

# Cape Verde Expedition 2006

In March 2006 the IWDG returned to Cape Verde, an island archipelago off West Africa, to once again try and locate Humpback Whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). It had been three years since the first Irish Humpback Whale Expedition and it took over one year to raise the necessary funds for Cape Verde 2006.

By Simon Berrow

In 2003, the IWDG, in collaboration with Joe Aston and Tony Whelan, sailed from Ireland to Cape Verde where we spent one month searching for Humpback Whales. We managed to obtain eleven fluke images, which were sent to the North Atlantic Humpback Whale Catalogue in Bar Harbour, Maine, in the US, to see if any of these whales had been photographed elsewhere in the North Atlantic, including Ireland. The expedition also formed the basis of a documentary film which was shown on RTÉ 2 on Christmas Day in 2004.

The aims of Cape Verde 2006 were similar to those of 2003; namely, to obtain more fluke images and sound recordings of Humpback Whales, but also to obtain tissue samples using a crossbow with a biopsy dart, to obtain recordings of Sperm Whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) codas and facilitate researchers from the Cape Verde.

The logistics of Cape Verde 2006, however, were different. A 46-foot yacht was chartered in the Cape Verde and skipper and crew flown out. For the first two weeks, the original team of skipper Joe Aston and Tony Whelan joined the expedition while IWDG Director Fiacc Ó Broilcháin was skipper during the second two weeks. Expedition leader Simon Berrow was joined by Dave Wall and Pádraig Whooley for the duration of the month-long expedition. A crew change half-way through meant we could invite more IWDG personnel (Mick O'Connell, Liam Lysaght and Jim Wilson) to join the team and also collaborating scientists Ricardo Antunes – who is carrying out a PhD on Sperm Whale codas – Zelinda Evora from the University of Mindelo, and Sao Vicente and Vanda Monteiro from the Cape Verde Fisheries Research Institute.

During the first two-week leg we surveyed sites not visited in 2003, including the island of Maio in the Leeward Islands. Local information

suggested Humpback Whales might use this island to the south when they are scarce at their more usual haunts further north in the Windward Islands.

The weather was as we expected for Cape Verde: wind force 5-6 from the NE, which meant the sea-state was favourable for surveying cetaceans for only 15% of the time. During 1,400km of sailing we had 22 encounters with six cetacean species, but only six of these encounters were of Humpbacks, with most being of dolphins.

The weather at the start of the second two-week leg was very good, with calm seas occurring for four days in a row – surely a record for Cape Verde. Visibility was poor, however, due to a huge sandstorm in the Sahara, smothering the Cape Verde in red dust. We had planned to spend more time surveying around Boavista, which is the best place to see Humpback Whales, and during 750km of sailing we had 16 encounters with cetaceans, of which 15 were with Humpback Whales.

In total, we recorded 42 Humpback Whales, of which 3-5 were off Maio, with the remainder off Boavista, but many of these were resightings, so the total number of individual whales encountered was much less. One individual sighted on 27 February was still off Boavista 14 days later. To hear singing Humpback Whales is one of nature's most magical experiences, but it proved difficult to locate singers, with only two recorded singing off Boavista and, surprisingly, one heard singing in deep water off Sao Nicolau while we were



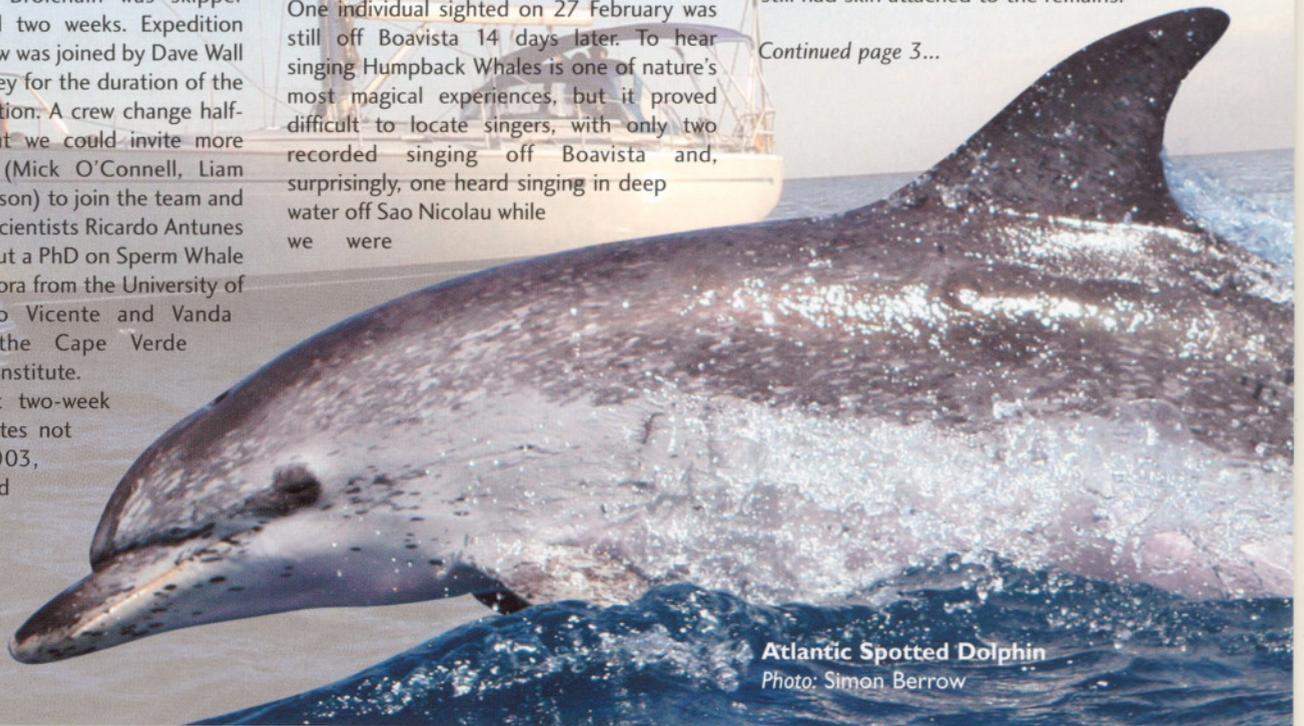
© Pádraig Whooley

Fluking Humpback Whale.

on passage, at night, to the island of Sal.

In addition to Humpback Whales, we obtained images of Bottlenose (*Tursiops truncatus*), Rough-toothed (*Steno bredanensis*), Short-snouted Spinner (*Stenella clymene*) and Pan-tropical Spotted Dolphins (*Stenella attenuata*) as well as Short-finned Pilot Whales (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*), which are useful for photo-identification. We also obtained acoustic recordings of Spotted, Bottlenose and Rough-toothed Dolphins and Sperm Whales but did not record any Sperm Whale codas. No biopsy samples were obtained from Humpback Whales, but we did sample 19 individual Melon-headed Whales (*Peponocephala electra*) from a mass stranding on St Luzia that had occurred two years previously but still had skin attached to the remains.

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Atlantic Spotted Dolphin  
Photo: Simon Berrow

## IWDG News

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### IWDG ADDRESS

#### Republic of Ireland:

IWDG, Merchants Quay,  
Kilrush, Co Clare, Ireland  
Email: [simon.berrow@iwdg.ie](mailto:simon.berrow@iwdg.ie)  
Website: [www.iwdg.ie](http://www.iwdg.ie)

#### Northern Ireland:

Ian Enlander, Commonwealth House,  
35, Castle Street, Belfast BT1 1GU  
Phone: 048 (028 in NI) 9054 6610  
Email: [ian.enlander@iwdg.ie](mailto:ian.enlander@iwdg.ie)

#### Text & Editor

Faith Wilson & Pádraig Whooley.  
Send your text to: The Editor, Faith Wilson,  
Hilltop Cottage, Kilcandra, Glenealy,  
Co Wicklow. Tel: 087-637 7328

#### Design & production

Cóilín MacLochlainn

### IWDG DIRECTORS

Frances Bermingham, Fiacc OBrolchain,  
Ian Enlander (chairman), Kevin McCormick,  
Vincent Murphy, Emer Rogan, Phyllis Ryan

### IWDG COMMITTEE

#### IWDG Co-ordinator:

Dr Simon Berrow

#### Secretary:

Pádraig Whooley  
Dereen, Rossmore, Clonakilty, Co Cork  
Tel: (023) 38761  
Email: [padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie](mailto:padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie)

#### Membership Secretary:

Mick O'Connell  
Coolcumisk, Beaufort, Killarney, Co Kerry  
Tel: 087-632 8106  
Email: [mick.oconnell@iwdg.ie](mailto:mick.oconnell@iwdg.ie)

#### Treasurer:

Phyllis Ryan

#### Committee members:

Nick Channon, Eithne Griffin, Louise McAlavey,  
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## View from the IWDG Co-ordinator



The IWDG has gone through unprecedented growth over the last three years. Our credibility with industry and state agencies as well as with fellow NGOs and the public has never been higher. Rarely a week goes by without some whale or dolphin story making the headlines and the IWDG involved or providing an objective opinion based on the best available scientific information or current best practice.

