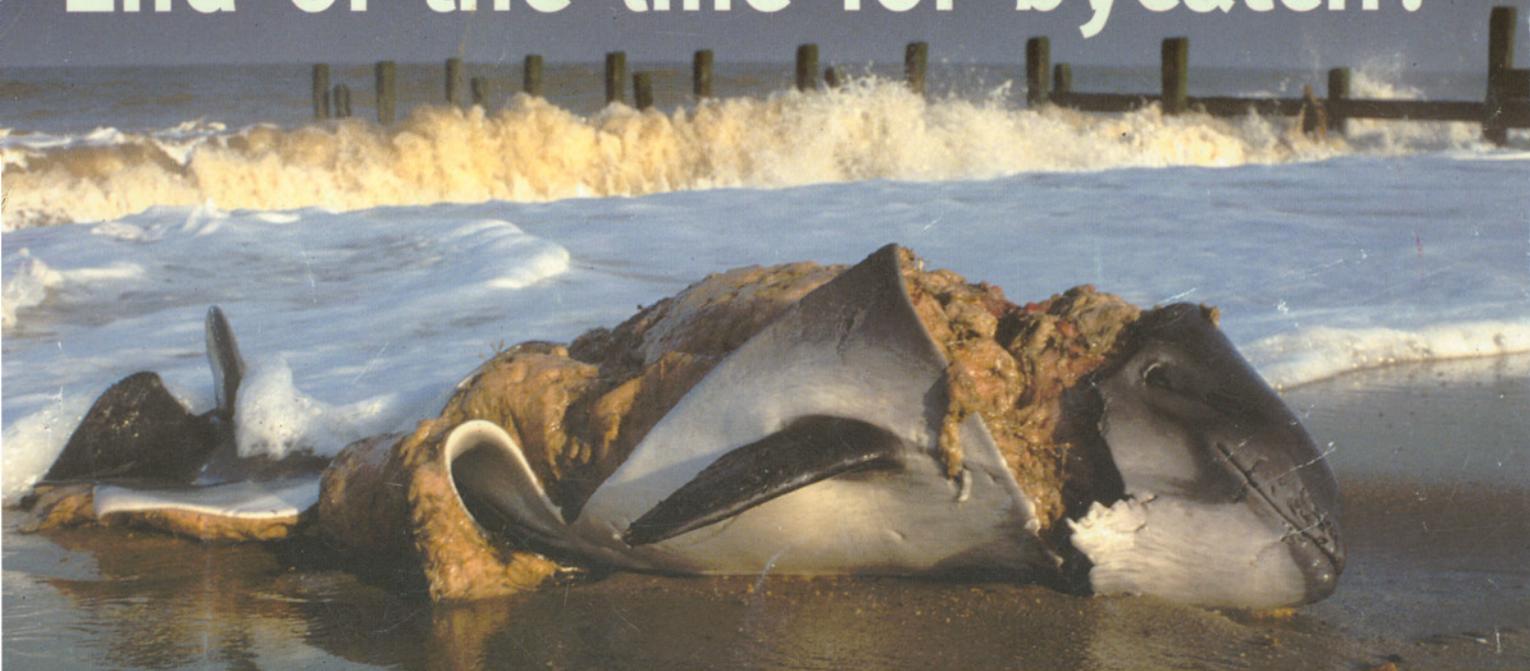


End of the line for bycatch?



At a meeting of the EU Council of Ministers on 22nd March 2004, a compromise agreement was reached on implementing measures for the reduction of bycatch in EU fisheries. On the day, Ireland supported the compromise proposal (despite predictions to the contrary from many environmental NGOs) while only Spain and Italy voted against. The compromise introduced a number of exemptions and implementation delays to the regulations. These include:

Use of pingers

- 1) An exemption for vessels under 12m from using pingers.
- 2) The exemption for vessels using pingers from the onboard observer scheme.
- 3) The dates for implementation of the use of pingers has been pushed back from July 2004 to January 2005-2007 (dependent on fishery area).

These proposals significantly weaken the mitigation powers of the pinger regulations. Exemption of vessels under 12m will exclude many inshore vessels from being forced to deploy pingers on gear, despite the fact that inshore waters

are a key habitat for the harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*), which these regulations were drafted to protect. The exemption of vessels carrying pingers raises a problem with monitoring the success of pinger deployment on reducing bycatch levels. The IWDG will actively work with the fishing industry and the government to develop a method for quantifying the success of pinger deployment and on quantifying and tackling bycatch in inshore fisheries.

Observer scheme

- 1) An exemption for vessels under 15m from the onboard observer scheme.
- 2) The council predicts a system of observer coverage of fishing effort 'to allow the estimation of the bycatch rates for cetaceans to achieve an accuracy rate of 30%.'

One of the most crucial aspects of bycatch management is to obtain an accurate estimation of bycatch levels for each fishery. It is unclear whether the proposed levels of monitoring will achieve this. The IWDG recommends minimum observer coverage of 5-10% of fishing effort or at a level which will

enable statistically robust data on bycatch to be collected. Our goal is to achieve the rapid assessment and effective management of cetacean bycatch in Irish fisheries through cooperation with the fishing sector and state agencies.

Overall, the IWDG welcomes these regulations as an important first step towards reducing bycatch in Irish fisheries to sustainable levels in the near future. We welcome the government's support for the compromise proposals and look forward to their implementation in Irish waters. In themselves, the new EU regulations are unlikely to prove sufficient to reduce bycatch to sustainable levels within a reasonable time frame. However, these regulations lay the foundation for the management of small cetacean bycatch in Irish waters, and the IWDG looks forward to working with both the fishing industry and the government to develop and build on these measures. Our ultimate goal is to see a sustainable Irish fisheries sector with minimal bycatch achieved through a suite of practical and effective mitigation measures and effective monitoring.

Dave Wall

IWDG News

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www.iwdg.ie

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Contact the Secretary, IWDG

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Any item or product advertised in IWDG News is not necessarily approved or recommended by IWDG unless specifically stated.

Letter from the Secretary



IWDG membership has broken the 600 barrier for the first time. The response to the initial membership renewal notice and subsequent reminder posted in April has been better than last year's. But we'll still have to axe around 100 non-renewals from our membership. This annual cycle of running to stand still is not unique to the IWDG, as every NGO suffers annual attrition. But to be positive, our membership still shows positive year-on-year growth. However, we have to be realistic about how big the IWDG can grow, in terms of membership. For example, our database shows that only 47 (7.6%) of our 610 members hail from 12 inland counties. Some land-locked counties like Monaghan and Armagh do not show a single

member. This is understandable, as it is hard to get people living in non-coastal areas enthused about the marine environment. Against these demographics, our growth rate in recent years has been impressive.

At time of writing, almost 84% of you have given us an email address and, notwithstanding the deadly trio of spam, viruses and worms, this remains the most efficient and cost-effective way of communicating with you. Please make sure to advise us of any change in your email address during the year. If you feel you are not receiving our bulletins, which we generally send out at least monthly, then let us know in case we are using an incorrect address.

As you're aware, we've been very busy delivering ISCOPE workshops and there has been at least one each month in 2004. We are running a major whale and dolphin exhibition in ENFO, which will run throughout June and into July. The Cape Clear courses have some vacancies on each of the three weekends, and the Míol Mór conference in September is now open for bookings. So, as you can see, we haven't taken the foot off the gas and it has never been so easy to become involved in our events, which are advertised on the website and on group email bulletins.

I think for the first time, we can truly say that we can do no more. It's handed to you on a platter. All you need do is pull up a chair!

Pádraig Whooley

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COVER IMAGE: Bycaught harbour porpoise (© Graeme Cresswell)

EVENTS

© Gary Burrows



At the ISCOPE/IWDG training day in Portrush

IWDG/ISCOPE Events 2004

21st May: ISCOPE Cetacean Workshop. UISCE in Ellybay, Co Mayo. Evening (7-10pm) recording and identification of stranded and sighted cetaceans. Contact: Marianne Odendahl, Email: MarianneOdendahl@hotmail.com

22nd May: ISCOPE Cetacean Workshop. Westport Leisure Park. Afternoon (2-5pm) whale-watching field skills, recording and ID. Contact: Deirdre Cunningham, Tel:(094) 904 7684, Email: heritageofficer@mayococo.ie

22nd May: One-Day Cetacean ID and Recording Workshop at Wexford Wildfowl Reserve. Cost: €25 for IWDG members. Bookings through Pádraig Whooley, or Chris Wilson at Wexford Wildfowl Reserve (053) 23129, cwilson@duchas.ie.

1st June-12th July: IWDG Whale Exhibition, ENFO, 17 St Andrew Street, Dublin 2. Contact ENFO, Tel: 1890 200 191, or www.enfo.ie

11-13th June: World Oceans Day, The Beach, Tramore, Co Waterford. In association with T-Bay Surf & Wildlife Centre, the Irish Wildlife Trust and the Irish Whale & Dolphin Group. A weekend of beach events (talks, walks, & water sports). IWDG talks & dolphin rescue exercises on Sat 12th June.

