

## IRISH WHALE AND DOLPHIN GROUP

NEWSLETTER APRIL 1992



### WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCHING OFF THE IRISH COAST

Whale-watching has become an important industry in many parts of the world. Traditionally, whale-watching was carried out near to the breeding grounds of large baleen whales such as the Humpback and Gray whales or along their known migration routes. Many of these areas were originally the centre of an industry of a different sort - namely whaling. It is somewhat ironic that after depleting many whale stocks to only a fraction of their former numbers, boat owners can now make money by taking people out to observe the few that are left!

Whale-watching is usually associated with sun-drenched, crystal clear tropical bays and lagoons, or battling against the elements off major headlands in North America. However, whale-watching is becoming increasingly popular in many other parts of the world, including European waters. See Killer whales off the Norwegian coast, Striped dolphins in the Mediterranean or how about Minke whales off the inner Hebrides in Scotland. Whale-watching off the Scottish coast is only a recent development but, with experience, whale-watching trips are offering "an almost 99% sighting rate".

Ireland is one of the best places in Europe to watch whales and dolphins and so there is enormous potential for a whale and dolphin watching industry off the Irish coast. Fungi, the Dingle Dolphin, has demonstrated that thousands of people in Ireland want to see whales and dolphins for themselves and that whale and dolphin watching can become economically important. Some locations with potential for whale and dolphin watching have already been identified off the Irish coast and a major boat survey of offshore waters is planned for the summer 1992 in an attempt to identify more potential whale-watching areas.

How do you develop a whale-watching industry and learn to predict the whereabouts of whales and dolphins? What are the possible disruptive effects on whales and dolphins subjected to such attention?

These are just some questions that need to be addressed if whale and dolphin watching is to develop in Ireland. Results from the on-going sighting survey, coordinated by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, will help to determine where and when whales and dolphins occur and what species are likely to be seen. Constant-effort and line-transect surveys, where the effort put into obtaining sighting records is quantified, enable density estimates to be made and are more useful in identifying whale and dolphin "hot-spots".

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group will work to develop a whale and dolphin watching industry off the Irish coast. Whales and dolphins are one of this country's finest wildlife assets and many more people both living in or visiting Ireland, should have the opportunity to experience these magnificent creatures in the wild for themselves.

**IWDG National Meeting  
Dublin, 4th April, 1992**

**The potential for whale and dolphin watching off the Irish coast is the theme of the next IWDG meeting. Addressing the meeting will be Vassili Papastavrov who has led whale-watching trips to the Azores and the Canaries and has been instrumental in establishing whale-watching in Scotland. All are welcome. See Agenda inside.**

