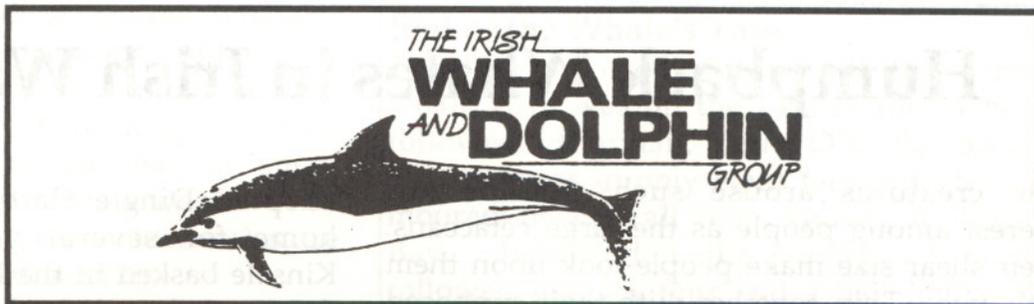


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AUTUMN  
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### IS IRELAND A SANCTUARY FOR WHALES & DOLPHINS?

Since the Irish government's declaration of a whale & dolphin sanctuary (June 7th, 1991) a lot has been written, discussed and thought about whale sanctuaries, the declaration and its implications. Some have expressed pride, some reservations and some confusion but there is little doubt that the declaration has aroused debate. The declaration has been welcomed by individuals and organisations throughout the world but what is a whale & dolphin sanctuary and what does it really mean?

A sanctuary is defined as a holy place, a place of worship affording immunity from arrest, a place of refuge, a reserve. Whales and dolphins are highly mobile species that may travel thousands miles, crossing national boundaries and into international waters. The distribution, movements and behaviour of many species in Irish waters is poorly understood and some species are only known from dead specimens.

The IWDG, who proposed the sanctuary declaration in the first place, felt that the best way to explore the implications of the declaration and sanctuaries in general was to create a forum within which all opinions and views may be expressed and disseminated. With generous funding from the National

Heritage Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service the IWDG are preparing a discussion document. Many individuals and groups, including conservation and animal welfare groups, government departments and fishermen's organisations, both in Ireland and abroad, have been invited to contribute to the document. Dr. Sidney Holt, the internationally respected whale biologist, who has been deeply involved in establishing whale sanctuaries throughout the world, has agreed to write a foreword to the document.

This is your chance to contribute to the debate and have an input into the conservation of whales and dolphins in Irish waters and abroad. *Remember, talk is cheap, action speaks louder than words.*

For further details and a copy of the sanctuary declaration write to the Secretary of the IWDG, c/o Zoology Dept., University College, Cork.

#### 4th IWDG Meeting, Belfast, 21st November, 1992

Dr. Seamus Kennedy will discuss the role of pollution in recent marine mammal die-offs, **John Millburne** will look at how legislation protects cetaceans in Northern Ireland and **Bernard Picton** will demonstrate the new marine database. A guided tour of the National Aquarium, Portaferry has been organised for Sunday. See Agenda inside.

# Humpback Whales in Irish Waters

Few creatures arouse such passion and interest among people as the large cetaceans. Their sheer size make people look upon them with awe. This, together with their supposed intelligence as well as the friendly and confiding behaviour towards man by some species has built up a certain, if sometimes inaccurate, perception of them. These whales make excellent subjects for the film maker and the fact that their complex songs and calls can be relatively easily recorded has meant that that many wildlife films feature them. Few people ever get a chance to see a large cetacean in its true element. Most of us have to be content with watching them on the many excellent films available or looking at the occasional individual washed up dead on our shores.

In contrast to the concern expressed for large whales today there can be few groups of animals that have been so much exploited in the past. This exploitation has caused huge reductions in the populations of most species involved. Even to the present day, species that have not been hunted for many years are still believed to be far below what would be considered a viable population size. However, because of the habitat in which most whales live any attempts to put accurate population figures on most species are fraught with difficulty and prone to huge error.