18-20th June: IWDG Weekend Whale-Watching Course on Tory Island, Co. Donegal. Contact: Simon Berrow, 086-854 5450, email: simon.berrow@iwdg.ie

3rd July: ISCOPE, Cetacean Workshop, Scatterry Island Centre, Kilrush, Co Clare. Full-day, covering whale-watching field skills, recording and ID. Contact: Simon Berrow, 086-854 5450, email:

simon.berrow@iwdg.ie

16-18th July: IWDG Weekend Whale-Watching Course on Cape Clear Island, Co Cork. Contact: Pádraig Whooley, (023) 31911, email: padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie

1st August: Whale Watch Ireland 2004: National whalewatch day. Guided watches on 10 headlands throughout the four provinces. Full details of locations and local contacts on IWDG website events section www.iwdg.ie

13-15th August: IWDG Weekend Whale-Watching Course on Cape Clear Island, Co Cork. Contact: Pádraig Whooley, (023) 31911, email: padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie

24-27th August: 5th International Symposium on Fauna & Flora of Atlantic Islands. Division of Biosciences, University College Dublin, Ireland, Contact Dr Declan Murray, email: ffais5@ucd.ie, website: www.ucd.ie/ffais5/ffais5.html. IWDG will host an **Eco-tourism Workshop** with Erich Hoyt on responsible whalewatching in the Atlantic Islands.

10-12th September: IWDG Weekend Whale-Watching Course on Cape Clear Island, Co. Cork. Contact: Pádraig Whooley, (023) 31911, email: padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie

24-26th September: IWDG Whale Conference, Celtic Ross Hotel, Rosscarbery, Co Cork. Booking and enquiries to Frances Bermingham, 087-238 8433, email: frances.bermingham@iwdg.ie

24th October: Live-stranding course with BDMLR at Portrush Countryside Centre, Co Antrim. Contact www.bdmlr.org



ENVIRONMENTAL INFO
information on the environment / eolas ar an gcomhshaoil



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4. **E-mail:** info@enfo.ie
5. **Website:** www.enfo.ie
6. **Visit:** The drop-in centre at 17, St Andrew Street, Dublin 2 (off Dame Street) and see the exhibition, visit the children's corner, see environmental videos and access the library's database and internet facilities
7. **Check out:** The Enfo information stands at your Local Authority office or County/City Library

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Visit the IWDG Whale Exhibition



1st June - 12th July 2004

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RTE's 'Wild Trials' films large whales

● IWDG accompanies broadcaster Ray D'Arcy on photo-shoot off south coast

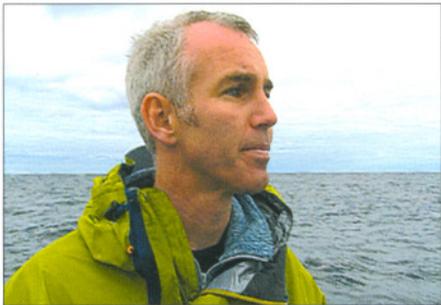
In search of a winning shot



Common dolphins: photographed by Ray D'Arcy on 'Wild Trials'

In January 2004, RTE aired a six-part series produced by Crossing the Line Films, called 'Wild Trials.' Filmed in the summer and autumn of 2003, it was an innovative approach to natural history broadcasting, setting a photographic challenge for each of the celebrity contestants. None of these had any prior photographic experience, or were familiar with their quarry, let alone the demanding field conditions they'd encounter in bagging that all too elusive 'classic shot.'

TV personality and Today FM DJ, Ray D'Arcy, reports on his week in west Cork, where his challenge was to photograph the humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) - or any other cetacean. Armed only with a brief lesson by wildlife photographer Mike Brown, and a little advice from the IWDG, Ray and his newly-acquired digital camera, headed off into some very uncertain territory, where he takes up the story...



Ray D'Arcy looks for whales and, below, one of the fin whale photos he 'bagged.'

As well as a free copy of the RTE Guide, one of the perks of my job is that I get to do amazing things in the name of television. Whale-watching off the coast of west Cork was one such amazing thing. The week had everything a good movie should have: superb location, drama, a chase, and an enigmatic star who never actually appears. The supporting cast were impressive too: skipper Colin Barnes, your very own Pádraig Whooley, and an army of dolphins.

When we arrived at Galley Head lighthouse, there were stories of sightings of a humpback whale - I thought all we had to do was leave the harbour and he'd be flapping his tail fluke at us, inviting me into the water with my fins on and camera at the ready - you've guessed it, it didn't happen that way. We had three long ten-hour days of rough seas and few sightings. Well, there was loads of bird action, but not a fin or a fluke worth mentioning. Pádraig and Colin remained confident we'd find and get a photo of Boomerang, the humpback that has returned to this area in each of the last three years and had last been seen the previous week.

Day four dawned and morale was low, but the word from a local fisherman was that there'd been whales some 20 miles southwest of Castletownshend. We headed off; we were in the last-chance salon, so to increase our chances we brought along extra spotters.

I honestly thought I'd be heading back to

Dublin with nothing but a handful of pictures of seagulls and a fairly good picture of a pair of common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*) which Pádraig informed me were technically whales, albeit somewhat smaller ones of the toothed variety. Anyway, eyes peeled, everybody was focused on the job in hand - and then it happened. I saw what I thought was some distant spray off to the east, but I didn't have the confidence to shout it out, so I said to Pádraig "Mmmmm, I think I might have seen something, but I'm not too sure." He looks and says "It's probably a wispy cloud on the horizon."

Then, as we looked towards the Old Head of Kinsale, there it was in all its glory, and Pádraig shouts out with the confidence of a man who's seen it before: "Blowww!"

Full throttle and there they are, not one but two fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*). They may not be as photogenic as humpbacks, but they're still impressive - the second largest animal on earth, over twice the length of our boat and, as we were to find out, not known as the "greyhounds of the sea" for nothing.

Being within metres of these amazing creatures is definitely a memory I'll take to the grave. For me, like most things, a lot of the fun was in the chase. There you go... and didn't I do well, not one whale pun included... but that was just a fluke!

Ray D'Arcy



The cameraman's view

● Ross Bartley

It was the last day of our week-long shoot in west Cork, and still we didn't have a programme. Skipper Colin Barnes had spent the last six days scouring every inch of water between Cape Clear and the Old Head of Kinsale, searching in vain for the humpback (*Megaptera novaengliae*) and fin (*Balaenoptera physalus*) whales which had entertained the IWDG folk in these waters the previous week. But it seemed that by the time we came on the scene the word was out and every cetacean in west Cork had moved off. A brief encounter with a pod of common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*) on day three had been Ray D'Arcy's only photo opportunity of the week (day five saw an even briefer encounter with a minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) which proved too quick for us to photograph). Since then, nothing. Ray and I were



Fin whales photographed by Ray D'Arcy on 'Wild Trials'

getting itchy fingers and the mere sight of a seagull flying nearby would have us jostling for position as we photographed and filmed it until it passed out of range.

Onboard, everyone remained optimistic - the swell had died down and visibility was fair. We had abandoned all hope of a sighting nearer shore and were now heading due south to a fishing ground 20 miles off the Old Head of Kinsale where trawlers had recently reported sightings of large whales. Colin stood motionless on the roof of the wheelhouse, tirelessly scanning the ocean around us. On deck, nine pairs of eyes were trained on different points of the horizon, everyone eager to be the first to shout out that magical word 'Blow!'

Two hours passed and still we were motoring south. I stood in the wheelhouse warming my hands with a cup of coffee. Outside, low grey clouds hung over the sea with the imminent promise of rain. On the port side, Ray stood peering out to sea, then turned to Pádraig hesitantly and asked: "Do you see that?" "Blowww!!!" came the reply, "Eight o'clock, 600 yards!" The race was on! The *Holly Jo* burst into action. Everyone gathered excitedly at the bow and the shouts became more regular: "Blow, four hundred yards;" "dead ahead;" and then in unison, "Blow!"

The *Holly Jo* thundered on as I clambered onto the roof of the wheelhouse; then, as we reached the vicinity of the last sighting, the boat stopped. Everything went quiet. The whale had taken a deep dive - we had ten minutes to get ready.

It started to rain. I was lying flat on the roof of the wheelhouse, having swapped the big shoulder-mounted Digibeta camera for the more manageable Mini DV, when the shout came in: "Blow!" Colin put the throttle down and the boat sped forward. We gained on the two fin whales fast, but rain and spray had

soaked my lens and they took their deep dive before I had wiped it clean. I could hear Ray's camera clicking away. He was getting shots, I needed to get footage.