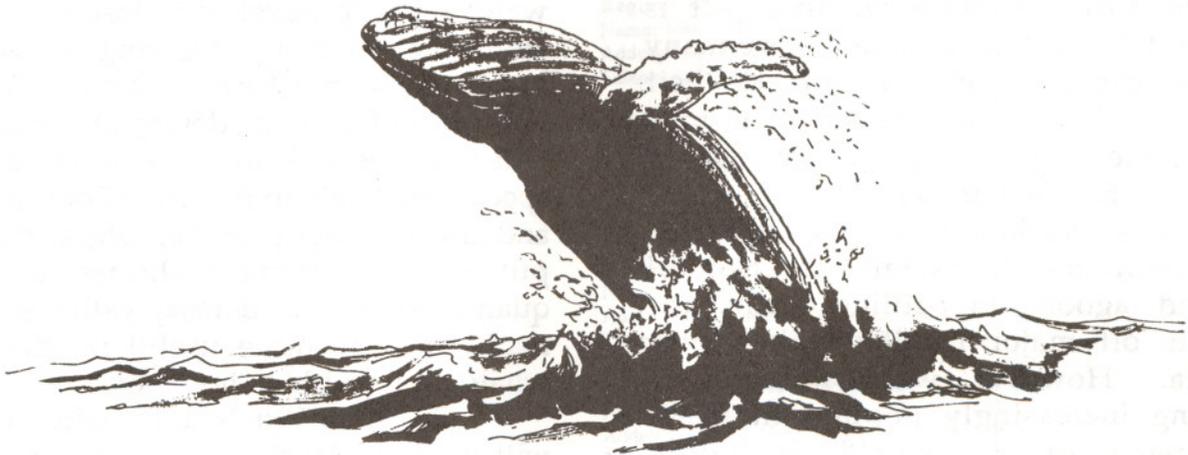
## Blasket Encounter

On Easter Monday morning, April 12th 1982, we weighed anchor at Portmagee harbour and set sail for the Blasket Islands, some 20 miles to the north. We were a group of six friends from Cork on a cruising holiday on the southwest coast. Our boat was a 36 foot ketch, chartered in Bantry where we had departed from the previous day.

The day was glorious. The sea was slight, and the breeze was a gentle force 3 on the beam. We reached the Blasket archipelago shortly after noon and spent a few delectable hours sailing amongst the islands. On approaching Inishvickillane island we were hailed from the cliff top and invited ashore "for tea" by the owner, Charles Haughey, who was spending his Easter vacation on the island. We anchored in eight fathoms in the bight at the north side of the island and proceeded ashore in the dinghy.

somehow there was something vaguely familiar about the sounds. I racked my brains. Then it came to me. I was listening to the song of a Humpback whale. Some years previously National Geographic magazine published an article by zoologist Roger Payne on the singing habits of the Humpback. The magazine had supplied a sound record of some of Roger's Humpback whale song recording. I had idly played this record a few times, prompted more by curiosity than any particular interest in the subject. Then I had forgotten all about it, until now. At this stage I had to convince myself that I was actually awake and not dreaming, or hearing Charles' "tea". I awakened Vivienne, one of the crew and together we listened, enthralled, to this symphony of the deep for the best part of half an hour.

The remainder of our cruise passed off very pleasantly, but my experience that night triggered a whole series of questions. I wondered how I



It was late evening when we disengaged from the very welcome, if unexpected, hospitality afforded us on Inishvickillane. As we made our way back to the anchorage I noted that the wind had dropped to nothing. It wasn't just a local condition as I could see smoke from gorse fires in the distance on the mainland rising vertically. The sea was now calm as a millpond. Our original intention had been to press on to Dingle. Now, given the very rare set of circumstances which would permit a comfortable anchorage in the Blaskets, we decided to forego the fleshpots of Dingle and stay put for the night. I was delighted. It had been an ambition of mine to spend a night in what the 'South and West' cruising guide describes as the "loneliest anchorage in the world". We discussed the events of the day and the plans for the morrow over a very pleasant meal and turned in.

About 2 a.m. I awoke to hear a strange, mournful, eerie, wailing sound. The piteous moans reverberated like they were emanating from a vast echo chamber. It was surreal. I had just awakened from a deep sleep and I was struggling to make sense of what I was hearing. I knew that I had never heard anything like this at sea before, but

could have heard underwater sounds at all. I was aware from my reading of the Blasket literature of the "fairy music" of Inishvickillane. Could there be a possible connection? This fairy music was supposed to be the inspiration of a traditional air "Port na bPucal", literally translated "the ghostly tune". I had never heard the tune. When I did hear it, would it bear any resemblance to the sounds I heard that night?

I re-read Roger Payne's article and anything else I could lay my hands on regarding the subject. Lo, it transpired that, yes, underwater sounds could be transmitted through the hull of a boat. In fact, in the era of the sailing ships, before engines, sailors were well accustomed to hearing the sounds of whales and dolphins through the hulls of their ships. I turned my attention now to the literature and the legends. Robin Flower, an English scholar who developed a deep affinity with the Blasket Islanders during the early part of this century wrote of his experiences in his book "The Western Island". In it he relates one story of the origin of Port na bPucal.

*In the old days, when the island was inhabited, a man sat alone one night in his house, soothing his loneliness with a fiddle. He was*

playing, no doubt, the favourite music of the countryside, jigs and reels and hornpipes, the hurrying tunes that would put light heels on the feet of the dead. But, as he played, he heard another music without, going over the roof in the air. It passed away to the cliffs and returned again, and so backwards and forwards again and again, a wandering air wailing in repeated phrases, till at last it had become familiar in his mind, and he took up the fallen bow, and drawing it across the strings followed note by note the lamenting voices as they passed above him. Ever since, that tune, port na bpucai, "the fairy music", has remained with his family, skilled musicians all, and, if you hear it played by a fiddler of that race, you will know the secret of Inisicileain.