Today, when one of the large whales is sighted near land it causes great excitement among the few lucky enough to witness such an event. When one appears inside a harbour and is seen by a large number of people the excitement knows no bounds.

Such was the case at Kinsale, Co. Cork, on 22nd June 1992 when one of the great whales (albeit a young one) appeared close to the town and began to follow boats around. To add to the excitement the whale was identified as a humpback, one of the rarest species in Irish waters. For a few days locals and visitors alike swam with and boated beside this enigmatic creature. Among the media this whale was hailed as a rival for Fungi, the friendly bottle-nosed dolphin which has

adopted Dingle Harbour, Co. Kerry, as its home for several years. Unfortunately, Kinsale basked in the limelight for only a few days and the whale then promptly turned up at Union Hall, Co. Cork, a small fishing port some 30 miles along the coast. Union Hall fared no better as the whale was seen here for a few days only also.

This was obviously a young whale and concern was expressed for its survival in the absence of its mother. Humpback whales mate in warmer waters in shallow bays. Gestation lasts nearly a full year and calves measure about 4.5m and weigh 1.5 tonnes at birth. They are nursed until they reach about 8m in length. This individual was just over 6m in length and therefore was still suckling. How it became detached from its mother must remain a mystery. When fully grown they may measure 15-16m, with females very slightly larger than males and weigh 34-45 tonnes.

No more was heard about this whale until 31 July when it was washed up dead in nearby Tralong Bay, Co. Cork. It had obviously been dead for several weeks and must have been afloat or perhaps lay hidden along the rocky coast for this time. Several marks which could have been caused by shark bites were evident on the tail and other parts of the body. Despite the media insistence on giving it the name Willie it turned out to be a girl.

This species has always been a rare one in Irish waters and during the days of commercial hunting off the north-west coast earlier this century only six were killed. Only two previous strandings are on record: one in Sligo in 1893 and one in Donegal in 1907. The only other acceptable records of occurrence in Irish waters since then relate to one seen off Clear Island, Co. Cork, in 1967 and one accompanied by a calf off Galley Head, Co. Cork in 1989.

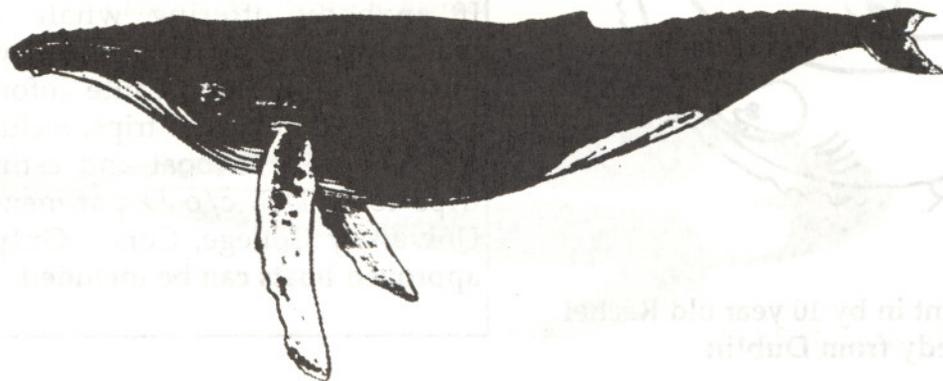
Humpbacks have what has been described as the most complex and varied songs of the animal world. Their calls were well known to

ancient mariners and of course whalers. Individuals and different groups are believed to be able to communicate across several hundreds of miles by their unique voices. The normal social unit consists of small family parties of three or four animals. They mature in less than ten years when males are about 11m and females about 12m.

