



Irish Whale and Dolphin Group

The first twenty-one years (1990-2011)





IWDG Committee in June 2007 (*from left*): Andrew Malcolm, Pádraig Whooley, Vincent Murphy, Simon Berrow, Ian Enlander, Faith Wilson, Dave Wall (with friend), Fiacc Ó Brolcháin, Emer Rogan, George Delaney. © IWDG.



Humpback whale breaching off Hook Head, Co Wexford, 23 January 2010. © Pádraig Whooley/IWDG.

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The first twenty-one years (1990-2011)

Pádraig Whooley and Simon Berrow



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Cover photographs: Simon Berrow about to take biopsy sample from fin whale (*Michael Linehan*); vet Siobhán O'Malley treating a stranded common dolphin, Old Head Beach, Louisburgh, Co Mayo, 20 August 2007 (*Shay Fennelly*); Whale Watch Ireland event at Galley Head, Co Cork (*Pádraig Whooley*); common dolphin, West Cork, July 2011 (*Pádraig Whooley*).

Acknowledgements: The IWDG would like to acknowledge the assistance of a number of key agencies and supporters who have supported the IWDG over the past 21 years, especially The Heritage Council, The National Parks and Wildlife Service, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, Marine Institute, Maritime Squadron (Irish Air Corps) and our core funder, Inis/Fragrances of Ireland.



The birth of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group will be 21 years old at 12:00 noon on 1 December 2011.

The IWDG was conceived on the third floor of the newly-opened ENFO offices in St Andrew Street, Dublin, in a room with 20-30 people. The person responsible for bringing us all together was Brendan Price, latterly of the Irish Seal Sanctuary but in those days of Skerries Marine Watch.

I remember clearly asking colleagues in the Department of Zoology at UCC, where I was doing my PhD at the time: 'Who is Brendan Price?' I was told he was a maverick, trouble-maker and best avoided. My kind of person; his idea to declare Ireland a whale and dolphin sanctuary in acknowledgment of the importance of Irish waters for cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoise) resonated with my new-found realisation of the very same fact.

Brendan wanted support for his sanctuary idea; I wanted to try and bring people together in a group to improve the recording of stranded cetaceans and start collecting sightings information. Don Cotton and colleagues had already created an ad hoc group of interested beachcombers recording cetaceans and other zoological items of interest, but only in the northwest.

At that first meeting we agreed to establish an all-Ireland group, and we developed two proposals: one on the Irish sanctuary declaration, and another identifying the need for a marine biologist within the National Parks and Wildlife Service. And we elected our first chairman: Don Cotton.



Pictured at the inaugural meeting of the IWDG in UCC in March 1991 (*from left*): Martin Sheldrick, Simon Berrow, Oscar Merne, Johnny Woodlock.



Dr Simon Berrow. © SDWF.

Over 100 people attended the IWDG's inaugural meeting at UCC on 2 March 1991. Martin Sheldrick travelled over from the Natural History Museum in London, and Peter Evans from Oxford. Two co-ordinators – Simon Berrow and Terry Bruton – were appointed together with 14 regional contacts to obtain records off all Irish coasts.

At that meeting the IWDG's proposal to declare Ireland a whale and dolphin sanctuary was released, and only 97 days later the then Taoiseach, Charles J Haughey, made his historical declaration.

Since those early, heady days the IWDG has grown into the most influential and successful marine NGO in Ireland and is respected throughout Europe and the world.

However, recording cetaceans stranded on our coast or sighted in our waters remains the core function of the IWDG. This commitment to collecting records will ensure conservation policies, mitigation measures, tourism and action plans will be supported by sound and robust data to ensure the proper conservation of cetaceans and their habitats in Ireland.

Dr Simon Berrow
IWDG Co-ordinator

The IWDG Sighting Scheme: a brief history



Pádraig Whooley, Sightings Co-ordinator. © IWDG.

The IWDG Cetacean Sighting Scheme is one of the core functions within the group. The scheme is high-profile and, perhaps unfairly, as Sightings Co-ordinator I get to hear of all the interesting stuff as and when it happens.

So I have some sympathy for Mick O'Connell who, as Strandings Co-ordinator, investigates carcasses in varying states of decay washed up on our beaches.

However, both schemes dovetail to provide us with a more complete overview of cetaceans in Irish waters. It was never the intention that they'd be able to answer complex, species-specific questions, but they at least point decision-makers and researchers in the right direction, highlighting the questions that need to be asked.