I had difficulty reconciling the legend with my own experience. Inisvickillane is a high island and I could not explain how underwater sounds, however intense, could be heard so far above the surface of the sea.

The search continued. In the music section of Cork city library I located an L.P. by traditional fiddler Tommy Peoples which featured Port na bPucal. As I listened to Tommy's unaccompanied plaintive rendition of the tune I heard, with excitement, familiar twists and phrases in the music which were evocative of the Payne recordings and what I had recalled hearing myself in the Blaskets. But now I made an unexpected discovery. The sleeve notes on Tommy Peoples L.P. had a piece written by Tony McMahon, himself a noted traditional musician, which gave a different version of the Port na bPucal legend. Tony's version puts three Inisvickillane men in a currach returning home from a ceili on the Great Blasket Island. It was a calm moonlit night. While at sea they heard the strange music. One of the three was a fiddler and he played along with the music thereby absorbing the tune. I was now quite excited. This version of the legend was compatible with my own experience. It was a boat at sea. The currach would have been approaching the landing place near where we were anchored. Their night was calm as was ours. For a traditional musician to pick up a strange tune by ear would not be considered extraordinary. It was then and still remains the normal method of passing on traditional music.

I have discussed my experience with authorities on traditional music. I learnt that Sean O'Riada was intrigued by the tune and sought to determine its origins but without coming to any conclusion. In relating my story I detected a slight resentment at the explaining away of a legend. This is a pity. I know that it is a lovely concept that such a wonderful tune might have come to us from the parallel supernatural world of the fairies. I think that it is no less lovely a concept that this tune might also have come from the parallel natural community of the oceans - the great whales.

**Eugene O'Malley**

Any opinions write to 11 Silvercourt, Tivoli, Cork.

## Review of 1991 Irish Cetacean Stranding and Sighting Records

The IWDG received reports of 45 cetaceans that were washed ashore during 1991. Most records could be confirmed as photographs or skulls were made available. Common dolphins were the most frequently recorded species with 14 records mostly from Counties Cork and Kerry and 9 Striped dolphins were also reported. The Striped dolphin was first reported stranded on the Irish coast in 1985 and has been reported in increasing numbers ever since. Other species recorded include Harbour porpoise (11), White-sided dolphin (1), Risso's dolphin (1), Bottle-nosed dolphin (3), Pilot whale (5), Bottle-nosed whale (1) and an unidentified Beaked whale and Balaenoptera sp.

In total 83 sighting records were submitted to the IWDG. Although not yet verified, Common dolphins were the most frequently reported and do in fact appear to be common of the Irish coast especially off the southwest and west coasts.

Species	% frequency of sightings
Common dolphin	23.2%
Harbour porpoise	19.5%
Bottle-nosed dolphin	17.1%
unidentified sp.	13.4%
Minke whale	9.8%
Pilot whale	6.1%
Risso's dolphin	3.7%
Killer whale	3.7%
White-sided dolphin	2.4%
Fin whale	1.2%

It is hoped that during 1992 the IWDG sighting records will be stored on a computer database enabling rapid retrieval and manipulation. This ability will enable "hot-spots" such as breeding and feeding grounds to be identified in the future.

The number of stranded cetaceans reported during 1990 was considered to be exceptionally high with 49 published records. Unfortunately only 17 of the present records have been published to date, minimising the usefulness of this information. Observers are strongly encouraged to submit all records for publication in the Irish Naturalists' Journal, however the present review demonstrates the success of the IWDG stranding scheme in its first year.

**Simon Berrow**

A copy of the review can be obtained from Dr. Emer Rogan  
c/o Department of Zoology, University College, Cork.  
Price £2.00 incl. p & p.