This is what the IWDG has been working to since its inception in 1990. With this influence comes responsibility and also increased pressure to ensure we continue to collect the relevant information to

underpin our advice and policies. The financial and logistical support obtained from state agencies for ISCOPE has enabled us to expand and develop the all-Ireland sightings and stranding schemes. The renewal of this funding under ISCOPE II not only enables us to continue this work but reflects the funders' high regard for the IWDG.

In order to continue to fulfil the potential of the IWDG we need to continually re-organise and encourage people to get involved in the group. The IWDG is often asked for its input and opinions on a range of issues, from offshore wind farms to acoustic deterrents, from cause of death to international whaling. We would like to have a greater input to the consultation process, to carry out more fieldwork or to provide more resources for young people, but we must not take on new commitments if it impacts negatively on our present priorities. Only by bringing in new people who want to contribute to the group can we expand. I encourage any of you who have been considering a greater involvement in the IWDG to contact us and we will try and provide the encouragement and resources to develop your interest for your benefit and that of the IWDG. Without exception, all of us who are deeply involved in the study and conservation of cetaceans in Ireland have got more from the experience than we ever put in.

**Dr Simon Berrow,**  
IWDG Co-ordinator

## IWDG Events 2007

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| 14-18 Feb  | <b>IMF Boat Show 2007</b> – RDS, Simonscourt, Dublin 4  |
| 7 May      | <b>Hook Head Safety at Sea Day</b> – Hook Head Lighthouse, Co Wexford   |
| 18-20 May  | <b>Whale-watching Weekend Course</b> – Tory Island, Co Donegal<br>Contact: Nick Channon ( <a href="mailto:Nick.Channon@iwdg.ie">Nick.Channon@iwdg.ie</a> , 087 994 7484)                                      |
| 1-3 June   | <b>Whale-watching Weekend Course</b> – Cape Clear Island, Co Cork<br>Contact: Pádraig Whooley ( <a href="mailto:padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie">padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie</a> , 023-38761)                             |
| 9-10 June  | <b>World Oceans Day</b> – at the Marine Institute, Oranmore, Co Galway  |
| 24 June    | <b>Whale &amp; Dolphin one-day workshop</b> – Shannon Dolphin & Wildlife Centre, Kilrush, Co Clare.<br>Contact: Simon Berrow ( <a href="mailto:simon.berrow@iwdg.ie">simon.berrow@iwdg.ie</a> , 086 854 5450) |
| 6-7 July   | <b>Whale-watching Weekend Course</b> – Cape Clear Island, Co Cork<br>Contact: Pádraig Whooley ( <a href="mailto:padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie">padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie</a> , 023-38761)                             |
| 20-22 July | <b>Whale-watching Weekend Course</b> – Ballycastle, Co, Antrim<br>Contact: Louise McAlavey ( <a href="mailto:louise.mcalavey@doeni.gov.uk">louise.mcalavey@doeni.gov.uk</a> , 028-905 46448)                  |
| 5 August   | <b>Whale Watch Ireland 2007</b> – various venues on coastline of Ireland<br>Contact: see <a href="http://www.iwdg.ie">www.iwdg.ie</a>   |
| 17-19 Aug  | <b>Whale-watching Weekend Course</b> – Cape Clear Island, Co Cork<br>Contact: Pádraig Whooley ( <a href="mailto:padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie">padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie</a> , 023-38761)                             |
| 23 Sept    | <b>Whale &amp; Dolphin one-day workshop</b> – Shannon Dolphin & Wildlife Centre, Kilrush, Co Clare.<br>Contact: Simon Berrow ( <a href="mailto:simon.berrow@iwdg.ie">simon.berrow@iwdg.ie</a> , 086 8545450)  |

*Theodolite-tracking Bottlenose Dolphins in the Shannon Estuary. © Simon Berrow*

## Cape Verde 2006...

During the expedition, we obtained 14 fluke images of Humpback Whales of which two, amazingly, were resightings from the IWDC 2003 expedition and another three had been recorded previously by other researchers in Cape Verde. Preliminary examination has shown that none are matches to whales anywhere else in the North Atlantic, so the breeding grounds of Irish Humpback Whales still remain a mystery.



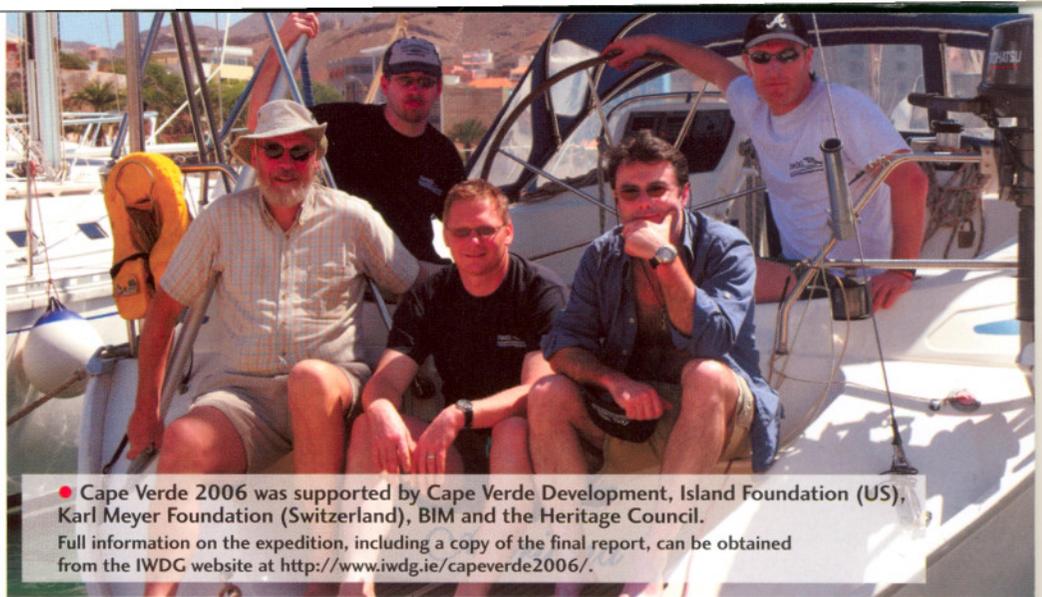
© Simon Berrow

Cape Verde fisherman with Green Turtle.

Thanks to the two expeditions, the IWDC has now contributed one-fifth (20%) of all Humpback Whale fluke images from Cape Verde. In collaboration with other scientists working in Cape Verde (Beatrice Jann from Switzerland and Fred Wenzel from the US), we are trying to derive an abundance estimate using mark-recapture statistical modelling. Preliminary analysis suggests the population is very small (as indicated by the high resighting rate) and genetically distinct, which means the Humpback Whales in Cape Verde are one of the most vulnerable populations of large whales in the Atlantic Ocean.

The IWDC has received great support and encouragement from the Cape Verde government and people. During the expedition, the IWDC made a presentation to researchers and policy-makers in Cape Verde, sharing our results and images. The IWDC has also expressed concern over the recent NATO naval exercises carried out in Cape Verde in June, especially the use of mid- and low-frequency sonars.

With more Irish people visiting Cape Verde and investing in property, we encourage them to learn more about the marine environment around Cape Verde and support marine conservation initiatives. Cape Verde is a wonderful country with wonderful people and we are already making connections between our island nations. Who knows, maybe one day we will find both people and whales are making the annual migration from Ireland to Cape Verde, meeting in the warm shallow bays of this tropical island archipelago.



● Cape Verde 2006 was supported by Cape Verde Development, Island Foundation (US), Karl Meyer Foundation (Switzerland), BIM and the Heritage Council. Full information on the expedition, including a copy of the final report, can be obtained from the IWDC website at <http://www.iwdg.ie/capeverde2006/>.

Some of the Cape Verde 2006 team on the chartered yacht *Adriana* (from left): Joe Aston, Dave Wall, Simon Berrow, Pádraig Whooley and Tony Whelan.

### By Fiacca OBrolchain

My job on the Cape Verde expedition was to skipper the boat for the second two weeks of the trip and 'bring 'em back alive.' While most of the crew were experienced in handling RIBs, they had little experience of running a sailing craft such as our Bavaria 49. We rarely went ashore, so the seven of us had to get along in a physically confined environment. I have to thank Joe Aston for training in those who stayed for the whole expedition, especially for the appointment of Pádraig Whooley as cook – a job he did splendidly.

For me, safety is the only issue at sea. I was the sailor and, as such, I was a little outside the group, as essentially sailors are not in a quest for definitive proof of something as intangible as the habits of whales.

It was a challenge to skipper the vessel. With six lookouts scanning the horizon, there would be a shout of 'Blow!' and I would enquire 'Where away?' and receive a garbled set of information, such as a request to furl the jib so the photographers could have a clear foredeck.

We managed to introduce the hands of the clock and some consensus as to distances off, and matters then improved somewhat. Then the problem became a little more complex. A whale would surface, blow, lie for a short while on the surface, blow again and dive for anything between six and ten minutes. My job was to put the vessel as close as possible to the whale at the time of the next blow, but without driving towards the whale or doing anything that might disturb it. I got it right about twice.

From a sailing point of view, the Cape Verdes have the best winds ever. The north-east trades blow steadily all the time. Near the higher islands you can get gusts of up to 40 knots, but these are rare. There are almost no places to lie alongside, so anchoring to two anchors is the order of the day. For a few days there was a swell of about six metres, but there was always a safe anchorage nearby.