A glance at the graph below of all sightings, casual and effort, over the last 20 years shows that there has been a huge

increase in the number of sightings reported per annum.

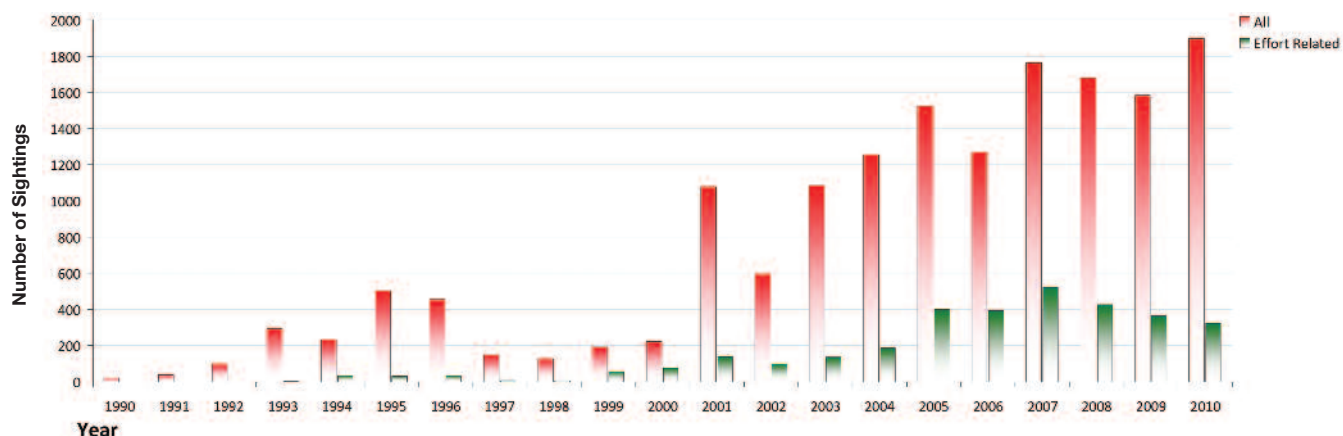
In our first year, 1990, we validated 21 records. Ten years later, in 2000, with the scheme firmly established though still not funded in any significant way, we validated 223 records, a modest increase. Twenty years on, however, in 2010, the number of sighting records was a massive 1,900 – though neither my brain nor calculator can agree on what this represents in terms of a percentage increase.

The main difference between the two decades was the funding support received between 2001-2009 from four key agencies: National Parks and Wildlife Service, Heritage Council, Marine Institute and Northern Ireland Environment Agency. This resulted in a six-fold increase in sighting records between 2000 and 2010.

But it wasn't always so. Twenty years ago, whalewatching was very much a fringe activity, carried out by a very small group of sea-watchers, mariners and fishermen, who reported occasional sightings. The few dedicated enthusiasts skulked around the fringes of the birding community, almost in denial, because every sane person knew there were no whales in Irish waters. But we set about changing this perception and establishing the facts.

We've progressed far from the early sightings reports that were often little more than musings on the back of whatever scrap of paper was to hand. The arrival of the internet provided IWDG with an opportunity to broaden the appeal of cetacean recording, making it accessible to a much wider audience. Empowering people. We provided a standardised input form so that sightings could be reported and validated quickly and easily.

Thousands of encounters were captured on camera. We had talks, Cape Clear weekends, conferences, newsletters, whalewatching events, research from land, sea and air, wildlife



The number of sighting records submitted to the IWDG from 1990 to 2010 including those with associated recording effort.

documentaries, and always a strong media presence. All these helped change the public perception of whales and dolphins to the point where a primary schoolchild could tell you that Ireland was, in fact, a great place to see whales and dolphins.

We successfully created a symbiosis whereby the cetacean recording scheme was seeding many other activities within IWDG, and these in turn fed “the monster” to which Emer Rogan alluded many years ago. Her concern was perhaps that we were developing something that would become too big, too all-consuming...and she may well have been right!

Today, sightings are reported by people from every walk of

life, and new technologies (as always) and social networking have provided endless opportunities for us to engage with an even larger audience.

But it's not all about volume of sightings. It's just as much about improving the quality of the data and, ultimately, how we use it to improve the conservation status of the 24 species of whale and dolphin with whom we share this island nation.

Are we up to the challenge? You bet.

Pádraig Whooley

Sightings Co-ordinator

The IWDG Stranding Scheme: a brief history



Mick O'Connell, Strandings Co-ordinator. Simon Berrow © IWDG.