## NO TO EUTHANASIA

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) was founded in December 1990. Among its objectives were the declaration of Irish waters as an International Whale and Dolphin sanctuary (achieved) and the appointment of a Marine Biologist to our National Parks and Wildlife Service (yet to be achieved). From the outset, among the scientific and conservation considerations, there was a general consensus that the broader field of cetacean welfare should be examined and not just within the strict parameters of the Humane Killing Group of the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Fully aware of the sensitivity of these issues the IWDG were not deterred and appointed a small working committee on welfare which received submissions from within and outside of the IWDG. With trepidation at first, as the brief was perceived as something of a poisoned chalice, the working committee was always encouraged by the parent body to act independantly and advised by other members to be faithful to it's over-riding brief - that of welfare. An international mail shot to all identifiable, like minded individuals and organisations was undertaken to define the welfare issues and select one for further study in it's first year. The welfare committee is extremely grateful for the co-operation and response received, without prejudice or exception, from all approached and others, who heard of it's work.

The issues identified were;

- commercial whale hunting
- aboriginal hunts
- tourism
- beachings/strandings
- incidental captures in fishing nets
- zoos, dolphinariums and marine parks
- scientific hunt

The welfare argument concerns itself with individual animals, not in isolation, but on a case by case basis. Against this background and the realisation that no immediate or overall panacea would be found, the first issue selected for study was - what approach should be taken in the cases of strandings and what have previously been considered "hopelessly" stranded cetaceans?

From the many submissions it became evident that global community thinking on this issue was divided into two schools of thought which we categorise as i) traditional mercy killings or euthanasia and ii) no euthanasia. As there is much confusion regarding this choice, and words such as 'mercy' are emotively loaded, the committee decided that, to be helpful, it was necessary to return to first principals and not be afraid to 're-invent the wheel'. The first principal established was that of **no intervention, only positive**. From this premise, which is recommended by the group to all approaching this dilemma either for the first time or afresh, progress became easier. Attempts to resolve the dilemma from the conclusive positions of either school of thought proved impossible. Adopting this positive direction to begin with, examination of case studies over the years, and in particular the Antipodean experience, illustrated quite clearly cases previously deemed "hopeless" in many instances, would not be considered now. Extrapolating from this position, and in the light of ongoing experiment and research, it became evident that all resources for research should be in a **positive direction** (i.e. life enhancing as opposed to death delivering) and many current problems could become opportunities to find new resolutions. This is also compatible with the philosophy of benign research. This is not to suggest the reverse and what the group would term flawed philosophy behind euthanasia, i.e. that life should be prolonged in any circumstances indefinitely and at any cost. Acceptance of death in obvious circumstances was another first principal and one agreed by both schools. What the committee proposes is that both schools, to approach our position objectively, should discard all vanity, acknowledging that power to give or take life is not ours. Ours is the opportunity to prolong it in certain

circumstances, and to be party, in dignified manner, to its demise in others. About any school of thought, our own proposition included, is the danger of rigid thinking, scientific or moral dogmatism and the perpetuation of pseudo industry and research built thereon. After much research, reflection and agonising, the proposition offered of "no euthanasia" became the consensus and personal decision of each member of the working committee on welfare. In the final instance it was an act of faith and the only proposition we could ask others to consider, by subjecting themselves and their opinions to a similar exercise and catharsis from first principals up. The committee felt, in considering the euthanasia option, all the benefits and comfort were for those witnessing the death of a whale and none that could be quantitatively established to be in the whale's best interests. The last safeguard the group could adopt to insure itself and any proposition, against anthropomorphism, rationalising for another life form we do not understand, vanity or sentimentalism, was the rigorous discipline, resistance and opposition, both within the group and from without, to the superimposition of personal feelings above the animal's welfare. The committee felt that many of the traditional arguments for euthanasia were the very ones, when subjected to this rigorous examination, supported ultimately the proposition of no euthanasia. It was also felt this proposition afforded to such a climatic event, opportunities of insight both to themselves and cetaceans in a benign, dignified and beneficial way.