In the southern hemisphere they feed on swarming crustaceans. In the northern hemisphere they take small to medium sized fish and they have been known to follow trawlers taking the spill. They are relatively slow swimmers and travel at about 4 knots (8kph). Because of this, larvae of crustaceans are believed to be able to attach themselves more easily than to the faster swimming species. Most humpbacks carry a selection of barnacles on the throat and head area as well as infestations of whale lice in warmer waters. In cold waters they may carry up to half a tonne of barnacles but many of these drop off when they move to warmer waters. The Tralong whale had nine barnacles still attached to the throat when it was examined. Humpbacks also have series of peculiar looking tubercles around the edge of the lower jaws and on the snout. Those on the snout carry sensory whiskers. All this gives the humpback a unique appearance and if seen well it is one of the easiest of the large baleen whales to identify.

It is interesting to note that a young humpback whales was reported in a British newspaper as having been sighted off the Dorset coast about a week before the arrival of the whale in Kinsale. It is just about possible it was the same animal.

Pat Smiddy



### End of the Whale's Tale

The last reported sighting of the Kinsale whale alive was on the 24th of June when it followed fisherman, Terry O'Reilly, back to his moorings in only eight feet of water. He moored in a small inlet known as Tralong Bay. Before that the young whale had followed him for four and a half hours: "No matter how fast or slow I went, if I stopped it arched its spine and put its tail down and stayed right under the boat. I was able to rub its head with my hand. I got a good few blasts from the blowholes in my face during all of this, but after a short while I did not notice".

Next day he was out fishing again in exactly the same place, but he did not spot the whale again. Not until five weeks later that is, when he found the young humpback washed up, dead, back in Tralong Bay.

### Humpback Deaths in America

Reports from the Whale Adoption Project in North America are alarming. They have found an unusually high incidence of humpback whale deaths. In all, twenty eight whales, mostly juvenile humpbacks, have been washed up on the coasts of Virginia, North Carolina and Georgia since the winter of 1989. The two juvenile humpbacks found on the Georgian coast were the first records since 1925. (In Ireland, the last documented stranding of a Humpback was in 1907 when one was washed up on the County Donegal coast.)

The cause of all these deaths is not known. It may be that there are just more whales around, and so strandings are becoming more common, however it is essential that more research is carried out if we wish to safeguard this species.

## NEWS and VIEWS

### Sealed Fate . . .

'The average seal rehabilitated after the Exxon Valdez oil spill had \$80,000 spent on it. Two of the most expensive were put back into the bay at a special ceremony. Within two minutes they were both eaten by a killer whale.'

Observer Magazine 4/10/92

### . . . death with a purpose?

WWF-Germany have a project to radio-track porpoises. Not live ones, as you might expect, but carcasses. They are observing their drift routes to try and reveal the distribution patterns of strandings in the German Bight.

European Cetacean Society, Newsletter 1992.

### Speed

Dolphins can travel twice as fast for the same amount of effort when they ride on the bow wave of a vessel, reported a scientist from a conference in Alabama

Science Now, BBC Radio 4, 3/3/92

Thanks to Delia Burt and Gabriel King for Newspaper and magazine cuttings. If you have any interesting articles or bits of news please send them in!



Badge design sent in by 10 year old Rachel Kennedy from Dublin

## Whale Watching Around the World

A new report highlights Ireland, Iceland and Norway as the areas with the most potential for expanding whale watching. Written by Canadian, Eric Hoyt, it is published by the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society.

Surprisingly, only North America and Australia earn more money from whale and dolphin watching than Ireland. Around 150,000 people visited Fungi, the Dingle Dolphin, in 1991. This generated a direct revenue of £750,000 and estimated indirect revenues of £1,000,000. If just one dolphin can be responsible for such a high level of interest, think how successful a more comprehensive programme of whale and dolphin watching could be.