The rain stopped and ten minutes later the two fin whales surfaced nearer the boat. With the lens clean and dry, I started the camera rolling, steadied it as best I could and kept the shot wide, not knowing where they would surface next. Suddenly, the fin whale surfaced right in front of us, exhaling loudly and sending a plume of mist into the air, which descended on us, covering my lens with water. I had seen fin whales before but never this close. I realised that, framed against the ocean, it is impossible to get a sense of scale, so over the next few encounters I concentrated on trying to get "two shots," with Ray and the fin whales in the same frame. Filming on boats is always tricky. Keeping the horizon steady and the lens dry is one thing, but while filming the fin whales I found the biggest problem was not knowing where they would surface next.

I slowly built up a handful of usable shots and Ray seemed pleased with the photographs he was getting. Before I knew it, someone told me we had been with the whales for two hours and it was time to leave. Grabbing a few last shots, we turned for home.

Three months later and *Wild Trials* was finished. The series began on RTE 1 and was already doing well with the first two programmes. Then, on the evening of Ray's programme, a staggering 390,000 viewers tuned in to watch Ray in west Cork. *Wild Trials* that evening and Ray's programme received the biggest audience of the whole series. This was perhaps one of the main reasons why RTE has asked us to start a second series. This time, we are thinking of sending one of the contestants out to photograph a basking shark in Irish waters, which might make the fin whales look easy!

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SIGHTINGS



Common dolphins

Winter whales in the Sunny South East



© Pádraig Whooley

Fin whales

By Pádraig Whooley

The inshore movement of fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*) along the south coast last winter shared some similarity with the winter of 2002/2003.

Sightings of the planet's second largest animal were tapering off in their usual west Cork haunts by late November 2003, with the last reported sighting on Dec 2nd. This, it seems, was their last hurrah - as I've not seen a large baleen whale in west Cork since November 15th. Is it a coincidence that their last sighting in West Cork in 2002 was recorded on November 18th?

But that's not the end of the story, as within a few weeks fin whales started re-appearing 120 miles to the east, off Hook Head, Co Wexford. Without photo-identification proof we can't be certain these are the same individuals, but I'd be willing to bet my binoculars on it.

What followed was perhaps the most sustained period of superb whale-watching activity documented in the southeast. Anxious to please whale-watchers on both sides of the county divide, the fin whales divided their efforts between Wexford and Waterford.

The IWDG sighting scheme received reports most weeks from late December and into mid-February. Between 3-5 fin whales were reported most days in the first week of January. The last two confirmed fin whale sightings reported were of a single animal feeding inside Waterford Harbour on February 10th and three on February 14th that were observed some five miles south of Hook Head. There were also sightings that could not be identified to species level, and

these were downgraded to large baleen whale species, ruling out minke whales (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*). These sightings finished on February 16th.

As we've come to expect, where large baleen whales occur, you are likely to find a spectrum of other cetacean species in the vicinity. During this period, we received many sightings of harbour porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) with occasional bottlenose (*Tursiops truncatus*) and Risso's (*Grampus griseus*) dolphins, minke whales and even a few reports of humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). But by far the most numerous were common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*), occasionally seen in groups of 150-200. Again it is noteworthy that for the first winter in four years they failed to show in their usual haunts further west, such as Cork and Kinsale harbours.

We can only assume that the prevailing conditions that attracted the fin whales also drew the common dolphins, filmed by RTE News on Feb 26th at Passage East, and on occasion as far upriver as Cheekpoint. By the time Kevin McCormick informed us that there were dolphins at New Ross Bridge, some 10 miles further up the River Barrow, I was prepared to believe anything regarding their upriver forays.

By mid-February, the fin whale sightings were tapering off in the southeast and, as nobody was picking them up along the southwest, it's a fair assumption that they had moved off altogether. It is interesting that we have never recorded fin whales or any other large baleen whale species in the three months between March and May along the south coast. Where they go, we simply don't know, and this is one piece of the

jigsaw that will take some time to find a home for. One possible explanation could be that they travel south to the Bay of Biscay, where Biscay Dolphin Research Project (BDRP) researchers recorded exceptional numbers of fin whales in March and April 2004.

But the wonderful thing about whale-watching in Ireland is that you never have to wait too long for your next fix. I recall a downbeat conversation with Colin Barnes in late March as we suffered the low-season blues, not having seen a whale of any description for several months in west Cork. Colin took an upbeat approach, commenting that the minkes should be showing up shortly. The following week, we headed up to Galley Head. The instant we peered over, a minke whale surfaced no more than 40 metres from us at the bottom of the cliff. The gods were smiling on us.

This minke whale sighting heralded the start of my whale-watching busy period, as in recent years minkes have moved inshore in west Cork, following sand eels, and sightings of our smallest baleen whale are a near-daily event in the area when viewing conditions are suitable.

Over the Easter holidays, the calm waters off Galley Head produced basking shark, harbour porpoises, Risso's dolphins and of course minke whales, while IWDG colleagues diving off Malin Head, Co Donegal, also saw minke whales.

So, there you have it. Again, there's a Cork bias, but you will notice that it's not as pronounced as it has been in the past. As interest in cetacean-watching and recording grows, counties like Waterford and Wexford are now producing sightings that are equally noteworthy, while a major IWDG drive is resulting in increased coverage along the Antrim and Down coasts which are beginning to produce some interesting results. Let us know if you'd like to become involved.

Fin whale: a species rarely seen fluking



© Killian Mullarney

Whales and plankton

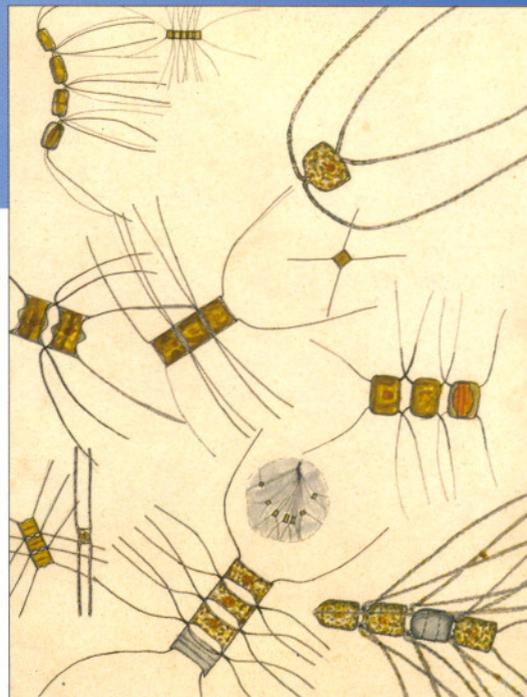
By Cilian Roden

At sea, the expression "All flesh is grass" loosely translates as "Everything eats phytoplankton." In other words, those parts of the sea which are poor in plankton will not be suitable for large concentrations of fish, birds or even whales.

In a general way, that is what we find. The areas of great algal growth, such as the Antarctic, the Peru upwelling and the Grand Banks off Canada, are also areas of immense fish populations. But why should some parts of the sea be rich in plankton while other areas such as the Sargasso are so poor that a white disc lowered into the water can be seen 50m below the boat? The answer is largely that where wind and currents bring deep, cold, nutrient-rich water to the surface, the mixture of light and nutrients allows algae to flourish. Conversely, areas of calm, warm water are nearly always poor in plankton.

There is no need to go to Peru to see upwelling. Off the southwest coast of Ireland, it has become clear that a form of cold-water upwelling can occur. In very windy summers, large areas of plankton-rich cold water stretch from Cape Clear east to Clonakilty, and even in calmer summers, a band of colder water runs along the south coast. Separating this cold water from warmer water offshore is a type of front or boundary. At present, the south coast area is of great interest because it is known to produce an alga which is toxic to humans and affects shellfish farming.

Long before aquaculture became established, however, the area was renowned for its fisheries. In the Middle Ages, the O'Driscoll chieftains taxed foreign fishermen who fished along the south coast. After the Cromwellian Wars, English settlers were drawn to the area because of its large pilchard stocks. Today, it is well-known as an area rich in seabirds – and in the last five years baleen whales as well.



© Cilian Roden

Plankton: the base of the oceanic food chain

We know about the whales due to long hours of sea-watching by Pádraig Whooley, and Colin Barnes' observations at sea. What we don't know is why the whales come to this area. Food is probably a good starting point in trying to answer the question. It would be easy to tack together a hypothesis that upwelling is known to occur along the south coast, upwelling produces lots of plankton, the seabirds are evidence of this extra production and, obviously, the whales are there to feed on the plankton bonanza. But is this the case?