The proposition was not endorsed by the IWDG but was welcomed as a discussion document, and wider discussion encouraged to the point of submitting to the IWC at Glasgow for further discussion. Members of the IWDG with first hand experience of rescue and failure and scientists who had rationalised euthanasia, had reservations and wished to maintain the euthanasia option. These sincere and well intentioned positions could, we feel, distract from the possibility of achieving even more for cetacean welfare. Their input was invaluable in helping us reach our own conclusions and we hope, on the way other issues of welfare, we can continue to benefit from each other. We could merely deliver our proposition and leave it on the table, with the academic exercise of transporting oneself back 10,000 years, walking a stormy foreshore and coming across a giant, live beached "fish" (whale) and wondering what one should do, without the benefit of euthanasia. One answer very promptly was 'to eat it'. We look forward to further submission and discussion. We have dealt with just one aspect of welfare and recognise the help required in coming to such conclusions and for many other issues.

It is an object of the working committee for welfare of the IWDG to have in place coastwide the people, plant and machinery to deal with the next 'hopelessly' stranded cetacean. Your help is needed so contact us NOW.

**IWDG Welfare Committee**  
**Brendan Price (Chairman)**  
**Gabriel King**  
**Don Conroy**  
**Liz Bono**

*The Welfare Committee presented a brief outline of their philosophy at the Sligo meeting (see this newsletter). It was soon apparent that the Group would not find a consensus without considerable debate. Opinions were very much divided; from the 'no euthanasia' viewpoint to the unemotive scientific view that as cetaceans do not have a rational brain they react to situations by instinct and conditioning and thus it maybe necessary, in certain circumstances, from an animal welfare point of view to have the option to put an animal down in order to prevent further suffering. Faced with the prospect of a stranded cetacean and with no euthanasia option one member suggested that he would no longer be able to carry out his duty to the animal and to the public. All agreed however that the issue is an important one and one that should be addressed. It was decided to spend a full session on this subject at the next meeting after members have had the opportunity to think about the issues.*

*The present submission provides the basis for discussion at the next IWDG meeting to be held at Trinity College, Dublin on Saturday 4th April, 1992 (see Agenda in this newsletter). During the afternoon session we will discuss the welfare of live stranded cetaceans with the intention of preparing an IWDG submission to the IWC's Welfare Group. Everybody is encouraged to participate.*

**IWDG National Meeting  
Sligo R.T.C., November 1991**

The second IWDG meeting began on Friday afternoon with a demonstration post-mortem on a porpoise which was held in the Regional Veterinary Laboratory. This was demonstrated by Thijs Kuiken who is a dutch veterinarian currently based at the London Zoo and who is studying the health status of dolphins and porpoises around the coast of England and Wales. On Saturday there was a talk given on diseases of whales and dolphins followed by a discussion paper that considered how to deal with live strandings. Everyone was in agreement that if a living animal beaches then it should not be treated as a hopeless case but all resources available should be mobilised to try and save the animal. However, controversy surrounds what to do with an animal that is undoubtedly in pain and is going to die. Some members of the group were against "humane" killing at any cost but believed that the animal should be allowed to die a natural and dignified death. The outcome of the discussions and of further research will produce a document including guidelines for how to deal with live strandings which will be ready in a few months time (see No Euthanasia in this newsletter).

In the afternoon the delegates attention was drawn to the massive problem of litter, particularly plastics, that are accumulating in the seas of the world and are leading to the deaths of many marine mammals. Discarded fishing nets and long lines are particularly dangerous to marine life due to their effect of 'ghost fishing'. Another topic of fruitful discussion stemmed from the great success of the Group in persuading An Taoiseach, Charles J. Haughey, to declare Irish territorial waters a Whale and Dolphin Sanctuary last May. The problem now is to see that positive action is taken to conserve these animals in Irish waters and to police the sanctuary (see Discussion Document). The sensitive problem of how to minimise accidental catches in fisherman's nets was discussed and it was agreed that close co-operation with the fishermen is essential to find a solution. An exciting international project that aims to see 100 murals of whales painted on walls throughout the world is underway in America and the IWDG have already identified a huge wall in Dublin that would be suitable for the Irish contribution. It was decided at the Sligo meeting to go ahead with this project in Ireland and the outcome will no doubt be seen on T.V. within a year or two.

Over 70 people attending with Coleraine, Portstewart, Belfast, Dublin, Cork, Kerry, Galway and Conamara all being represented. The Sligo meeting was a great success and the next meeting of the Group will take place in Dublin in the spring.