We worked all day, from dawn to dusk. I know that I have often been blissfully unaware of the presence of marine life, as my focus was always on running my vessel, and anything that was not mentioned in the Collision Regulations could be overlooked. I do not believe that our gang missed much, such as their focus on the job.

My thanks to Simon Berrow and all of the crew, for the craic and the opportunity.



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## Large whale sightings in 2006

By **Pádraig Whooley** (Sightings Coordinator)

There was a time when this report was called West Cork Large Whale Report; but no more. It is evident from a glance of the mapping facility on [www.iwdg.ie](http://www.iwdg.ie) (see map) that sightings of large whales, namely Fin (*Balaenoptera physalus*) and Humpback Whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), largely reflect the distribution of observers, rather than that of the whales. For two reasons it is heartening to see a greater dispersal of sightings, as they spread east towards Wexford and west into Kerry. Firstly, because it suggests there may be more Fin and Humpback Whales in Irish waters than we thought, and secondly because it proves our old mantra...if you look, you will see!

By selecting all validated 2006 sighting records (n=67) of both Fin and Humpback Whales and including those in the "Sei, Fin & Blue" whale category, which are most likely Fin Whales, there appears some remarkable sighting clusters. Behind each of these is a small but growing core of observers who put in countless hours on cliff-tops, scanning the distant horizons. There is no doubt but where

you have observers willing to put in the time acquiring the field skills, who can watch in suitable weather conditions, and with quality optics, then the sightings of large whales will follow – although we do appreciate there are stretches of the coast which are regularly watched by seasoned observers who are not recording such activity.

During 2006 we carried out 12 photo-identification research trips in West Cork, most with whale-watch operator Colin Barnes. Nine of these days were during the acknowledged Sept-Nov peak period for large whale sightings in the known West Cork hotspots. We encountered fin whales on 63% of days at sea, of which useful photo ID images were obtained on 57% of trips. Since Sept 2006 we have added five Fin Whales to the Irish Fin Whale catalogue, which now contains 21 well-marked individuals. Of these five photo-identified Fin Whales, one was an inter-annual re-sighting of #FWIRL2, first photographed by Ray D'Arcy during the Wild Trials TV series in Oct 2003, and was then recaptured (on camera) on 8 Nov 2004 and recently on 1 Nov 2006.

Although it is too early to draw conclusions from this field work, the fact that 19% of these Fin Whales have been resighted, and 9% are inter-annual resightings, does suggest we are still dealing with relatively low numbers of Fin Whales off the Irish south coast. We have seen nothing in either 2005 or 2006 like the impressive numbers of Fin Whales seen in West Cork in Nov 2004, which on some days numbered conservatively 30-40 Fin Whales.

We also note with interest that Humpback Whales have been absent from West Cork in 2006, with not a single confirmed encounter



Large whale sightings in 2006.

all year. This, combined with the fact that our old friend "Boomerang," # HBIRL3, has not been seen in 2006, for the first year since 2001, does raise some interesting questions as to what has happened to our Humpback Whales. But the answer may not be too far away, in geographic terms, as Andrew Malcolm, Mick O'Connell and Nick Massett have enjoyed record numbers of Humpback Whale encounters in 2006 off Ardmore Head, Co Waterford, and Sleah Head, Co Kerry.

It is clear that if the whales are going to continue to shift the goalposts by ignoring the rule book we've scripted for them – i.e. Rule 1 clearly states that West Cork is the only place they're allowed play – then we are going to have to redouble our efforts in the coming years by expanding our search parameters to include these new areas where these large whales are being reported.

This ongoing work continues to be supported by the Vodafone and Conservation Volunteers Ireland Nature Fund.

© Pádraig Whooley



Fin Whale blowing, West Cork, November 2006.

## Killer Whales in the North Channel

By **Gary Burrows**

Last July, skipper Brian Meharg and the BBC camera crew chartering his boat got a lot more in the can than they had bargained for when filming long-distance swimmer Jacy Woods attempting to swim from Scotland to Northern Ireland. The predictable routine of stroke after stroke was dramatically interrupted when three Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*) surfaced 100 metres from the boat. Temporarily distracted from Jacy, all cameras swiftly focused on the Killer Whales, capturing rare film footage, and this superb photograph (right) of one of Ireland's most distinctive predators.

Killer Whale sightings are something of a rarity off Northern Ireland, with only 13 recorded instances on the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group database. There has, however, been an increase in reported sightings in recent years, with Killer Whales being seen off Portmuck, Portrush, Whitepark

Bay and off the Copeland Islands. Interestingly, the last sighting in the North Channel was on exactly the same date in the previous summer.

Given the Killer Whale's rarity, the ensuing TV and radio interest was considerable. Skipper Brian Meharg described the moment as follows:-

"I was steering the boat at the time, when I noticed on my starboard side this massive fin about 100 metres away. It was quite a shock because I've seen a lot in my time – dolphins, porpoises, Basking Sharks – but this fin was four or five feet out of the water and travelling at quite a speed. It just shot straight past us and on towards the Isle of Man. I'm glad to say the Killer Whale wasn't peckish at the time!"

The Environment and Heritage Service moved to quell the media hype of 'Killers off our bathing beaches' and brought balance to the press coverage, commenting that, despite their dangerous



Killer Whale, North Channel, July 2006.

reputation, Killer Whales are highly intelligent and inquisitive animals with more to fear from humans than we have from them. Fishing gear presents one of the greatest risks, as cetaceans can easily become ensnared in the fine mesh of fishermen's nets. Marine pollution is another problem for these apex predators, as the toxins consumed by their prey accumulates at the top of the

marine food chain, causing increased vulnerability to illness and disease.

Killer Whales are not easily intimidated and, unlike some cetacean species, do not show evasive behaviour around boats. So, for those fortunate enough to have a camera to hand during such a close encounter, the results can be stunning, as Tom McCann's image demonstrates.

© Tom McCann

# Belfast Lough – then and now

By Ian Enlander

1880 saw the publication of the book *Birds, Fish and Cetacea Commonly Frequenting Belfast Lough* by Robert Lloyd Patterson, a member of the famous family of Irish naturalists. The book offers a very comprehensive account, at least as far as the birds and fish are concerned, and follows a typically Victorian systematic approach flavoured with many personal anecdotes and lengthy digressions. The cetacean coverage is rather more variable. Having done most of my cetacean-watching on Belfast Lough over the past five years, I thought a comparison might be of interest.

One of the problems with Patterson's account is trying to determine the species he refers to. Thus, in a description of 'porpoise' seen from a steamer while crossing to Scotland, he states that they "seemed as if in sport to begin racing with the steamer and with one another, frequently crossing the ship's bows" and estimates their speed at 25–30 miles per hour. The behaviour fits better one of the larger dolphins, most probably **Bottlenose Dolphin** (*Tursiops truncatus*) as he surely would have noticed the patterning and coloration on **Common Dolphin** (*Delphinus delphis*). Bottlenose Dolphins have been seen irregularly in recent years, with sightings from the Lough itself as well as from the Copelands at the mouth of the Lough and nearby Islandmagee.

Statements which appear to relate to **Harbour Porpoise** (*Phocoena phocoena*) suggest that they were not particularly frequent other than from midsummer until late in the autumn, with occasional appearances before and after these periods. Today, porpoise are present in the Outer Lough and only rarely west of the Carrickfergus area, a distribution similar to that noted by Patterson. They are present on most days, year round, with an apparent reduction in numbers from May to July approximately, when, it is presumed, adults move elsewhere for mating and birthing. When porpoise return through July and August, it is common to see calves accompanying adults. Overall, porpoise do

seem to be more frequent (present on more days and in greater numbers) than in Patterson's time. Being a man of his times, he states that "I have often tried to catch them but always unsuccessfully" – it is not clear what he would have done had he been successful.

Of the larger cetaceans, Patterson records sightings of 'Bottlenosed Whale,' described as the 'commonest of the larger Cetacea that visit us.' Specific identification of whales is difficult from Patterson's accounts, with few species named and other larger species alluded to.

A detailed understanding is not helped by his general term for large whales as 'Herring Hogs,' while Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*) are referred to as 'the Grampus,' a name now reserved for Risso's Dolphin (*Grampus griseus*). Today, Killer Whale is frequently described locally as the Herring Hog.

The **Northern Bottlenose Whale** (*Hyperoodon ampullatus*), a distinctive species given good views, has been positively identified in the Lough from an early 20th-century stranding record and, indeed, strandings do suggest some regularity in the Irish Sea, at least historically, as this certainly is not a species seen recently.

**Pilot Whale** (*Globicephala melas*) has not been recorded in the Belfast Lough area in recent years, but an individual captured well up the Lough was displayed in the city centre in 1878 and fully described by Patterson.

Irrespective of naming complications, **Killer Whale** was positively recorded by Patterson around the mouth of the Lough – an area where I have seen them on a number of occasions from the mainland and also from the Copeland Islands. In his account, Patterson quotes his boatman of the time as saying "They are Becker dogs; don't make any noise or do anything to attract their attention for sometimes they are very mischievous and do a deal of harm." He then recounts experiences of others elsewhere, pointing to the dangerous and unpredictable nature of these beasts. This does seem to be at odds with the known facts today which show that



Common Dolphin

© Pádraig Whooley

Killer Whales, in the wild anyway, pose no threat to people.