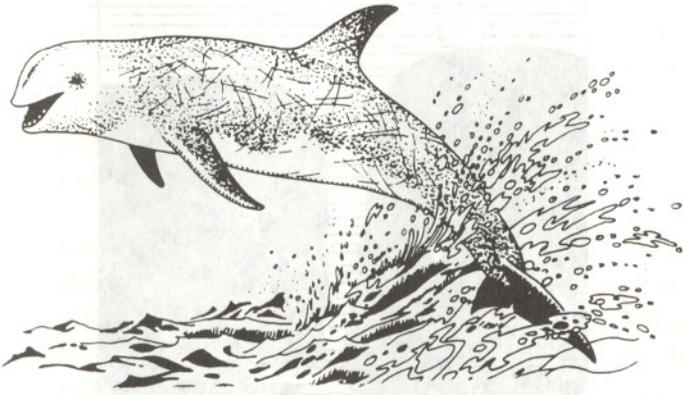
Norway sets an example that perhaps Ireland could learn from. Since 1989 the number of visitors on organised tours has increased from 375 to 4,563 in 1991. The industry was initiated after surveys were carried out to assess the best areas. This was followed up by meetings with the relevant parties i.e. tourism authorities, scientists and entrepreneurs, to discuss how best to proceed. A two year pilot study was carried out and in 1989 commercial whale watching began. They have now combined the tours with a comprehensive education programme.

Copies of the eight page, full colour, report, 'Whale Watching Around the World', published by the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, are available from the IWDG for £2.00 (including P&P).

### WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCHING INFORMATION SHEET

If anybody offering whale and dolphin watching trips in Ireland wishes to be included in a Bord Failte information sheet please send details of trips, including location, duration, size of boat and estimated cost of trips to IWDG, c/o Department of Zoology, University College, Cork. **Only Bord Failte approved boats can be included in the sheet.**

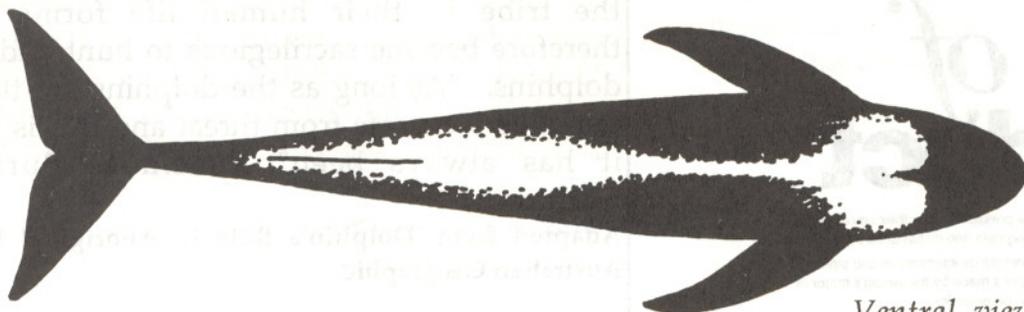
## Risso's Dolphins



On the 30th September this year we observed 15-20 Risso's dolphins at Benwee Head, Co. Mayo. They were less than 1km from shore and we were able to watch them for almost an hour as they swam, seemingly following a scum line that ran from Kid Island 3-4km along the coast to another small island. Earlier in the year the IWDG had received a report from Heather Aylward who had seen 14 Risso's Dolphins in this same area. Curious, we began to look at past records in the Irish Naturalists Journal. We found that on 7th July 1969 Dr George Luke and John Temple Lang had also seen 15-20 Risso's dolphins "as they sat on the clifftop opposite Kid Island." More recently, on the 10th July 1978, R.Nairn and M.Curry observed 12-15 Risso's in Broadhaven Bay (adjacent to Benwee Head).

Long term studies of recognisable individuals in NW Scotland suggest that Risso's dolphins form very stable groups that occupy the same areas from one summer to the next for a least three summers. It would be interesting to do some more research on this Irish population, which appears to have occupied the same area for over twenty years.

Clare Heardman/Simon Berrow



Ventral view of a Risso's Dolphin

## REPORT 3rd IWDG Meeting, Dublin, 4th April 1992

The 3rd meeting of the IWDG focused on the potential of whale and dolphin watching off the Irish coast. *Vassili Papastavrov*, whale biologist with the International Fund for Animal Welfare, introduced whale-watching around the world and discussed the practical aspects of developing such an industry in Ireland. The relative merits of yachts and powered boats, small and large, were discussed along with how whale watching is marketed and competition from other leisure interests. The ethics of whale-watching were also considered and all agreed on the necessity of a strict code of conduct. Despite Ireland's unpredictable weather and the expense of travelling to this country the potential for such an industry in Ireland was apparent. The IWDG and Bord Failte have since agreed to produce an information sheet on whale and dolphin watching in Ireland.