In 2003, I was part of a team organised by Simon Berrow, Geoff Oliver and Pádraig Whooley whose aim was to obtain some data on the whales and their environment. We went out to sea on three occasions, in July, September, and November. Not only did we see fin (*Balaenoptera physalus*) and humpback (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) whales, but we recorded the water temperature, salinity, plankton, fish, birds and upwelling. We are still working on the results, but a number of points can already be made. The whales only appear towards the end of summer, long after the maximum abundance of the smaller plankton. As Colin Barnes has observed, the whales are often seen in association with dense marks on the echo-sounder, probably shoals of small fish. When the position of all whale sightings is plotted, they seem to cluster close to the average position of the boundary between warm and cold water.

Much more to learn

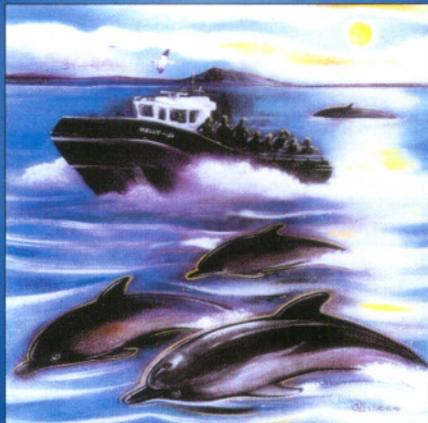
So, we suspect that whales feed not on small plankton but possibly on small fish, and these fish in turn are connected to the upwelling of water. Many points remain to be established before this idea can be accepted. Firstly, do we have enough data on whale distribution to be sure that the whales are concentrated off the south coast – perhaps they are as abundant off Mayo but no one has looked enough? Secondly, even off Cork, can we be sure that the whales stay close to the coast? Perhaps they also occur further out but are harder to see. Thirdly, what are the dense marks seen on the echo-sounder? Krill or euphausiid shrimp are whale food par excellence but are hard to sample – could they be part of the whales' diet off southwest Cork? In fact, are we certain that the whales come for food at all? Perhaps there are other reasons for their arrival.

So, even though the idea that the upwelling off Cork brings the whales is attractive, we cannot be sure until a lot more is known about the movements, distribution and feeding habits of the whales themselves.

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Míol Mór 2004

First IWDG Whale Conference – 24-26th September 2004



Humpback whale (© William Helps).

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) is holding its first International Whale Conference - Míol Mór 2004 (Míol Mór means large whale) this September.

The theme of the conference is to put the recent discovery of the presence of fin and humpback whales off the coast of County Cork into an international perspective. We are bringing together the foremost authorities on humpback and fin whales in the Northwest Atlantic – namely Phil Clapham and Martine Bérubé – together with Simone Panigada, who has worked with fin whales in the Mediterranean, and Greg Donovan, Head of Science at the International Whaling Commission.

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group will present the results of four years' monitoring of large whales off County Cork and current research aimed at determining what is attracting these whales to the Irish coast.

The conference will hold the premier of the documentary film *Cape Clear to Cape Verdes (CC2CV)*. This film was shot during 2003 by Tony Whelan in collaboration with the IWDG and tells the story of humpback whales in Ireland and their possible breeding grounds in the Cape Verdes off West Africa.

It promises to be a stimulating and exciting conference for everybody interested in whales in Ireland and the northeast Atlantic.

Profiles of invited speakers

Phil Clapham, NOAA, Woods Hole, USA



Phil Clapham directs the Large Whale Biology Program at the Northeast Fisheries Science Centre in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. He has more than twenty years' experience with cetaceans, and at one time

or another has worked with most species of large whales in various places worldwide. Prior to his current position, he was at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC, and before that directed a long-term study of humpback whales at the Centre of Coastal Studies in Massachusetts. He holds a PhD in biology from the University of Aberdeen and has advised several governments and other bodies on whale research and conservation. He currently serves on the Board of Governors of the Society for Marine Mammology. Phil has published three books and about a hundred referee'd papers on cetaceans.

Martine Bérubé, University of Berkeley, California, USA

Martine is a research scientist at the Conservation Genetics laboratory of the University of California in Berkeley. After completing her biology degree she worked from 1985 to 1992 with Richard Sears at the Mingan Island Conservation Society. Her fieldwork oscillates from the Gulf of St Lawrence in summer and the Sea of Cortez during winter. Her doctorate at McGill University involved genetic analyses to identify the different North Atlantic fin whale populations. As her work is now primarily carried out in the laboratory (data analysis, writing of scientific papers, laboratory management) she sometimes feels far-removed from whales!



Greg Donovan, International Whaling Commission, Cambridge, England



Greg Donovan is Head of Science at the International Whaling Commission, based in Cambridge UK. He is also editor of the *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management*. His fieldwork

has taken him to many parts of the world, including Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Alaska and Peru, where he has also taken delight in establishing small outposts of lovers of traditional Irish music. His special research interests include population abundance estimation and population dynamics, particularly in the context of conservation and management. In recent years this has focused particularly on the management of aboriginal subsistence whaling and issues related to by-catch reduction. He believes that effective international conservation requires co-operation, dialogue between scientists, managers and users, and a respect for different views, rather than confrontation.

Simone Panigada, Sea Mammal Research Unit, St Andrews, Scotland

Simone is vice-president of Tethys and Coordinator of the Tethys Scientific Advisory Board. Since 1992, Simone has collaborated with Tethys and with the Mediterranean Fin Whale Project, where, since 1998, he has been co-ordinating the radio-tracking with 'Velocity-Time-Depth Recorder' of fin whales in the Ligurian Sea. In recent years he has contributed to a Bio-acoustical Workshop organised by Cornell University and worked with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in the United States. At present, he holds a Marie Curie Fellowship for a two-year post-doc at the Sea Mammal Research Unit at the University of Saint Andrews, Scotland.



Outline Conference Programme

Friday: 20:00 Registration
21:00 Premier of Irish humpback whale documentary - CC2CV

Saturday: 10:00 Welcome and Introduction
10:15 Phil Clapham: "Humpback whales in the NW Atlantic"
11:00 Coffee break
11:30 Pádraig Whooley: "Large whales off west Cork"
12:00 Martine Bérubé: "Fin whales in the Gulf of St Lawrence"
12:45 Lunch
14:00 Field excursions (boat and land-based whalewatching)
20:30 Conference dinner
22:00 After-dinner presentation (invited speaker and musician)

Sunday: 10:00 Registration
10:15 Greg Donovan: "Management of fin and humpback whales"
11:00 Coffee break
11:30 IWDG: "Large whale survey off the south coast of Ireland"
12:00 Simone Paningada: "Fin whales in the Mediterranean"
12:45 Lunch
14:00 Field excursions (boat and land-based whalewatching)
18:00 Close of conference

HOW TO BOOK: Places are limited, so early booking is recommended. Booking forms are available from www.iwdg.ie/miormor/booking or from Frances Bermingham, Einagh, Moyasta, Kilrush, Co Clare, Mobile: 087-238 8433, email Frances.Bermingham@iwdg.ie

ISCOPE heads north



Simon Berrow instructs trainees

By Melina McMullan

As a keen diver with a great interest in the marine environment, I was looking forward to the ISCOPE training day on 23rd February 2004. I had always wanted to improve my whale and dolphin identification skills, so it was with great anticipation that I headed to Portrush to attend the training day organised by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group.

Together with delegates from various government and non-government bodies covering the geographical north of Ireland, we marvelled at the knowledge and enthusiasm of Pádraig Whooley and Simon Berrow of the IWDG, as they used slide shows and hands-on demonstrations to show us how to identify cetaceans found in Irish waters.

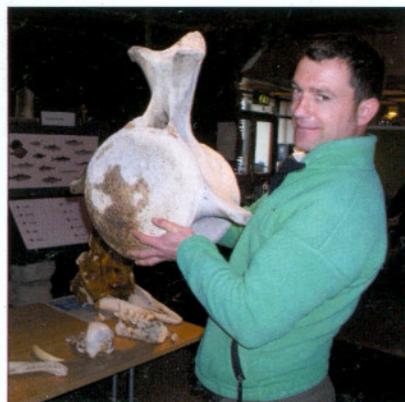
I was surprised to learn that of the 80 or so species of whales and dolphins worldwide, 24 of them have been found in the waters around Ireland. It was amazing to realise that we have the opportunity to watch almost one-third of the world's whale and dolphin species right here

on our doorstep – a realisation that was brought home dramatically as we were all called outside just in time to see a harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) break the surface of the water in its slow rolling fashion!

The ISCOPE training day also made me aware that there is a lack of information, and indeed knowledge, about cetaceans in the north of Ireland. Having learned the basic skills required to observe, identify, record and report cetaceans found around our shores, I am looking forward to getting involved in local watches. I am delighted that soon we will be taking part in constant-effort sightings, which will contribute to the understanding and conservation of these magnificent mammals.

● Melina McMullan is with the Environment & Heritage Service, Northern Ireland

Hugh Thurgate of the National Trust sizes up a whale vertebra.