Patterson does record still larger whales in the Lough, estimating them at 35–40 foot long and definitely identified as something other than 'Bottlenosed Whale.' While size alone is not the best basis for identification, the likeliest species is probably **Minke Whale** (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), the smallest of the rorquals. This species has been seen recently a number of times around the mouth of the Lough, with groups of up to three present. They never seem to hang around, being on their way through the area.

Assuming that Patterson's size estimates were accurate, it would place at least some of these whales beyond the upper range of Minke, so was his sighting on a day that larger cetacea chose to visit? There have, of course, been a number of recent confirmed sightings of **Fin Whale** (*Balaenoptera physalus*) in the Irish Sea, together with tales of 'big lads' in the North Channel area.

In conclusion, it would seem that the cetaceans of Belfast Lough may have changed significantly over the past 125 years or so. While the apparent increased frequency of porpoise may be as a result of improvements in optical equipment, his view that Northern Bottlenose Whale was the commonest of the larger cetaceans present suggests a very different picture of species diversity and relative abundance to that seen today.

The Lough is, of course, now a major port with high-speed ferries, tankers and cargo ships, together with numerous pleasure craft, making the environment very different to that experienced by Patterson.



Northern Bottlenose Whale  
Photo: Pádraig Whooley



## Strandings

# Sperm Whale strands in Sligo

By Mick O'Connell & Pádraig Whooley

On the morning of 12 September, the IWDG received a report from Niall Nugan of a large whale swimming inside Ballysadare Bay in County Sligo. Initial descriptions of the animal suggested it was a Sperm Whale (*Physeter macrocephallus*) although this was not confirmed until early afternoon when its wrinkled skin, dorsal 'knuckle' and distinctive head shape were more clearly observed by IWDG member Will Woodrow using a 30x spotting scope.

At 10:00am the animal was about 300m offshore and close to Culleenamore Strand, south of Strandhill. Observations by Dr Don Cotton of Sligo IT suggested that the whale was in emaciated condition and this, combined with its large size (14m), ruled out any attempt to rescue the animal.

The whale eventually stranded on a sandbank which was separated from the shore by a dangerous channel and, following attempts by a number of people to swim across this, the Civil Defence and National Parks and Wildlife Service declared a 200m exclusion zone around it. At around 18:45 the IWDG was informed by Tim Roderick (NPWS District Conservation Officer) that the whale was dead. (This had been confirmed by the Civil Defence who had carried out a 'blink reflex' test.) Skin samples were taken for genetic analysis, but Sligo County Council now had the problem of trying to dispose of the carcass, as it was not possible to get near it with lifting or digging

© Will Woodrow / Woodrow Wildlife Consulting



Stranded Sperm Whale, Strandhill, Co Sligo, September 2006.

equipment.

With the able assistance of Captain Diarmuid Gray and the crew of the Irish Lights vessel *Granuaile*, the whale was towed off the sandbank on 15 September. Initially, the plan was to tow the carcass out to sea and sink it, but concerns were raised by the Irish Coastguard that it might become a threat to shipping. Because of this, the animal was towed out to Inishmurray island, off the north Sligo coast, and tied up there, where it will provide a welcome winter feast for many species of wildlife. The lower jaw and many of the teeth were recovered by Sligo County Council and these will be preserved and put on display in the Sligo County Museum.

This stranding received much coverage in the media, both locally and nationally.

Following on from the massive local interest in the event, Sharon Eastwood (Environmental Awareness Officer with Sligo County Council) contacted the IWDG with a view to organising a series of public talks and a week of school visits under the 'Heritage in Schools' scheme. Pádraig Whooley and Mick O'Connell visited 13 national schools and one secondary school in Co Sligo, talking to over 1,200 children. While the stranding itself was unfortunate, it was heartening to see the interest and enthusiasm in the schools, with paintings, projects and 'name-the-whale' competitions, with 'Cully' being the judges' choice (from Culleenamore Strand).

The IWDG would like to thank all the many people and organisations who helped out with this stranding event.

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# Knee-jerk sentiment or intelligent love?

© James Kilroy (NPWS)



© Pádraig Whooley

Stranded Striped Dolphin, Belmullet, Co Mayo, October 2006.

By Jim Allen

Prompted partly by the recent Mullet peninsula live strandings and partly by a niggling unease at how humans can sometimes respond with more misguided sentiment than intelligent love, I knee-jerked with the following reaction, which is really a form of thinking out loud.

All who are committed to the conservation of cetaceans will inevitably respond with a mixture of alarming dismay and curious excitement at the sight of a living whale or dolphin stranded on our shores. We have an enormously deep empathy with fellow mammals dying at our feet. But are we always, always (yes, I did mean to repeat myself) right to rush in with our often valiant, well-intentioned, sometimes clumsy re-floating efforts? Correct me if I'm wrong, but of all the re-floating attempts I have read of or witnessed, up to 95% failed. The animal(s) repeatedly re-strand and eventually die in what appears to be even greater distress (e.g. the County Antrim Sei Whale in July 2006).

The success rate being so low should surely cause us to revisit our thinking on this matter or at least open a debate. Before you start begging, Mr Whooley, for my address so you can put my windows in, hear me out. I am certainly not calling for any blanket ruling that states we never attempt re-floating.

All strandings are complex, multi-factorial and, in some cases, involve members of the same pod in an apparent act of self-sacrificial support, which raises the stakes and as such warrants unique and careful consideration based on the varied circumstances. Of course there isn't time to sit down on a beach in a little debating circle to calmly discuss the situation and vote to float or leave, while a beautiful mammal is dying on the tide-line. Certainly, the onlooking public wouldn't let that happen. So why not allow for an airing of some thoughts and alternative views on this while we have the time and opportunity?

I have long wondered if there isn't something in either the DNA or 'mindset' of a cetacean, whether through clinical impairment, age or adverse environmental conditions, that causes them to live-strand. As humans, we see it differently and instinctively perceive every stranding as a distress signal and dysfunctional behaviour and immediately default to rescue mode. But this may well be against the 'wishes' or instinct of the animal itself. Ought we to not consider our interpretation of repeated (or even initial) strandings as some form of 'judgment' or conscious decision on the animal's part to wilfully die: "...for pity's

sake, leave me alone; this is how I choose to die and you are actually harming me and prolonging what I am going through."

Of course we will never know for sure and we cannot rule out, for example, a temporary fault in the animal's metabolism brought on by being impacted by any one of a myriad of specific parasites or related illnesses which it may, if re-floated, recover from. In addition, the danger of choosing to 'walk away' may result in the death of healthy pod members. The call to refloat, euthanise or walk away is always going to be a difficult one to call. I know from experience. It is amazing how emotionally impacting the sound of a gunshot can be in the dark on a lonely beach.

A cetacean is inherently and instinctively all too aware of the dangers and possible consequences of stranding, in the same way as we instinctively know to avoid long-term immersion in water for fear of drowning. Dare we believe that, by stranding, a whale or dolphin has chosen to 'take itself out,' somehow aware that it is now a liability and a handicap to its group. Perhaps, therefore, stranding is 'known' (or 'learned') to be a certain and relatively quick death, when compared to the alternative of a lingering death which may effect the pod's efficiency in hunting and/or travelling. Of course, this argument is flawed in many ways, not least that it risks the death of fellow members who may choose to co-strand as a result of inevitable familial bonding. I can almost feel the cringing from marine biologists as I write.

Close encounters with live and even dead cetaceans will always be an emotional experience which can over-ride subjective action. Perhaps one solution as a compromise might be to regard three or more repeated strandings as an animal's 'choice' to die and thereby be a cut-off point for rescuers to either euthanise or leave it to die naturally.

In finishing off, I am motivated entirely by the welfare and comfort of these creatures. I do what I can to respect all life and underline for you my belief that there is a universe of difference between animals and humans and that the above observations and comments in no way apply to the human right-to-die through assisted suicide debate, which I personally oppose.

At the end of the day, I am a 'knee-jerk sentimentalist' who has turned out in the middle of the night for a local porpoise who may have temporarily lost its way in this broken world of ours. Someone once rescued me in a similar way through an act of self-sacrificial love. We honour and need those who love more intelligently and who have patience with all 'pseudo' animal behaviourists like me.

## Species Profile

### Long-finned Pilot Whale (*Globicephala melas*)

By Pádraig Whooley

Pilot Whales, despite their name, are the second largest member of the dolphin family. At a distance they look like very large and slow-moving dolphins, which can be confusing, as on occasion they will travel in mixed groups with species such as Bottlenose Dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*). Pilot Whales are also frequently recorded in association with White-sided Dolphins on the continental shelf edge.

Interestingly, there has not been a single confirmed sighting of Pilot Whale made by experienced observers during land-based effort watches since the IWDG sighting scheme began; yet the fact that this species is "reported" occasionally by members of the public suggests some confusion with species identification. They are, however, frequently observed beyond the continental shelf, and over 70% of these sightings are recorded between June and August, which reflects the increase in observer effort on offshore vessels of opportunity in the summer months.