Also at the meeting the IWDG Welfare Committee presented the notion of no euthanasia as a principle when faced with a live stranded cetacean. Following heated debate this was considered unacceptable to the meeting but these discussions certainly made people think about what they would do in such a circumstance. The IWDG agreed to seek funding for the production of practical guide-lines for the welfare of live stranded cetaceans.

Over 80 people, including yacht owners, fishermen and scientists attended the meeting. Many thanks to Bord Failte for sponsoring Vassilis visit, Trinity College for hosting the meeting and *Teresa Doyle* for organising the event.

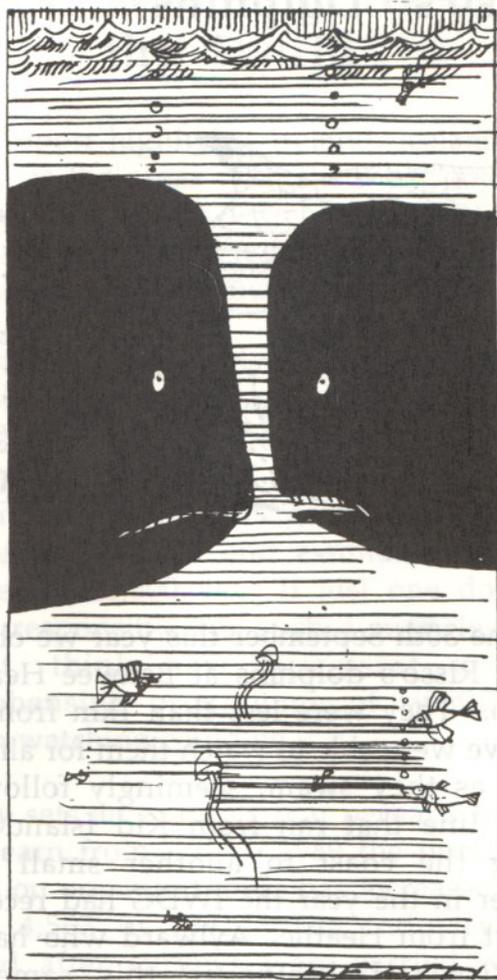
## Dolphin Code of Conduct

There is no reason why boats and dolphins should not be able to co-exist if care is taken to observe the following rules:

- **Do not** chase dolphins or drive a boat directly towards them; wherever possible let them approach you.
- **Do not** respond to them by changing course or speed in a sudden or erratic manner; slowing down or stopping suddenly can confuse and alarm dolphins as much as sudden acceleration.
- **Avoid** dolphins with young
- **Do not** swim with, touch or feed dolphins, for your safety and theirs.
- **Ensure** that no more than one boat is within 100 metres, or three boats within 1 kilometre of dolphins at any one time.

*Guidelines produced by the Sea Watch Foundation*

Send an SAE to the IWDG for a full copy of the code.



*'Whatever we do, we must save the humans before it's too late'.*

Sea Watch Foundation

## Dolphin



*olphins and porpoises share Britain's coastal waters with you, please show understanding when in their vicinity*



## Code of conduct

Dolphins and porpoises face severe pressures upon their environment - pollution, accidental capture in fishing nets and disturbance from vessels. Inshore craft can either affect the animals by interference and stress caused from the high frequency sounds made by the vessel's motor or from injury when accidentally cut by the propeller.