Atlas of Cetacean Distribution in North-west European Waters

Simon Berrow

At long last, after months of waiting, the combined joint atlas of cetacean distribution has finally been published. Three very different datasets, from the dedicated pan-European SCANS survey to the extensive, largely voluntary SeaWatch Foundation sighting schemes, have all been brought together to provide effort-related maps of cetacean distribution and relative abundance.

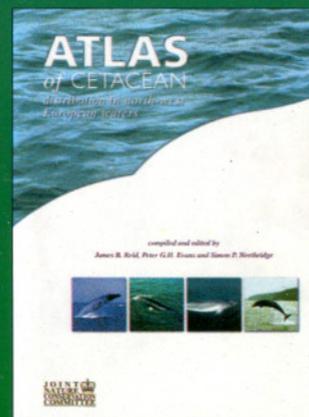
From an Irish perspective, this provides the most up-to-date map of cetaceans in Irish waters. Data from Irish waters was collected during a four-year project that ran between 1994 and 1997, which mainly targeted seabird distribution; a dedicated line-transect survey of the Celtic Sea in July 1994; around 611 hours of opportunistic watches (mostly during 1991-98); and casual sightings mainly from the southwest and east coasts.

Much of the Irish data was collected during the summer (May to August) and there was limited coverage in some areas, thus the maps are not as extensive as for Great Britain and the North Sea. Coverage off the Irish west and northwest coasts is particularly low and more effort going into these areas might significantly change our understanding of cetacean distribution around Ireland. Many of the recent sightings of the rarer species (blue, false killer and humpback and fin whales) collected by the IWDG are not included as this atlas has been in production for some considerable period.

The atlas provides a baseline for cetacean recording in Ireland. It is the most comprehensive publication to date but also emphasises the lack of information on basic cetacean distribution and relative abundance in Ireland – essential information for management of the Irish EEZ. The current ISCOPE project aims to increase coverage along the west and northwest coasts and enable a finer-scale atlas to be prepared of Irish waters in the future.

Reid, J.B., Evans, P.G.H. and Northridge, S.P. (2003). Published by JNCC, Peterborough, England PE1 1JY. ISBN 1861075502.

Editor's note - this publication can be viewed on-line at: www.jncc.gov.uk/Publications/cetaceanatlas/default.htm#download



STRANDINGS

● By **Simon Berrow**

Why record stranded cetaceans?

Often a stranded whale or dolphin is a person's first encounter with the rich diversity of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) inhabiting Irish waters. Usually stranded animals are dead when located, but around 5-10 live strandings and the occasional mass stranding are reported to the IWDG annually.

Early stranding records

Stranded cetaceans have been reported in the scientific literature since at least 1750, but even some earlier descriptions from the 15th century can be reliably identified to species level. Coastal communities often took advantage of stranded animals, and when fresh, removed meat for human consumption or for feeding to dogs. Some live-stranded animals were killed for this purpose. A report of a sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) stranded in Roundstone in 1820 describes "considerable difficulty in compassing his death ... obliged to resource to a hatchet, which was hammered into its skull and, even after this barbarous but necessary operation, the poor animal lingered five hours before life could be expelled." Indeed, ambergris (a waxy substance found in whale intestines) has recently been found in a number of archaeological excavations, which strongly suggests it must have been a valued commodity.

Since the IWDG was established in 1991, the recording of stranded animals has been more systematic and many have been recovered for post-mortem examination.

Why post-mortem a stranded cetacean?

Stranded cetaceans can be an important source of information on their life history, including age, diet, reproductive rates and parasite load, as well as providing samples for pollutant, genetic and a wide range of other studies. Some individuals have been examined by veterinary pathologists and the cause of death determined. The killer whale (*Orcinus orca*) that died in Cork Harbour in August 2002 died of septicemia in the lower jaw caused by very badly eroded teeth. All individuals in a mass stranding of 19 white-sided dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*) in Killala, Co Mayo, were post-mortem'd and life history parameters determined. The largest animal in the group (a male) had a perforated aortic valve



Sperm whale stranded at Tramore, Co Donegal

leading to a thinning of the heart wall, causing a rupture and subsequent heart failure. We know little about the social ecology of white-sided dolphins, but maybe this dolphin was the patriarch and, when it stranded, the group including pregnant females and new-born calves stranded too.

Can the records be used to assess the status of cetaceans in Irish waters?

A review of stranding records over the period 1901-1995 showed a steady increase in the number reported since the 1970s. This was largely attributed to increased recording effort, which makes it difficult to use stranding records to assess the status of cetaceans in Irish waters. The number of reported strandings continues to increase, with 108 records received during 2003 – the largest number in any year since recording started.

Stranding records, however, are considered useful for identifying unusual stranding events, such as those caused by epizootics (such as virus outbreaks) or high mortality caused by fisheries bycatch. The increase in the incidence of striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*) strandings may be caused by increasing sea temperatures as this species is usually more abundant in warmer waters further south.

Mass strandings, where two or more animals are found washed up together, are regularly reported, but the stranding records can identify whether these events are unusual. For example, four Cuvier's beaked whales (*Ziphius cavirostris*) were reported during a six-week period between March and May, 2001. The mean stranding rate for this species is one every four years, so this can be described as unusual. What may have caused such an event is not known.

Striped dolphin (left), and common dolphin (right): once colouring is lost, they can be told apart only by presence or absence of an upper palate groove



Minke at Giant's Causeway

By Gary Burrows

Port-na-Spaniagh, on the north Antrim coast, is best known as the wreck site of the Spanish galleass *La Girona*, which perished in October 1588. In May 2003, the fresh carcass of a minke whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) washed into the same boulder bay. The path leading to this eastern extreme of the Giant's Causeway is largely inaccessible and, as a result, the carcass was left completely to the elements without interference.

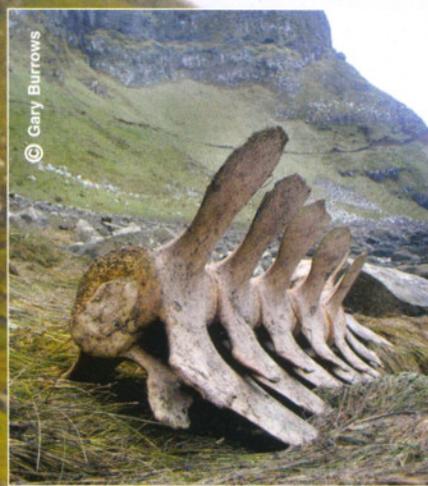
Within a week of the stranding, favourable sea conditions allowed local IWDG members Jim Allen and Robin Ruddock to access the minke by sea. A small inflatable boat enabled them to measure, sex and photograph the whale for IWDG stranding records. The whale was observed to have been a female, approximately eight metres in length, and the sixth minke to have stranded on the north coast (Antrim and Derry) in the last decade.

Returning on separate occasions in late December, Robin and I were impressed to observe how quickly the bulky carcass had been reduced

to clean skeletal remains. High summer tides had pushed the minke well up the beach where the action of waves, combined with marine and terrestrial animal activity, resulted in the rapid breakdown of the carcass.

Although the baleen plates and finer bones were lost to the sea on this occasion, the skull, rostrum, mandible and vertebrae were recovered from the shore in December and placed safely beyond the reach of the highest tides. A number of loose ribs and vertebrae were recovered to be cleaned and used for educational work.

Our hope is to return to the stranding site by boat in early spring to recover the heavy skull and part of the column of vertebrae (still attached by



© Gary Burrows

connective tissue) for interpretative work with Bushmills Education Centre and Portrush Countryside Centre.



© Gary Burrows

Stranding schemes are essential for recording rare species such as beaked whales (Ziphiids). A deep-water beaked whale washed up in Wexford as recently as 1st April, and initially thought to be Gervais beaked whale (*Mesoplodon europaeus*), was later found to be a young male Sowerby's whale (*Mesoplodon bidens*).

How to identify stranded cetaceans

Identifying stranded cetaceans, like identifying any animal or plant, requires systematic recording of a range of characteristics, enabling you to eliminate some potential species and positively identify the right one. Some species (e.g. beaked whales) may require detailed examination of skull characteristics, but most species in Irish waters can be easily identified by inspecting only a few features.

Size – an obvious and simple way of distinguishing between a harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) and a fin whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*)! But also some dolphins such as bottlenose (*Tursiops truncatus*) or white-beaked (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*) are bulky, robust animals, and the length of a beaked whale can eliminate some possible species. Is the animal young? A neonate perhaps. You can check general age by the degree of fusing of the animal's skull.

Coloration – some species such as common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) and white-sided dolphin have distinctive coloration and this can still be visible, even when the animal has been dead a while.

Head – shape is very useful. Does the animal have a long nose (beak), or is it blunt? Does it have a protruding beak, bulbous or a gently sloping forehead?