Their key features are a 4-6m stocky, jet-black body with a broad-based, backward sweeping dorsal fin, set well forward along the back. They have a bulbous head which may overhang the snout on older males, and an almost absent beak. Their strong, bushy blow will be visible in good conditions and is quite audible. Given reasonable views, there should be little problem with confirming their species.

They are highly social, living in tight groups of between 10-30 individuals, but herds of several hundred have been observed offshore. Pilot Whales may be confused with large Bottlenose or Risso's Dolphins (*Grampus griseus*) or Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*) in Irish waters. They can be seen lob-tailing (slapping tail flukes), spy-hopping (holding head clear of the water) and logging at the surface. Juveniles may even bow-ride or breach.

Pilot Whales have the dubious distinction of being the species most likely to mass-strand in Irish waters, which unfortunately means we have a better chance of seeing this species stranded on our beaches than we do at sea. Why whole herds of seemingly healthy Pilot Whales strand is likely to be due to a combination of factors: with a strong preference for waters off the shelf edge, they may not navigate effectively in unfamiliar inshore waters, where their echolocation capability may be inadequate. This, combined with the tight family bonds that form their social structure, may result in healthy whales following an older or sick individual into shallow coastal waters, often with dire consequences for the entire pod.

Pilot Whales feed primarily on squid, but may also prey on fish species such as cod and mackerel. Resting during the day at the surface, they feed mainly at night when the deep scattering layer rises from the ocean floor to within their diving range. Pilot Whales have a formidable set of teeth. Although they form tight groups when on the move or being harassed, once feeding, this rigid formation loosens, which suggests they hunt alone.

# Minkes by midnight

– a whale-watch in Iceland

Humpback Whale, Iceland

Photo: Faith Wilson

By Dick Coombes

"There's another one; they have to be Killers... look at the size of them!" The debate got livelier, divided opinions widened... Yes, they were big hefty animals with a distinct grey saddle behind a good-sized black dorsal fin. White patches occasionally showed along the flanks, reinforcing our belief that we were watching Killers. Twenty-five, we reckoned, but why were there no males with their distinctive tall fins? Were they big enough? And had we eliminated everything else?

It was our first 'night' in Iceland and ridiculously bright for ten o'clock. The headland at Gardur, half an hour from Keflavik Airport, was already proving to be an impressive location for land-based whale-watching. Some 12,000 Lesser Black-backed Gulls, 500 Manx Shearwaters, 20 Storm Petrels and smaller numbers of Arctic Skuas, Glaucous Gulls, Gannets and auks were massed offshore in wheeling flocks – the feeding was evidently good. Bird activity became frenzied each time one or other of the two Humpback Whales (*Megaptera novaengliae*) we had been watching surged out of the water, huge jaws closing on tons of prey-rich water. Tail flukes showed occasionally, but we were mainly getting 'head and shoulders' views. Every so often the calm surface was broken by the sleek form of a Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) – always all too brief and overshadowed by the more distant but spectacular performance of the Humpbacks. So what of our 'Killers'? Well, though we would each have considered ourselves seasoned whale-watchers, we had to admit to having goofed on their ID. They were, of course, White-beaked Dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*) – one of the few dolphin species found in the cool waters of the far north Atlantic. It was a lesson for all of us. As is so often the case in nature-watching, familiarity with field guide images is no match for experience in the field.

At 09:00hrs next morning, aboard *Moby Dick*, the Keflavik-based whale-watch boat,

we were heading out into the drizzle, across a flat grey sea. A few Harbour Porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*) surfaced close inshore and several Minkes gave good close views. And with great confidence and authority, we pointed out White-beaked Dolphins to each other! The highlight of the three-hour trip was a medium-sized Humpback Whale bubble-netting close to the boat – a behaviour our on-board guide said was unusual in Icelandic waters.

The plan was that the four of us, Faith Wilson, Sandra Jordan, Christian Osthoff and myself, would do the circuit – drive clockwise right around Iceland, starting up along the west coast. Cetaceans formed part of a wider agenda which included birds, camping, swimming in hot springs, climbing volcanoes and simply enjoying the stunning scenery. Day three saw us camped on a lava field on a wild headland at the western extremity of the Snaefellsness peninsula. Puffins whizzed past at an astonishing 3,000 per hour. A Minke surfaced – it was two minutes past midnight! We retired to the tents, my head dizzy with all those Puffins and full of anticipation for the next day's adventures.

Day four. We had been steaming out for 30 minutes, heading into the open ocean, due

west of Olafsvik. Expectations were high – the target species was Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*) and this was a serious whale-watching operator with a good track record. It was a large, comfortable boat, with a snack bar and the latest hi-tech equipment. We would be out all day. A dampener was quickly put on things, though, when some English guys recounted how eight hours aboard this same vessel produced not a single whale sighting the previous day. However, the skipper's broadcast over the tannoy a while later was encouraging: "As we saw no Blue Whales yesterday, we have sent out a spotter plane to try to locate them." Not long after came the welcome but slightly strange announcement: "Our spotter plane has found Blue Whales, they are about 45 miles away and we should be with them in about three hours." As a birder I could relate to this – this was twitching on a grand scale!

Just as we picked up the massive blow three miles ahead, the call went out: "Blue Whale two o'clock." A simple clock system, using the boat's bow as 12 o'clock and the stern as 6, was very helpful in pinpointing surfacing whales. At least three were in this area. Distant flukes heaved out of the water as one of them sounded. The boat edged in behind another and stayed with it for the next hour. A close encounter with a Blue Whale is a truly breathtaking experience. The blow rises up to 30ft into the air – twin gaping blowholes behind the raised splash guard open wide while the animal completes its breathing cycle. Before you, the earth's largest creature slides effortlessly along the water surface – first the broad rostrum, then the enormous mottled blue-grey bulk of the animal's back and eventually the tiny fin just before it slips below the waves. Cameras poise for the next blow, a predictable 10-20 seconds later. After eight or so such shallow dives, the back arches, the great flukes may clear the surface – the whale is going deep and won't surface again for ten minutes or more. The setting out there was perfect – perched on a curiously deep blue sea, no



White-beaked Dolphin, Iceland.

© Dick Coombes

land in sight and humbled by the presence of these awesome animals.

Our al fresco breakfast the following morning was hastily abandoned when nine Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*) cruised into the adjacent bay. We had seen distant ones at 23:45 the night before, but these were close inshore and entertained us for more than an hour. By now it was becoming obvious that making daily plans was a pointless exercise. We'd let the whales determine our schedule!

Several days later found us sipping mugs of hot chocolate and munching the plates of cinnamon buns that had appeared on deck – snow-capped volcanic peaks and mysterious fjords formed a dramatic backdrop. We were aboard *Nattfari* (Night Traveller), off the northern port of Husavik, the self-proclaimed whale-watching capital of Iceland. From this beautiful wooden boat and its nearby sister vessel (a converted catcher boat formerly used for hunting whales) we had clocked up a tally of 30 White-beaked Dolphins, two Humpbacks, four Minkes and, a mere 50m either side of the boat, two magnificent Blue Whales. At this close range a hint of rusty yellow was clearly visible along the animals' flanks. This coloration is caused by an accumulation of diatoms (microscopic marine algae) – hence the Blue Whale's old name "Sulphur Bottom." This second opportunity to enjoy this endangered species was a special treat. In the twentieth century, whalers killed over 360,000 Blue Whales in the Southern Hemisphere alone – the current world population is put at just 3,000 to 5,000 individuals.

I reflected on the welcome changes since my previous trip to this wonderful country in 1981. Whale-watching boat trips were not an option then and I recall one of the tourist 'attractions' on offer was a visit to a whaling station, "...and if

you are lucky, you might see a whale being flensed" – the blurb on the brochure was happy to announce! Unsurprisingly, Iceland's recent decision to resume commercial whaling has been bitterly opposed by the whale-watch operators. Their plea is that tourists should continue coming to Iceland to whale-watch, not boycott the country. Whale-watching was only established there in 1995 and, with enough support, its tourism value could eventually far outweigh the revenue derived from the whaling industry – a message made loud and clear in Husavik's fascinating whale museum.

Organised whale-watching is a pretty reliable way to see whales, but there is something particularly thrilling and rewarding about finding your own. Rounding a headland, some days later, in the extreme northeast of Iceland we pulled off the road for 'a quick stop.' Suddenly, Sandra shouted the magic word "Blow!" Scopes were hurriedly trained on the area several miles offshore. Blow after blow and tail flukes everywhere – Humpbacks, at least 22 of them. The next 90 minutes flew!

Iceland is a land of rich contrasts. Black lava fields, gleaming white snow and rugged outwash plains stand side by side with bubbling hot springs, icy waterfalls and lush meadows. Birds are everywhere – personal favourites were Harlequin Duck, White-tailed Eagle and Red-necked Phalarope and we saw several Arctic Foxes. The Icelandic Horse (they won't call them ponies) is also rather special, a breed going back 1,200 years. A Humpback breaching 35 times in succession at Gardur on our last night was a fitting finale to a wonderful trip. If your circadian rhythm can cope with 24-hour daylight and you want some of the best whale-watching there is, visit this wild unspoilt country. It's not that far away.