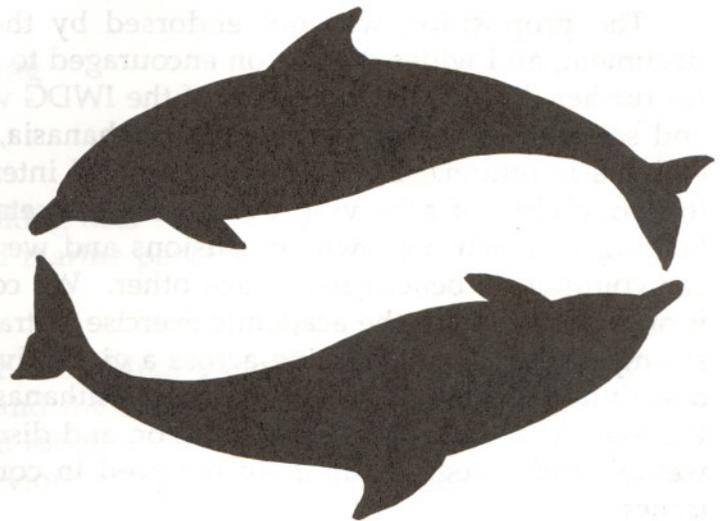
**Don Cotton**

*Fin whale*

*by Chris Agee*

Like the shop-worn idions of the sea-harvest - -  
*fair weather and foul, sou'wester, 'thar she blows'* -  
thoughts of this bloody slaughter bring me back  
to Anglo-Saxon, to the majesty of Caedmon,  
dreams of the whaleroad on the pelagic sway:  
a black glimpse of the sea's Jehovah  
making plain Melville's love of the cetacean - -  
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*Chris Agee's first collection of poems In The New Hampshire Woods, will be published by Dedalus Press later this year.*



**WHALE AND DOLPHIN SANCTUARY  
DISCUSSION DOCUMENT**

*On 7th June, 1991 the Irish government declared Ireland a whale and dolphin sanctuary. The declaration has been well received by the fishing industry, scientists and conservationists but what does the declaration really mean and how will it lead to the protection of whales and dolphins in Irish waters? The IWDG are preparing a discussion document on the whale and dolphin sanctuary to build on this important declaration. With funding from the Office of the Taoiseach, submissions will be invited from government departments, international conservation organisations and the fishing industry to name but a few and if anybody would like to contribute to the document then please write to S. Berrow, c/o Dept. of Zoology, U.C.C. for further details.*

## Irish Whale and Dolphin Group Meeting Dublin, 4th April, 1992

The main theme of the 3rd Irish Whale and Dolphin Group meeting is to explore the potential of whale and dolphin watching off the Irish coast and prepare a discussion document on the welfare of stranded whales and dolphins.