Teeth – How many, what size and what shape are they? Have they erupted or are they still covered in the gum? If no teeth are present, how many tooth sockets can you count, and are some missing due to damage to the tip of the beak? Does it have baleen?

Limbs – what size and shape are the flippers? Is the tailstock truncated at the end? How far do the throat grooves of a baleen whale reach along the belly?

Skulls – in order to identify a species from its skull it is usually necessary to compare different skulls to identify distinctive features. However, if you know which features are distinctive to which species, then they can be very useful. For example, the upper palate of a striped dolphin is smooth while the common dolphin has two deep grooves on either side. So, although both have a long beak and the tooth count is the same, simply checking a stranded animal for this feature will identify it accurately to species level.

Using stranded cetaceans for monitoring

As part of the IWDG's commitment to ISCOPE, we are trying to develop and expand the stranding scheme, especially along the northwest coasts. For monitoring purposes, only the species, length, and sex of stranded animals is required. With a little experience, even those stranded in poor condition can be identified, often using skull characteristics to identify the species. If stranded in good condition, the IWDG will inform University College Cork, who have a contract to recover and post-mortem animals to determine life-history parameters.

All stranding records are posted, with photographs if available, onto the IWDG stranding page of the website (www.iwdg.ie/strandings.asp). New web search facilities, developed under ISCOPE, will enable detailed searching of the database, including mapping options.

The IWDG is trying to create an extensive network of observers which will run for many years, as only with long-term monitoring can trends, including status and abundance, be assessed.

STRANDINGS

© Sinead Murphy



Diagnostic tooth of Sowerby's beaked whale

Sowerby's beaked whale strands in Wexford

By Jim Hurley

On Thursday 1 April 2004, Terry Lawton phoned to report the presence of a "dead whale or dolphin" at Ballyteige, Co Wexford. I visited the location, found the animal and took more than twenty photographs and a number of measurements.

The remains of the whale were lying on the shore of Ballyteige Bay, 250m west of Ballyteige Burrow Nature Reserve. Its position low on the beach suggested that the animal had been washed in within the previous few days. The body had six sets of deep wounds (see photo). The cuts were double and curved, suggesting impact with a ship's propellers. The remains were decomposing, bloated and oozing. Great Black-backed Gulls were picking at the flesh.

Length: Overall body length was 3.7m (tip of snout to trailing edge of tail flukes). Though the remains were bloated, the body appeared to be somewhat compressed laterally.

Colour: The whale was a uniform black in colour with no distinguishing marks or patterns. The underside was paler, varying from pink to maroon. There was a small, isolated faint pale area in front of the flipper, giving the impression that the dark flipper was connected to the dark back by a dark band of colour.

Jaws: The animal had a very narrow lower jaw and a long, slim snout (270mm from the tip of the snout to the corner of the mouth). The tip of the lower jaw very marginally protruded. No teeth could be located in the jaws. There were two long throat grooves present between the lower jaws. The lower jaws were uniformly black in colour.

Melon: The whale did not have a melon. There was a very slight protuberance on the profile of the brow, but it was insufficient to describe it as 'bulbous' or even 'bulging.'

Blowhole: The blowhole was located in a shallow depression 429mm from the tip of the snout. It was open and weeping a slight discharge.

Flipper: The exposed left flipper was relatively small for the size of the body, was set very low on the body, was oval in shape and was sharply pointed. Maximum width to length along the longest axis was exactly 1:3. While the flank was damaged close to the point of insertion, a flipper pocket could clearly be distinguished in the body wall.

Scratches: The flanks had innumerable scratch marks; these were 50-200mm long. The scratches did not form any pattern to

indicate raking. No external parasites or marks left by parasites were noted.

Sex: The external genitalia indicated that the animal was female.

Dorsal fin: A dorsal fin was present, located 2.3m from the tip of the snout and 1.4m from the tail flukes, that is, almost two-thirds of the way along the back. The fin was small, triangular, sickle-shaped and shark-like in appearance. The vertical-height-to-length-of-base ratio was 1:2.2. The uppermost edge of the fin had a small, bite-like depression.

Tail flukes: The tail flukes were uniformly black. They did not have a central notch. The trailing edge was relatively straight with the lateral tips strongly swept backwards.

The animal was obviously a beaked whale, but identification sources to hand were insufficiently detailed to allow the whale to be keyed to species level with any confidence.

IWDG personnel from Dublin travelled to Wexford on 2nd April to see if they could assist in the identification of the whale, but got a call that it had washed out overnight. Later, upon investigation of the skull by UCC, the beaked whale turned out to be a young male Sowerby's (*Mesoplodon bidens*), identified by lower jaw traits. This species has been confirmed only six times in Ireland, with three or four other possible stranding records.



Sowerby's beaked whale, Wexford, April 2004

© Jim Hurley

Common dolphins rescue

By Chris Wilson

On Monday 1st March 2004, I got a report of an adult and young dolphin who looked like they were about to be stuck in the mud in the Burrow at Rosslare Back Strand in Wexford. I immediately phoned Kevin McCormick of IWDG and Alan McGuire from South East Radio and headed to the Hopeland causeway where members of the National Coastguard and inshore RNLI crews were already in the water near the stranded common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*). A falling tide and failing light emphasised the need to work quickly. It was immediately obvious that the adult was much more distressed than the young animal, and it was decided to remove both animals together to deeper water. The animals were lifted with a sling into a tarpaulin, into the back of a van and driven to the tip of the Burrow where Kevin headed straight into the freezing sea, supporting the adult as the sling was removed. In fact, it was getting quite critical as the adult was so upset. The Coastguard and RNLI lads released the juvenile and it was immediately obvious that it was having no major problems. As it swam

towards the adult, that animal perked up and then they were both side by side and swimming for themselves. We were all breathing more comfortably. Both animals headed for open water and the sea - success. The Zodiac kept a good distance, allowing the animals room to re-orientate - all looked well. The proof, of course, is that there was no report of a further stranding - and all services were well aware and on the lookout over the next couple of days.

Congratulations really are in order - the Coastguard, the Inshore RNLI, the IWDG and the local community worked together on this potential calamity. Of course the experience for us all was terrific - especially with a successful rescue. For us all to be so closely involved with these beautiful animals and to know that we had succeeded was a magical reward.

• An initial report was present on: <http://www.iwdg.ie/articles.asp?art=1137&cat=1>

• Christopher J Wilson, Wexford Wildfowl Reserve Warden

Live porpoise stranding

By Gavin Duffy & David McLaughlin

On Wednesday 14th April 2004, Environment & Heritage Service staff at the Quoile Countryside Centre received a call from Exploris Aquarium in Portaferry, saying that a harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) was stranded on mudflats at Ringhaddy, near Killinchy on Strangford Lough, Co Down.

The animal had been seen for some 30 minutes swimming with difficulty in shallow water over mudflats. It soon became stranded in a channel on a dropping tide. We soon arrived at the location and met the resident who had made the initial call. The tide was heading out and the porpoise had managed to get well and truly 'stuck in the mud.' To try and get it further out

into what was left of the tide in the bay would have been pointless as it was very shallow and the porpoise would have inevitably got stuck again.

So, after being advised by the locals of deeper water further along the coast, we managed to get the porpoise onto a length of wet carpet and place it into the back of our vehicle. On arriving at the deeper section of water a couple of miles away, we placed the porpoise in the water, where after getting its bearings for several seconds, it made off like a torpedo – happy days!

- For further details on how to deal with live stranded cetaceans please see our website at www.iwdg.ie.



Species Profile

Harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*)

The harbour porpoise is one of six members of the porpoise family found worldwide, and is Ireland's only porpoise. Harbour porpoises are our smallest cetacean, and their 1.4-1.9m frame, combined with their relaxed behaviour, makes them difficult to observe in sea states greater than 2. For this reason, diving gannets and seabirds, which often associate with feeding porpoises, may be your best clue to their whereabouts.

Observations are generally of their small, dark back, which rolls out of the water, giving them a unique profile. Their heads and tail flukes rarely show on surfacing. Because of their slow movement, they generally do not generate the splashing more associated with dolphins. In calm conditions, their short, sharp blow may be heard but is rarely visible. When active, they may surface frequently and younger animals may even breach or be seen surfing ocean swells. They may spend inactive periods resting or logging on the surface.

Porpoises are shy, and will neither bow-ride boats nor interact with humans. They are usually seen in small groups of 2-5 individuals, although larger feeding aggregations of 20-30+ can occur. Whale-watchers should have little problem distinguishing them from any other cetacean in Irish waters.

The porpoise is the most frequently reported species to the IWDG sighting scheme. The best places to see them are invariably from headlands and bays, but they can appear in most marine habitats. Sightings are common from June through the autumn/winter. Lower encounter rates from well-watched sites in spring suggests they move offshore between March and June, to calving/breeding grounds.