## Underwater Sound and Marine Life Workshop

By Simon Berrow

The IWDG were invited to the International Ship Operators Meeting (ISOM) hosted by the Marine Institute in Galway in October 2006. The objective of the workshop was to discuss the development of generic guidelines for acoustic surveys (seismic and multi-beam) that could be adopted unilaterally by the ISOM. Members of the ISOM are operators of state research vessels and there were representatives from many countries including the UK, Denmark, Norway, Germany and the Netherlands in Europe and also the US and Chile.

The draft guidelines for "Mitigating the Effects of Acoustic Surveys on Marine Mammals," developed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in consultation with the IWDG, were presented. These have changed little since the original meeting 18 months ago, but are edging closer to adoption.

The IWDG made a presentation on the background to the development of these guidelines, which started in 1999 when the IWDG expressed concern on the effects of seismic surveys on cetaceans during the Corrib Gas EIS. The IWDG also identified some current concerns including gaps in our knowledge of the distribution and relative abundance of cetaceans, especially offshore, and the importance of carrying out post-mortems on deep-diving species (sperm whales and beaked whales) stranded on the Irish coast.

The workshop included wide-ranging discussions from whether acoustic surveys actually have any significant impacts on marine mammals to the difficulties in visually detecting cetaceans by MMOs (Marine Mammal Observers).

Generally the workshop was very positive and the IWDG acknowledges the ISOM for addressing this important issue and thank the Marine Institute for inviting the IWDG to participate.

© Dick Coombes



Blue Whale, Iceland

### Overseas trips

Done Cape... Been to Tory... Eager for new whalewatching horizons? The IWDG are planning a series of annual overseas trips to some of the top whalewatching destinations in the world. If you would be interested in joining the group on a guided whalewatching trip, please contact Faith Wilson on [faith.wilson@iwdg.ie](mailto:faith.wilson@iwdg.ie) to register your interest.

© Shay Fennelly / Aquaphoto



IWDG personnel receive Vodafone and Conservation Volunteers Ireland Nature Fund Award in November 2006, for IWDG's Fin and Humpback Whale photo-identification research.



## Government criticised on cetacean monitoring

By Simon Berrow

The Advocate-General Leger of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) delivered his preliminary opinion in September 2006 in the case taken by the European Commission against Ireland in April 2005, that there was no protection under Irish law for cetaceans, as required by the 1992 EU Habitats Directive. The Advocate General concluded that Ireland had failed to meet its obligations under this directive.

The final ruling will be handed down by the ECJ in approximately four to six months. In around 80% of cases, the final ruling concurs with the preliminary opinion. Should the ECJ concur with this opinion, then the government would be obligated to bring national legislation into line. If upheld, Ireland will have 2-3 years to achieve this, after which, if the Commission is of the view that Ireland still has not made, or isn't making, sufficient progress in doing so, it would have the right to refer Ireland again to the ECJ, but this time it could ask the ECJ to impose fines, up to €20,000 a day, for each day that Ireland remains in breach.

The Commission criticised Ireland for failing to put in place a comprehensive, adequate, ongoing monitoring programme for cetaceans that could enable a system of strict protection to be devised. The Commission acknowledged ongoing research and monitoring in the Shannon estuary and Galway Bay and studies in Roaringwater Bay and the work by BIM in developing acoustic

© Simon Berrow



Breaching Bottlenose Dolphins in the Shannon estuary.

deterrents. They also referred to a study by the IWDG in 2005 (*Gap Analysis*, carried out by Dave Wall) which identified gaps in the knowledge of cetaceans within the Irish Exclusive Economic Zone and stressed the pressing need for more precise information on the distribution and abundance of cetaceans in Irish waters so that, in particular, Ireland may comply with the requirements of the Habitats Directive. The Commission stated that it "is clear that the cetacean

monitoring programmes are ad hoc and confined to certain geographical areas. Ireland has failed to establish that cetaceans have been subject to a comprehensive, systematic, ongoing monitoring programme."

- IWDG would like to acknowledge Shay Fennelly for continuing to raise these issues with the EU and Proinsias De Rossa, Labour MEP for Dublin, for keeping the IWDG informed on EU issues.

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# IWDG invited to ASCOBANS meeting in the Netherlands

By Simon Berrow

Between 18-21 September, IWDG Co-ordinator Simon Berrow was invited to attend the Fifth Meeting of Parties of ASCOBANS in Egmond aan Zee in the Netherlands.

ASCOBANS (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans in the Baltic and North Seas) is a regional instrument developed under the aegis of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (1979).

There are currently ten parties to the Agreement and Estonia has also indicated its intention to accede. At the fourth Meeting of Parties in 2003 it was agreed to extend the boundaries to include the western seaboard of Ireland and Scotland, including the Irish Sea and waters south to southern Portugal. Ireland and Portugal have not ratified and have not indicated to ASCOBANS as to whether they intend to or not.

Under Article 2(1) of the Agreement, ASCOBANS aims to facilitate co-operation to achieve and maintain a "favourable conservation status" for all small cetaceans in the Agreement area. ASCOBANS also attempts to develop conservation and management plans, which essentially requires the parties to apply, "in conjunction with other competent international bodies," five broad conservation, research and management measures, with a particular emphasis on habitat conservation and management.

Bycatch mitigation can objectively be considered to be the policy area that has attracted the greatest amount of attention under ASCOBANS to date. ASCOBANS

considers that the long-term aspirational goal is to ensure that no anthropogenic removals of small cetaceans occur within the Agreement area at all, but has a (more realistic) intermediate target of 1% of the estimated abundance of a cetacean population. ASCOBANS also aspires to restoring cetacean populations to 80% of their carrying capacity. It has agreed that bycatch levels above 1.7% of the best population estimate are unacceptable.

## Ireland and ASCOBANS

Ireland has a long history of association with ASCOBANS and was very keen to sign when the Agreement opened for signatures in 1992. However, at that time the Agreement did not include Irish waters. When ratification was last considered in 1996 there was resistance from the Department of the Marine due to the implications of signing on the "viability of the various sectors of the Irish fishing industry." At this time there was an opinion that "there was no reliable contention that bycatch arising from fishing operations poses a serious threat to native or migratory cetacean population."

Our knowledge of cetaceans and the impacts on their populations has improved significantly since 1996 and few would now dispute that fishing interactions can pose serious threats to cetacean populations. Indeed, BIM are leading the field in developing acoustic deterrents for reducing cetacean bycatch in pelagic trawls. The fishing industry is itself now facing serious challenges, and ignoring environmental issues will not improve this situation. Many of the fisheries implications of ASCOBANS are now incorporated into the EU Regulation 812/2004, and ASCOBANS have more to offer Ireland than merely restrictions on fishing practices.

## Why sign ASCOBANS?

The IWDG has written to the Minister for the Environment, Dick Roche, and submitted a proposal that Ireland sign ASCOBANS. A number of reasons why include:

- 1 protect the interests of Ireland
- 2 participate in important international conventions
- 3 contribute to the development of ideas and conservation priorities
- 4 co-ordinate research and monitoring priorities to ensure more efficiency and cost-effectiveness
- 5 draw on the expertise of ASCOBANS and the Advisory Committee
- 6 influence reporting structures and consistency of methodologies
- 7 engage with, and learn about the concerns of, neighbouring EU countries
- 8 promote the work being carried out by Ireland
- 9 Signing ASCOBANS is an Action (No 49) of the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

ASCOBANS has strong links with other bodies, including the EU, and policies developed by ASCOBANS have had a significant influence on EU Regulations. Signing and contributing to ASCOBANS will assist Ireland in ensuring that the interests and implications of these policies to Ireland are protected and/or promoted, including contributing to regional management plans. Signing ASCOBANS is part of Recommendation 4 of the IWDG Commercial Fisheries Policy document.

• For a copy of the full submission see: <http://www.iwdg.ie/articles.asp?art=1665&search=ascobans>



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Picture: Galley Head Lightkeepers' Houses, Co Cork



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# New acoustic deterrent systems tested

By Ronan Cosgrove (BIM)

The Irish Sea Fisheries Board (BIM) has teamed up with Simon Berrow of SDWF/IWDG and Dave McGrath of Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) in a programme of research aimed at reducing cetacean bycatch from fisheries. This work is part of BIM's extensive approach of developing and promoting environmentally friendly fishing methods and practices at sea.

Although relatively rare, incidental occurrences of cetacean bycatch, predominantly of Common Dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*), have been observed in the mid-water paired trawl fishery for Albacore Tuna (*Thunnus alalunga*). A species size-selective device such as grid or net panel is not an option in this fishery as the target species, Albacore, and commercial bycatch species such as Bluefin Tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) and Swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) can be similar in size to dolphins. Therefore, an acoustic system represents the best potential solution in this fishery. As previously reported in *IWDG News*, an interactive acoustic device/pinger, which transmits a deterrent signal only when an echolocating dolphin is in the vicinity, was developed and delivered in 2005. The principal advantages of the interactive element of this device are: it saves battery power, it aims to prevent habituation by the animals it is supposed to deter, and it minimises noise emission, thereby potentially preventing exclusion of cetaceans from their preferred habitat.

When last we reported this story, the device had been thoroughly tested on pelagic trawls to ensure that common marine noises such as vessel engines, fish-finding equipment and the nets themselves would not cause the device to be falsely triggered. The device had also been tested with captive Bottlenose Dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*) in Sweden to ensure correct response to vocalisations. Signal activation was not required, so no animals were hurt during the making of this experiment!