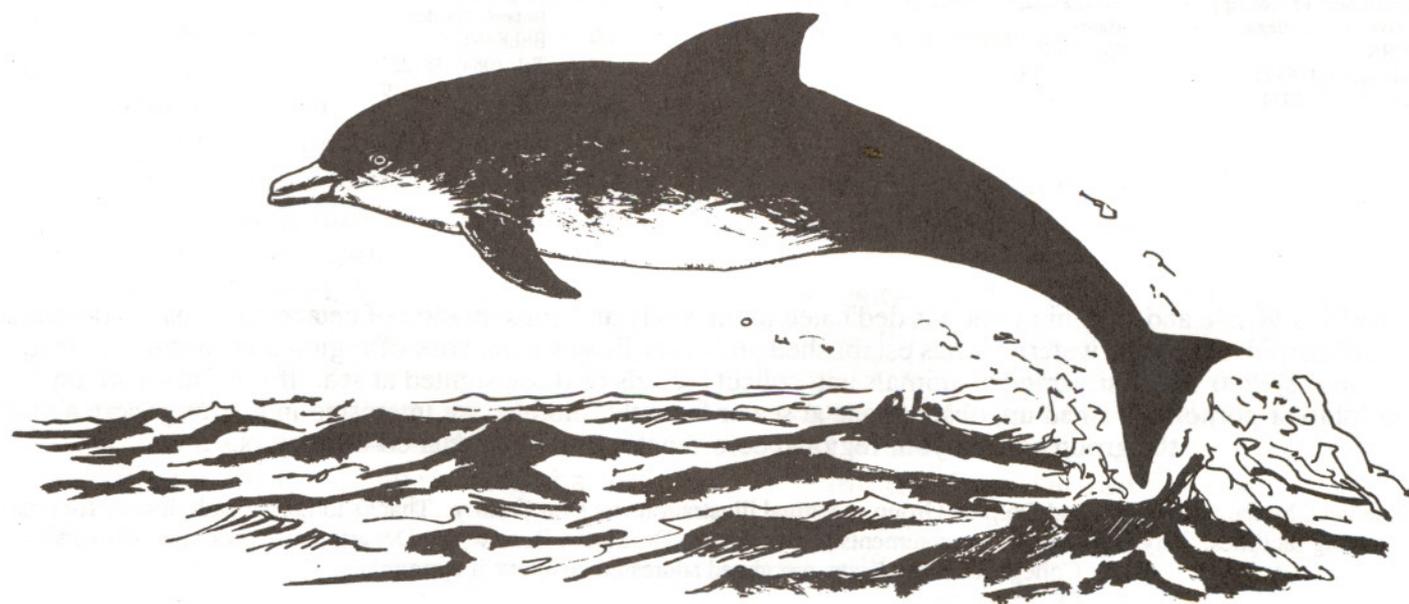
Addressing the meeting will be Vassili Papastavrov who first became involved with whales in 1984 while studying Sperm whales in the Indian Ocean and off the Galapagos Islands. Subsequently Vassili was involved in studying Sperm whales in the Azores, using paying volunteers, effecting a combination of research and tourism. In between sailing from Sri Lanka to France, France to the Galapagos and from the Galapagos to New York he assisted in a conservation project to manage the coastline of the Sultanate of Oman. More recently Vassili has helped set up and run the whale-watching and research that is being conducted on minke whales off Mull, which is the first behavioural research project to be conducted on whales in the U.K and is at present being funded by the International Fund for Animal Welfare to improve the scientific content of the work off Mull. In his talk Vassili will be comparing and contrasting the Azores, Scotland, the Canaries, Galapagos and Sri Lanka and will examine their suitability for whale watching. The benefits and costs, to the whales and the local community will also be discussed. Vassili's visit to Ireland is being supported by Bord Failte for which the IWDG is extremely grateful.

### Agenda

10.00 - 12.00	Whale-watching off the Irish Coast	<i>Vassili Papastavrov, IFAW</i>
12.00 - 12.30	Blasket Encounter	<i>Eugene O'Malley with music by Paddy Glackin</i>
12.30 - 14.00	Lunch	
14.00 - 16.00	Welfare of live stranded cetaceans	<i>Brendan Price, Welfare Committee, IWDG</i>
16.00 - 17.00	Report on news, events etc. & AOB	<i>Simon Berrow, Co-ordinator, IWDG</i>

The IWDG established a Welfare Committee to examine the welfare of live stranded whales and dolphins on the Irish coast. The Committee has prepared a document (see No to Euthanasia in this newsletter) which is intended as the basis for discussion at the Dublin meeting. The objective for the Dublin meeting is to discuss its contents in an attempt to prepare a submission to the International Whaling Commissions Welfare Group at their meeting in June, 1992.

The meeting is to be held at the Department of Botany, Trinity College, Dublin and is open to anybody who is interested. There is no admission charge and everybody is encouraged to attend and participate. Further details can be obtained from Johnny Woodlock (01) 492268 or Simon Berrow (027) 51187