Porpoises have a varied fish diet but they may also take squid and octopus. Their spade-shaped teeth (dolphin's are conical) are well-suited for grabbing and holding prey, which is turned head-first and swallowed whole, ensuring fish spines don't stick in their throat.

Harbour porpoise numbers are declining for a number of reasons, such as fisheries interactions (gear entanglement), pollution and habitat disturbance. They are found on Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive and, as such, Ireland is required to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) that meet the ecological requirements of the species. ■

Sperm whale calf live-strands

By Simon Berrow

On 4th May, 2004, a whale was observed swimming close to the shore off Spanish Point, Co Clare, amidst large surfing waves. Local IWDG members, NPWS ranger Brian Duffy, local vet John Underhill and members of the local coastguard quickly assembled to find the whale was being pushed onto the beach. The local fire brigade aided in assembling the rescue pontoons but the whale managed to re-float itself and headed slowly out to sea. Despite stranding twice within a 30-minute period, the whale re-floated itself on both occasions and eventually swam away from the shore on an ebbing tide. A watch was posted at a nearby headland but the whale was not seen again.

This whale subsequently washed up dead at Quilty, Co Clare, where it was identified as a very young male sperm calf (5.8m long). Sperm whales measure 4-4.5m at birth, and although lactation lasts for up to two years, calves begin to take solid food within the first year. A post-mortem examination found a small volume of milk and around 500 squid beaks within the

whale's stomach.

This is the third record of a stranded sperm whale in County Clare, with 52 records for Ireland. There has been an increase in the number of strandings of sperm whales in Ireland and Britain since the 1960s, especially on the Scottish coasts. Of these records most (90%) were greater than 10m in length as usually only adult, male sperm whales occur off the Irish and British coasts as females are usually much further south in warmer waters. The only other strandings of such a small sperm whale (<6m) in the North Atlantic was in 1916 in Roundstone, Co Galway, and in September 1980 in Marazion in Cornwall, England. This was a very rare event, and what a sperm whale calf was doing thousands of miles away from where it should be is anybody's guess.

We would like to thank the rapid and efficient response of the rescue services in County Clare (Doolin and Lahinch Coastguards and the Fire Service) to the live-stranded incident, and local veterinary John Underhill for his assistance.



ShOP Surveys

● By **Dave Wall**



Celtic Explorer alongside in Dublin.

The first thing you may have noticed is that we have suffered a name change: IWDG Ferry Surveys has been replaced by the **IWDG ShOP Surveys Unit**. The name change has been made to reflect the wider remit of these surveys, which now take place not only on board commercial ferries but also on board the national offshore research vessel R.V. *Celtic Explorer*. ShOP stands for Ship of Opportunity... a name given to any vessel we manage to scrounge our way aboard for the purposes of surveying whales and dolphins!

Indeed, the past few months has seen a number of exciting developments in our surveys, with some good news and some not so good. Sad news first... April marked the end of the line for our Dublin-Cherbourg survey as P&O closed the route and sold the *European Ambassador* to another ferry company (she is on her way north to ply the waters of the Baltic). I would like to take this opportunity to thank the officers and crew of the *Ambassador* for their friendliness and support during the past two years. Every surveyor we had on board and many of the passengers we talked to, without fail, were impressed by their friendliness. We also wish Captain Nick Spencer well on the occasion of his retirement. We are optimistic of recommencing surveys to Cherbourg in the near future and hopefully a new route on the north Irish Sea.

Onto some good news... this year at the European Cetacean Society, the Atlantic Research Coalition (ARC, a collaboration of partners conducting ShOP surveys in the UK, Spain and Ireland) presented a poster on ShOP surveys in European waters and launched a review of ARC surveys during 2001 (this report will be available on the IWDG website very soon). Both the poster and the review were well-received, and shortly after the conference, we welcomed ARC's newest member on board when Colin McLeod of the University of Aberdeen joined the team. Colin conducts surveys on ferries in Scotland and the Northern Isles, and ARC surveys now span the waters from the Northern Isles to the Bay of Biscay.

More good news comes in the form of a Heritage Council grant which will enable the IWDG to conduct cetacean surveys on board the R.V. *Celtic Explorer* from May to September this year. These surveys follow on the successful completion of three surveys on the *Explorer* during October '03 and January and March of this year (reports available on website). The *Explorer* is helping us to survey areas from which we have very little data, especially regions off the northwest coast.

Yet more good news comes from Irish Ferries, who have generously agreed to sponsor a new survey route from Rosslare to Pembroke (this is in addition to our Dublin-Holyhead survey

on board the *Ulysses*). This survey will be in conjunction with the Sea Trust organisation in Wales, who will carry out sister surveys on StenaLine from Fishguard to Rosslare. This collaboration marks an important step to jointly monitor cetacean movements in the waters between southeast Ireland and south Wales.

So... lots going on and a very busy summer ahead for the ShOP Surveys Unit. Remember that those with a bit of whale-watching experience and good sea-legs can join in with these surveys. For more information and contact details, please see our website.



Risso's dolphins

Risso's dolphin photo-ID project

By **Nick Channon**

Last summer saw numerous sightings of Risso's dolphins in the Dublin to Wexford coastal area of the Irish Sea. The majority of sightings were reported by IWDG members during land-based watches. There were also a handful of encounters at sea during which IWDG was able to photograph the dolphins at close quarters (you should always aim to get close-up photographs of the dorsal fin).

Risso's dolphin photo-ID projects have been successfully carried out in the Azores and California in the past. With this in mind, IWDG is hoping to establish a network of members to watch for and report sightings of Risso's dolphins from Dublin Bay to Wexford. IWDG hopes that this will enable us to obtain photos of the dolphins for ID purposes.

Risso's dolphins develop distinctive markings on the body and particularly on the dorsal fin as they age. These markings are essential for identifying individual dolphins. Risso's dolphins are believed to live in fairly stable groups and as a result can be identified from relatively few good photos of individual dolphins.

IWDG hopes to develop this project methodically over the next few years. Please report any sightings of Risso's dolphins in this area to nickferries@eircom.net.

Risso's dolphin and calf



Marine biodiversity displays

Environment and Heritage Service (NI) has just completed work on a number of biodiversity displays. These are designed to raise the profile of a number of marine species which have been prioritised for conservation action in Northern Ireland, specifically cetaceans, harbour porpoise, basking shark and common seal. The displays on cetaceans and harbour porpoise can be borrowed for temporary use at IWDG/ISCOPE events.

Each biodiversity display provides a simple and colourful overview of the species or group, with vital statistics, identification, where and when to spot them and conservation action. Observers are encouraged to report sightings online on the IWDG website (www.iwdg.ie).

Thanks go to the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group who supplied many high-quality photographs for both interpretative displays. Any IWDG member who would like to make use of these should contact Gary Burrows on 028 905 46688 or Louise McAlavey 028 905 46448 (048 if ringing from the Republic).

MARINE MAMMALS OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Harbour Porpoise

Phocoena phocoena

The harbour porpoise is the smallest, most widespread and common cetacean around the coast of Northern Ireland. Seasonal movements occur with porpoises observed mostly inshore in summer and autumn, and offshore in winter months.



WHAT IS IT LIKE?

- Maximum length: 1.1 metres
- Black dorsal finning
- One dorsal finning finning

HOW TO SPOT THEM

- Look for a small, dark, rounded dorsal fin
- Look for a small, dark, rounded dorsal fin
- Look for a small, dark, rounded dorsal fin
- Look for a small, dark, rounded dorsal fin
- Look for a small, dark, rounded dorsal fin
- Look for a small, dark, rounded dorsal fin

CONSERVATION ACTION

- Annex II species under the EU Habitats Directive
- Priority Species under the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy
- The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) operates a public reporting scheme to monitor all cetacean activity off Northern Ireland - please report all sightings online at www.iwdg.ie