## Shannon estuary trials

The next step in this process involved testing the device for real



© Pádraig Whooley

Common Dolphin, adult and calf pair, West Cork.

with wild dolphins. Although not a species bycaught by tuna trawls in Irish waters, the resident population of Bottlenose Dolphins in the Shannon estuary was chosen for trials in July 2005 in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The estuary provided a reliable and easily accessible location to observe individually identifiable dolphins, and it was hoped that if the device worked on this relatively large and robust cetacean it would also work on its smaller cousin, the Common Dolphin.

A field team including Simon Berrow, Ruth Leeney of the University of Exeter and Joanne O'Brien of GMIT was put together. The new interactive or responsive deterrent and an older device, which continually transmitted its signal when activated, were tested. The sound output was approximately 157 dB re 1 $\mu$ Pa, consisting of various sweep signals and harmonic energy up to 160 kHz, in 300 ms bursts not more than 15 s apart. Boat-based and static moorings trials were carried out with active and inactive (on/off) pingers. Observations on dolphin behaviour were carried out visually, by observers who were unaware of pinger status (on/off), and acoustically by analysing dolphin click data recorded with T-PODs.

The results of the trials were very promising, particularly in relation to the boat-based experiment. Dramatic evasive behaviour characterised by dolphins moving away from the boat at speed, surfacing fast and often and leaping in a line formation was observed for 3 out of 4 deployments with the continuous, and 3 out of 4 deployments with the interactive pinger. It was not possible to explain the lack of evasive response on two occasions but it was decided to try and incorporate the use of an independent hydrophone in future trials to monitor and verify pinger activation.

The static trials also produced some interesting results. Dolphin activity was

significantly lower in the presence of the active continuous deterrent than the inactive, but not significantly different for the active and inactive interactive deterrents. This result was as expected, as the static interactive pinger relied on passing dolphins to echolocate in the vicinity to trigger the deterrent signal, and no stimuli were employed to encourage dolphin vocalisations. Inter Click Interval (ICI) values were lower in the presence of active pingers of both types of deterrent, which may suggest a high pulse vocal response from dolphins to the acoustic alarm.

Following the relative success of the Shannon trial, the team of researchers set off, quietly confident, to test the device with Common Dolphins. This trial was conducted in February 2006 off Cork, on board the *Holly Jo*, skippered by Colin Barnes, with similar methods adopted to the boat-based Shannon estuary trials.

During five days at sea, a total of 10 encounters with Common Dolphins were obtained and a total of 16 trials were carried out on group sizes ranging from 4 to 24 animals. The results were clear and conclusive: no evasive response was recorded for any trial! This was surprising, but, as we now know, underwater acoustic signals elicit different responses from different cetacean species. On the plus side, the interactive deterrent was found to trigger its deterrent signal frequently and appropriately during the trial, so it is planned to incorporate a new improved deterrent signal in the device, rally the research team and try again later this year.

## Reference

Leeney, R.H., Berrow, S.D., McGrath, D., O'Brien, J., Cosgrove, R. & Godley, B.J. (2006) Effects of pingers on the behaviour of bottlenose dolphins. *J. Mar. Biol. Assoc. U.K.* **86**: 5467-5472.

BIM Pinger Trials 2006

# Pingers do deter Harbour Porpoise

Under EU Regulation No 812/2004, the use of acoustic cetacean deterrents or 'pingers' is to become mandatory on bottom gillnet fisheries in certain EU waters including areas off the south and southwest coasts of Ireland. The aim of this regulation is to mitigate cetacean bycatch, particularly Harbour Porpoises in bottom gillnet fisheries. Fishermen in a number of countries have raised concerns about the resilience of the current commercially available pingers and also the practicalities of using these devices in a commercial environment. Recognising these concerns, BIM carried out trials with four types of pingers on board Irish gillnet vessels throughout 2005 and in early 2006. In parallel, Seafish in the UK and agencies from Sweden, Denmark, France also completed similar experiments.

As a result of this work, collectively all available models of pinger have now been extensively assessed in terms of ease of use, resistance to damage and long-term running costs, but the trials carried out have highlighted a number of serious issues and difficulties relating mainly to the reliability of the devices. Problems with deployment were also found, although some of these problems have been resolved by changes to rigging or operating practice. All issues were discussed with the EU at a meeting held in April. While the Commission accepted that the concerns raised were real and genuine, they emphasised the need for Member States to enforce the regulations regarding the use of pingers. They did stress, though, that there was a need for Member States to carry out further scientific experiments to improve on the specifications and operational deployment of the available devices prescribed in the Regulation. If the

results of such research were positive, then the EU would allow derogations from the conditions of use in the regulations.

Taking this on board and leaving aside the reliability problems, which are an issue that the manufacturers must resolve, BIM carried out some further trials during July-September 2006 with the objective of establishing the effective range of pingers. The manufacturers of two of the devices believe the effective range of their respective pingers exceed the 200m prescribed in the regulation. This is one of the biggest issues facing fishermen in that the cost of fitting devices to their gear, using this maximum allowable spacing, is prohibitive. For instance, for a vessel with 20km of gear this would mean buying 100 pingers at a cost of €7,000-10,000.

## Field trials

Sea trips were carried out by BIM in the commercial gillnet fishery for hake off the south and southwest. The vessels, mfv Holly B and Girl Geraldine carried three trains of nets on board with pingers spaced at 200m, 600m and a control set of nets with no deterrent devices. Observers accompanied vessels to sea and recorded data on cetacean bycatch and pinger functionality. No Harbour Porpoise were caught in nets that had functioning pingers attached, from 125 hauls observed.



Highlighting the continuing durability problems found with the devices, a number of US-made pingers deployed suffered extreme damage and ceased to work during the trials. A porpoise bycatch was observed from three hauls on the control nets without pingers attached, so in reality little can be concluded other than that bycatch in this fishery is very low. Similar trials, however, were carried out in the Danish North Sea hake fishery where the Harbour Porpoise bycatch is quite high and their experiments showed quite clearly that the spacing could be increased to 455m without reducing effectiveness.

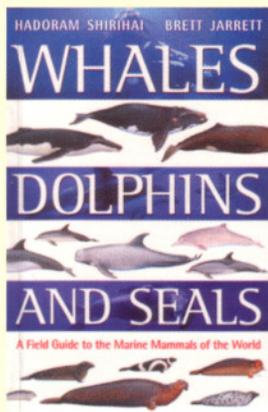
BIM will continue to work with the Irish industry and other agencies to try and develop reliable devices, and on practical conditions for the use of these devices. There is no doubting that existing pingers do deter Harbour Porpoises but the devices available are still not resilient enough.



Lord Iasraigh Mhara  
Irish Sea Fisheries Board

For further details on pingers, please visit our website [www.bim.ie](http://www.bim.ie), or contact BIM staff directly at [fleet@bim.ie](mailto:fleet@bim.ie), or phone (01) 214 4100

# Book reviews



**Whales, Dolphins and Seals: A Guide to the Marine Mammals of the World**  
By Hadoram Shirihi and Brett Jarrett  
Published by A&C Black, London  
ISBN-13: 978-0-7136-7037-0

**By Simon Berrow**

Rarely is a 'complete' guide complete but it is very difficult to find anything left out of Hadoram Shirihi and Brett Jarrett's *Guide to the Marine Mammals of the World*. Full-colour illustrations of adult female, male and calves as well as dorsal views compliment the incredibly thorough text. For each species, descriptions on field identification, variation, distribution and ecology are included but

also recent evidence from genetic studies on population differentiation. The images, as you would expect, are superb.

To test field guides such as this, I tend to look at the beaked whales and see if they offer new insights into their identification as well as distribution. This guide even describes new species such as Pygmy, Perrin's and Spade-toothed Beaked Whales, including images of the former. 'Complete World' guides rarely achieve this objective but the truly remarkable thing about this guide is how they have packed all this information into 384 pages and barely an inch in thickness! A superb publication, strongly recommended and an invaluable addition to your IWDG *Guide to Whales and Dolphins of Ireland*.