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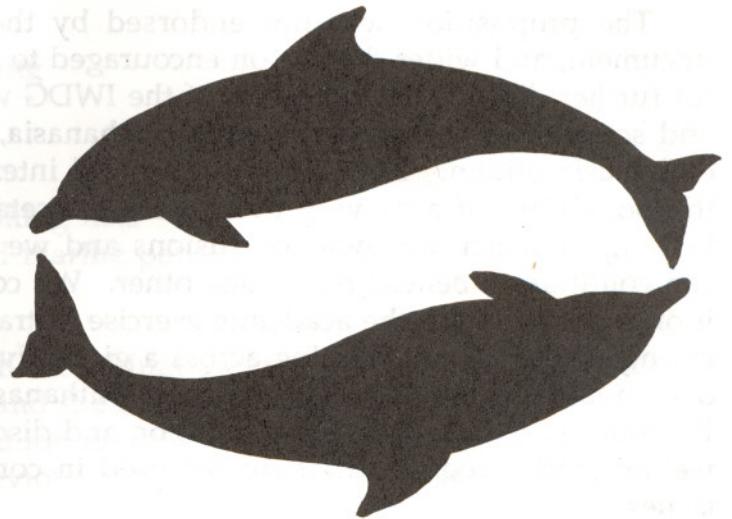
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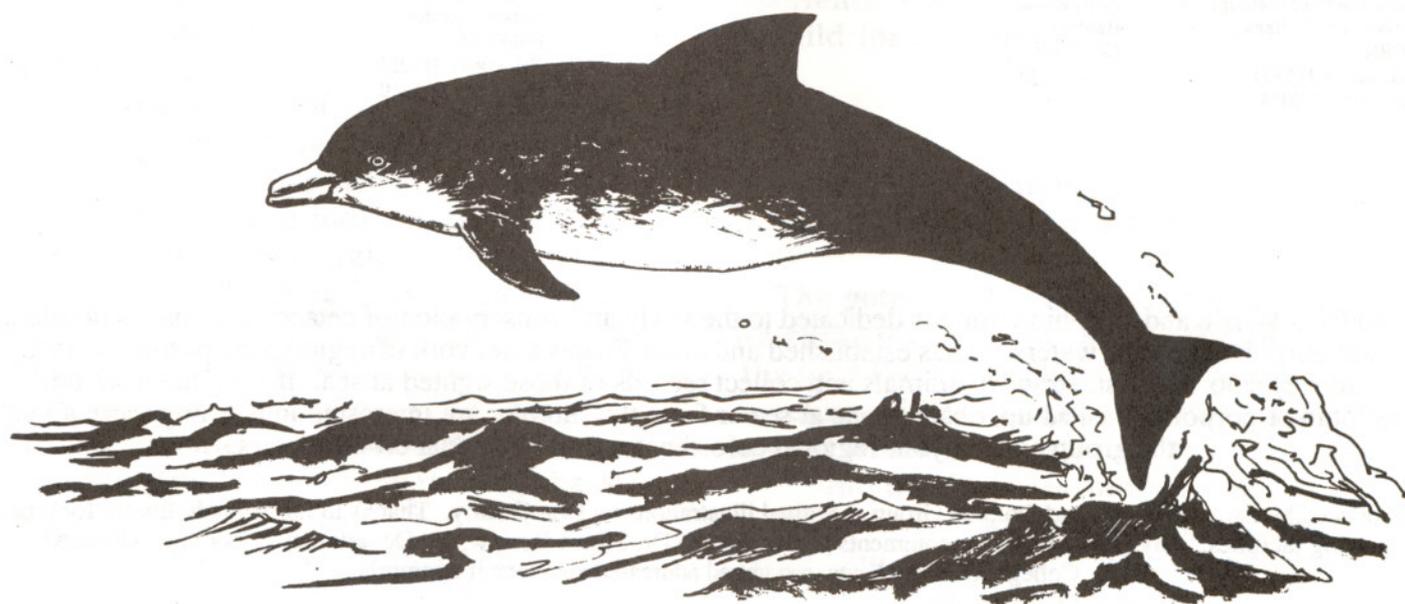
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## REGIONAL CO-ORDINATORS

### Region: Counties Louth, Meath, Dublin

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The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group is dedicated to the study and conservation of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoise) in Irish waters. It has established and co-ordinates a network of regional co-ordinators (see above) who will visit stranded animals and collect records of those sighted at sea. If you find a whale, dolphin or porpoise washed up, observe one at sea or from the shore or are interested in learning more about the group contact your regional co-ordinator or the national co-ordinators.

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