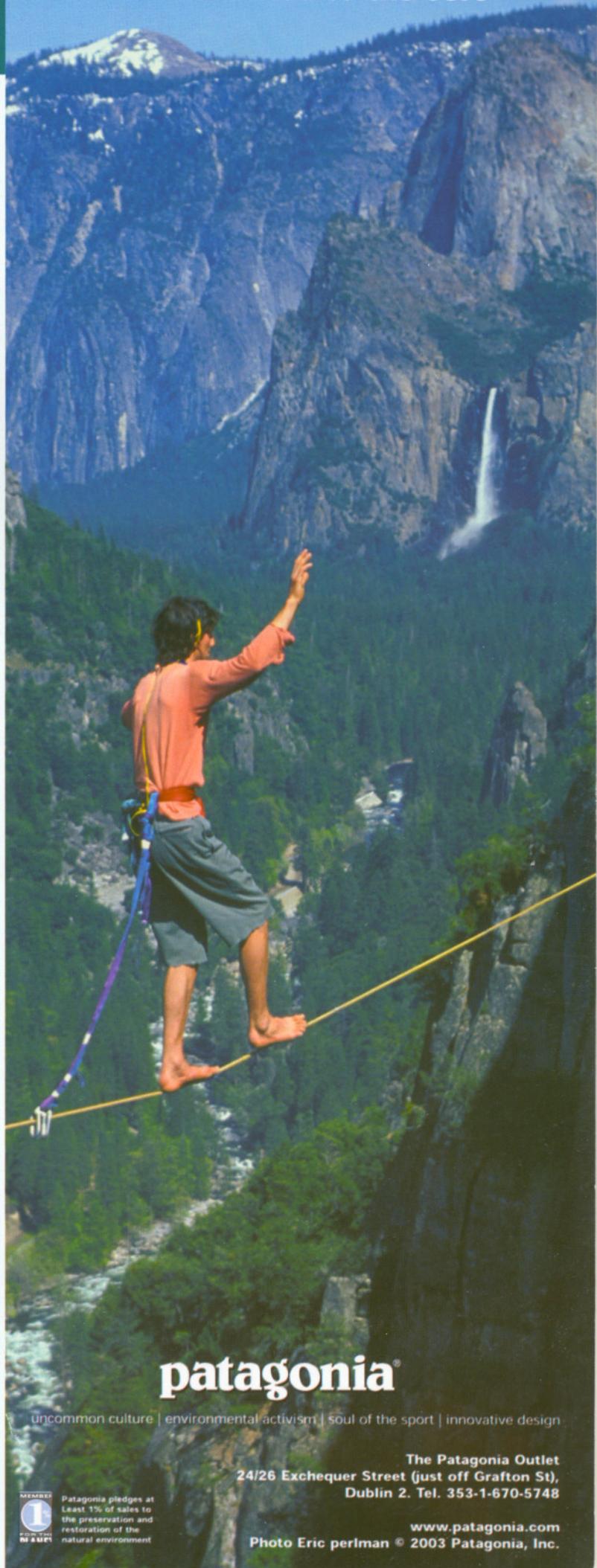
GLOBAL THREATS TO HARBOUR PORPOISE

- Accidental entanglement in fishing gear - gillnets, trawls and seines
- Marine pollution - persistent pollutants may affect reproduction and immune systems
- Disturbance from powerboats and jet-ski's



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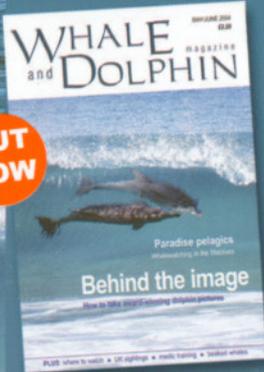
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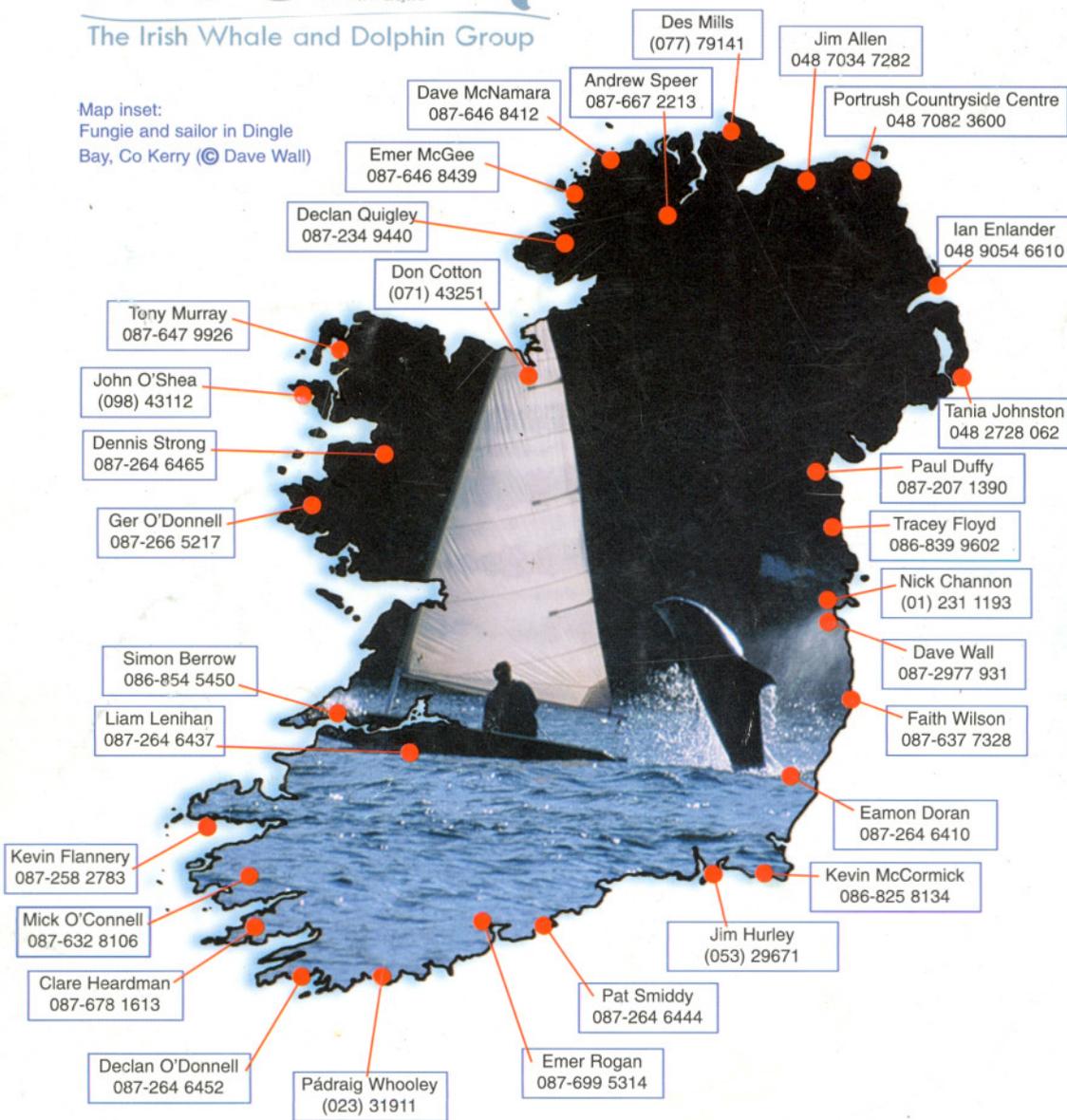


● IWDG contacts around the coast

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group has 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.



Map inset:
Fungie and sailor in Dingle
Bay, Co Kerry (© Dave Wall)



Bottlenose dolphins

Sightings

Dr Simon Berrow,
Merchants Quay,
Kilrush, Co Clare
Mobile: 086-854 5450
Email: simon.berrow@iwdg.ie

Strandings

Dave Wall
Tel: (01) 716 2261
Mobile: 087-297 7931
Email: dave.wall@iwdg.ie
Dr Emer Rogan
Tel: (021) 490 4197
Mobile: 087-699 5314
Email: emer.rogan@iwdg.ie

Live strandings

Dúchas
(01) 647 2404
IWDG
(023) 31911
087-699 5314
086-854 5450
Irish Seal Sanctuary
(01) 835 4370

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Mission statement

The Irish Whale & Dolphin
Group (IWDG) is
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tion and better under-
standing of cetaceans
(whales, dolphins and
porpoise) in Irish waters
through study, education
and interpretation.

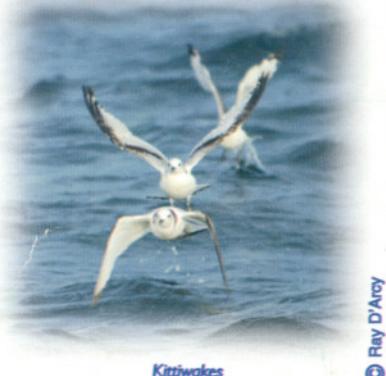
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Calling all southern seawatchers...

Bird observers in Cork have decided to resurrect the *Cork Bird Report* and are looking for records of *all* birds in Cork for the period 1996-2003 (inclusive of both). We are especially keen to receive records of common and resident species, so don't be deterred from getting in touch if you have just noted the odd passing Gannet! The deadline for submissions is the end of May 2004. Please spread the word.

Data can be submitted in paper format or electronically (a sample spreadsheet is available for those who wish to submit records in this way. This is the preferred format as it makes the job of entering data much simpler). Contact: Ciaran Cronin, 1A East View, East Hill, Cobh, Co Cork, (021) 4813 784 (H) or 087-640 8822, or by email at ciarcronin@eircom.net with any queries, or for further information.



Kittiwakes

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