## Reactions to IWDG fieldguide

The IWDG *Guide to Whales and Dolphins of Ireland* has been very well received. The two largest distributors in Ireland, Easons and Argosy, have already requested more copies and the authors Jim Wilson and Simon Berrow have received many kind messages:

*'I have looked at many, many books on whales and dolphins, and I don't think there's anything else out there quite like the publications you and your colleagues have produced. Although my initial interest in the IWDG books was obviously prompted by the Irish focus, I've found in them much of value to other areas too, including here on Pacific Coast of US. Even in league with the standard general cetacean guides, I think that the text, illustrations and maps of your guide are unsurpassed, and the elegant functionality of the overall design of the book is unequalled.'* – **Claude Reichard, Senior Lecturer, Writing & Critical Thinking, Department of English, Stanford University**

*'Just received the copy of the new ID guide which you sent. I'm very impressed with it and will recommend it to most of the people working here, as it's one of the most useful ID guides I've seen (has all the right information and is a great size). When's the UK one coming out?'* – **Dr CD MacLeod, Research/Teaching Fellow, School of Biological Sciences (Zoology), University of Aberdeen**

*'We all really liked the guide – good, clear layouts and well illustrated. I*

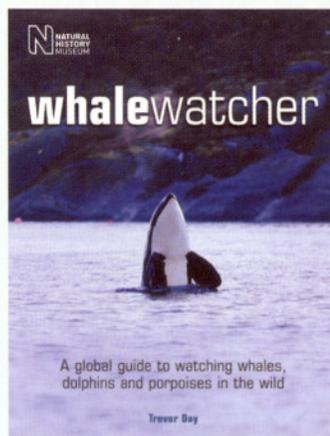
*particularly liked the pictures of all the whale skulls – something we used when visiting a marine wildlife museum in northern Spain. The museum had a great collection of whale skulls and skeletons, many of which were unlabelled, so your guide provided very useful cues to their ID.'* – **Graeme Creswell**

*'I have read my cetacean-obsessed 7-year-old son the IWDG *Guide* as a bedtime story from cover to cover.'* – **Niamh Haverty**

*'Thanks for the *Whales & Dolphins of Ireland* guide. Nice compact size and easily usable in the field. Congratulations and Bravo!'* – **Erich Hoyt, Senior Research Fellow, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society**

*'Whales and Dolphins of Ireland is an outstanding book! Looks water and windproof too, and the layout is excellent. I am constantly amazed to see what you folks do... there is no other country on earth with the same level of whalewatch stuff.'* – **Bill Rossiter, Chairman, Cetacean Society International**

*'Many thanks for the copy of *Whales and Dolphins of Ireland* which I have just received. Congratulations on a great production!'* – **Dr Charles Anderson, Consultant Marine Biologist**



**Whalewatcher**

By Trevor Day  
The Natural History Museum  
ISBN 0-565-09212-X

**By Mick O'Connell**

When you hear of a new book being published by the Natural History Museum, you expect a certain quality, and *Whalewatcher* by Trevor Day does not disappoint. It aims to introduce readers to the broad range of whalewatching opportunities around the world and gives one choice location for

watching each of 41 species of cetacean, from Harbour Porpoises in Scotland to Botos in Brazil – an impressive wish-list for those with the time and money to 'tick' them all!

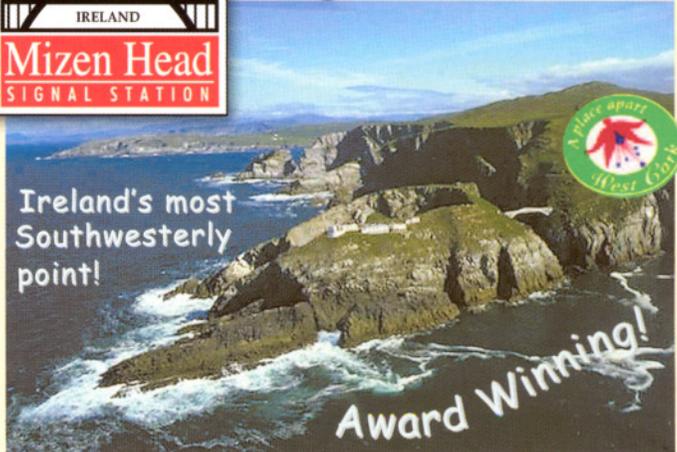
Far from being just a 'Let's go!' of whalewatching, there is a factfile of useful information for each species described, illustrated with stunning photographs. There is also a concise but informative introduction covering the biology and ecology of cetaceans, and a list of useful addresses at the back.

This book is not only for the more intrepid traveller but is ideal for the 'armchair' whalewatcher and would also be a useful resource for schools.

- *Whalewatcher* retails at stg£12.99, but the Natural History Museum is offering a discount of 10% plus free p+p to IWDG members. To avail of this offer, phone +44(0)1752 202 301 or e-mail orders@nbinternational.com and quote NHM/IWDG.



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# Network

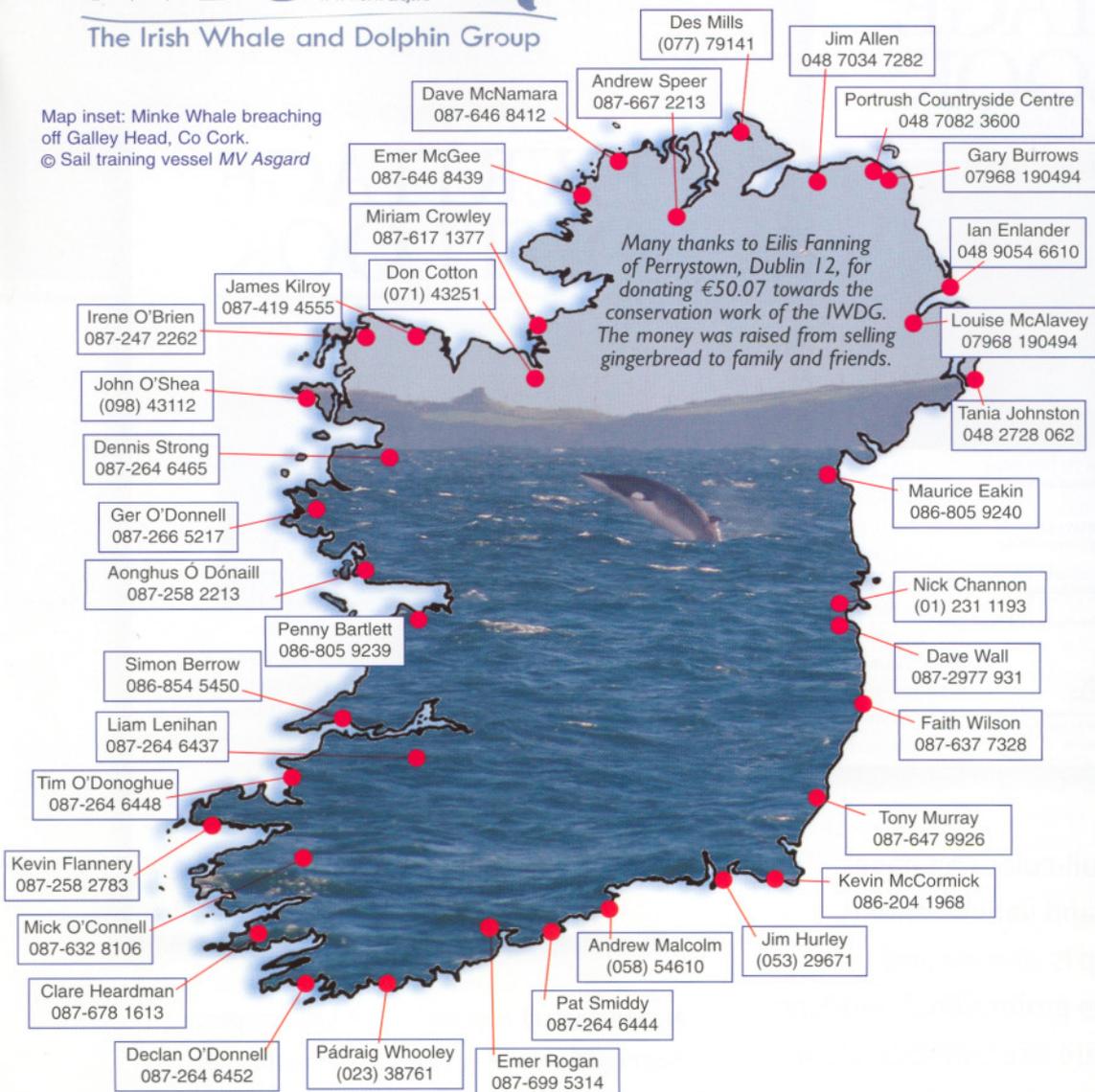
## ● IWDG contacts around the coast

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.



The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group

Map inset: Minke Whale breaching off Galley Head, Co Cork.  
© Sail training vessel MV Asgard



## IWDG Co-ordinator

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

## Sightings Co-ordinator

Pádraig Whooley  
Tel: (023) 38761  
Email: padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie

## Strandings Co-ordinator

Mick O'Connell  
Mobile: 087-632 8106  
Email: mick.oconnell@iwdg.ie

## Live strandings

National Parks and  
Wildlife Service  
(01) 647 2404

## IWDG

087-632 8106 (Mick O'Connell)  
(023) 38761 (Pádraig Whooley)  
086-854 5450 (Simon Berrow)  
087-699 5314 (Emer Rogan)

**Irish Seal Sanctuary**  
(01) 835 4370

## Ship Surveys Co-ordinator

Dave Wall  
Mobile: 087-297 7931  
Email: dave.wall@iwdg.ie

## Advertisements

Please contact Pádraig  
Whooley for rates:  
(023) 38761  
padraig.whooley@iwdg.ie

## Mission statement

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)

## Yes, I would like to join the Irish Whale & Dolphin Group

Please complete and post (with appropriate fee) to: Mick O'Connell, IWDG, Coolcumisk, Beaufort, Killarney, Co Kerry, Ireland

Waged €25/Stg £20    Family €35/Stg £30    Student/OAP/Unwaged €15/Stg £12    Corporate €125/Stg £100    Overseas: add €5

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Address:	
Phone No(s):	E-Mail:

OR please deduct from my VISA / MASTERCARD / LASER / AMEX card the above sum. (Please state cardholder's address if different from above.)

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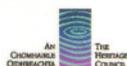


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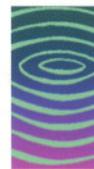
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