Please observe the code of conduct ►

### Aborigines and dolphins

For many coastal aboriginal tribes in Australia the dolphin has special symbolic significance. Some individuals are able to commune with the dolphins and get them to round up shoals of fish which the tribe can easily catch. "As with all pets we would personally reward the dolphins by hand feeding them," said Burnam Burnam, New South Wales Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

The tribe believed that the spirits of their departed would go back to the dolphins and from offshore they could guide and protect the tribe in their human life forms. It therefore became sacrilegious to hunt and kill dolphins. "As long as the dolphins are there, our tribe feels safe from threat and this is how it has always been", concludes Burnam Burnam.

Adapted from 'Dolphin's Role in Aboriginal Life', Australian Geographic

## INTERNATIONAL WHALING COMMISSION: GLASGOW 1992

This year's IWC meeting was held in Glasgow. Three weeks of Scientific and Technical meetings culminated in the political meeting that took place 29 June-3 July. 31 of the 38 member countries were present and observers were present from 79 non-government organisations.

### Commercial whaling

As you know, catch limits for commercial whaling have been set at zero since 1986. Probably the most important part of the IWC Scientific Committee's work has been the development of a safe procedure for calculating catch limits for baleen whales. This represents the culmination of 7 year's work. It is the most extensively-tested wildlife management procedure yet developed and has been designed only to require minimal information (estimates of past and current population size and catch history) and takes into account uncertainty in a wide range of factors.

The Commission adopted this by resolution but agreed that a number of other issues need to be resolved before it can be used (and hence the moratorium on commercial whaling be lifted, at least for some species and areas). These include some scientific issues (e.g. setting of minimum standards for data and developing guidelines for carrying out surveys and analysing the results) and the development of an effective inspection scheme. A three-quarters majority of votes cast (excluding abstentions) is required for the IWC to implement a new management scheme for commercial whaling and establish catch limits.

### Aboriginal whaling

The IWC continues to allow whaling by native peoples. At present there are *Alaskan Eskimos* (a 3 year quota of 141 strikes is in force - in any one year they may strike up to 54 bowhead whales or land 41, whichever comes first); *Siberian Eskimos* (an annual limit of 169 gray whales is in force until 1994); *Greenlanders* (annual limits of 21 fin & 12 'eastern' minke whales are in force until 1994 - 315 strikes of 'western' minke whales are allowed

between 1992 and 1994 with a maximum of 115 in any one year); and natives of *St Vincent and the Grenadines* (an annual limit of 3 humpback whales until 1992/93).

### Scientific permit catches

The right of member nations to issue scientific permits (and their duty to utilise the products once scientific sampling has been carried out) is enshrined in the Convention that established the IWC in 1946. The Scientific Committee reviewed two permit proposals at its meeting. One from Norway, was to take 110 minke whales from the northeastern Atlantic in 1992, 136 in 1994 and 136 in 1995. The other, from Japan, was to take 300 minke whales in the Antarctic. The Commission passed resolutions inviting both countries to reconsider issuing permits.

### Sanctuaries

France had proposed a whale sanctuary in the Southern Hemisphere but this proposal was deferred to 1993 to allow further consideration by the Scientific Committee and other international bodies with an interest in the region. The present Indian Ocean sanctuary (established in 1979) has been continued for a further 10 years.

### Humane killing

An action plan adopted included suggestions for further work on equipment and methods, times to death and assessment of the physiological status of hunted animals.

### Small cetaceans

I believe that the most important cetacean conservation problems relate to small, not large, cetaceans. Notwithstanding the different views of member nations over the legal competence of the IWC to manage small cetaceans, the Commission adopted a resolution that recognised the need for further international co-operation to conserve and rebuild depleted stocks of small cetaceans. It has also recognised the value of the IWC Scientific Committee considering small cetacean issues.

*Greg Donovan*  
(IWC Scientific Committee)

For more information write to Greg Donovan, IWC, The Red House, Station Road, Histon, Cambridge, UK.

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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.

Newsletter produced by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group. Layout by Clare Heardman. Thanks to Earthwatch, Bantry for typesetting facilities. You are welcome to quote or reproduce any of the material contained in this newsletter, but please acknowledge the IWDG. Any contributions or comments please send to:

IWDG c/o Department of Zoology, University College, Cork.