Records of stranded cetaceans in Ireland date back to at least AD 752, when a “whale cast ashore at Bairche in the time of Fiachna, son of Aedh Roin, king of Ulster.” A more detailed description from AD 1246 in the *Annals of Cé* reported: “a whale ashore at Strandhill peninsula, Co Sligo, which brought great prosperity and joy to the entire country.”

Encounters with stranded cetaceans are often a person's first encounter with a whale or dolphin and can tell us a lot about the animal's life.

Stranded cetaceans were recorded under the UK Stranded Whale Scheme, co-ordinated by the Natural History Museum in London until 1976 when Colm O'Riordan from the Natural History Museum, Dublin, prepared a provisional list of

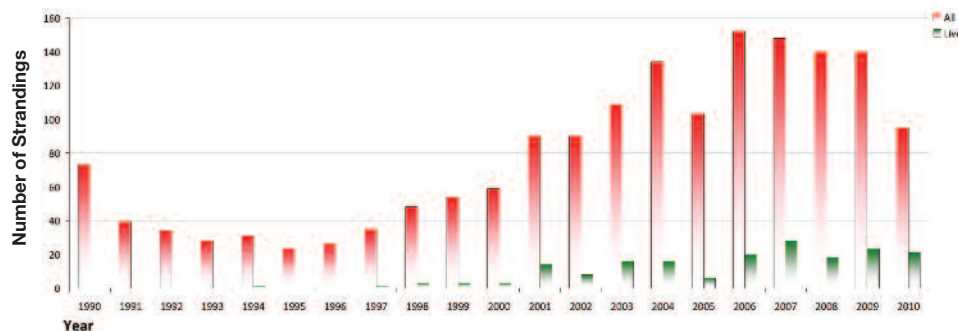
cetaceans recorded in Ireland. From the early 1980s stranded cetacean records were published in the *Irish Naturalists' Journal*, which has always been at the centre of cetacean recording in Ireland. Up to the establishment of the IWDG, records of stranded cetaceans reflected the distribution of interested people and often only the larger, more interesting species were recorded. This is demonstrated by the rapid increase in stranding records reported in the 1980s; most were harbour porpoise and most were in east Cork/west Waterford and reported by one person: Pat Smiddy.

If records of stranded cetaceans are to be useful in recording distribution, relative abundance and changes in species range, or identifying increased mortality, then records must be collected systematically. This was the challenge to the IWDG when it started. At the first meeting a network of local co-ordinators was established. Many of these people were already recording stranded cetaceans in their area, others were not. The IWDG developed standardised recording forms and requested information on species, length and gender. From 1992, some animals were recovered for post-mortem examination at University College, Cork, where information on diet, reproduction, parasites and other aspects of the animal's life-history were recorded.

A review of stranding records published in 1997 suggested the Irish stranding records could be used to identify unusual stranding events, such as those caused by fisheries interactions or a disease outbreak, but not for monitoring changes in distribution that might be driven by climate change. Recent reviews suggest the records might now be suitable for monitoring these changes, too. Now the IWDG stranding scheme is an important source of samples for a range of studies, including genetic studies, following the formation of

the recent Irish Cetacean Genetic Tissue Bank with the National Museum of Ireland (Natural History). The stranding scheme has recently been supported by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, which will ensure the information collected will be used to inform cetacean policies and actions.

A stranding scheme has to run for many years before its true potential is realised. The network currently consists of over sixty IWDG members who are willing to visit strandings in their area and who probably dread seeing my number appear on their phones!



The number of stranding records submitted to the IWDG from 1990 to 2010, including those live stranded.

We hope the IWDG will continue to drive this scheme for at least another 21 years and maybe the next millennium!

Mick O'Connell,
IWDG Stranding Co-Ordinator

Beyond the horizon: offshore ship-based surveys



Dave Wall, Offshore Surveys Co-ordinator. © IWDG.

Ireland's marine habitats cover some 890,318 square kilometres and extend from our shorelines, beyond the horizon, to 200 miles offshore. To put this in some perspective, Ireland's terrestrial habitats cover just 70,270 square kilometres, or less than one tenth of our marine area.

Beyond the horizon lies a vast network of marine habitats. As on land, each habitat has its own unique fauna and flora. At the bottom of the food chain are phytoplankton and zooplankton, which drift in the water column. Feeding on these is a myriad of

fish, shellfish and squid, and at the top are sharks, seabirds, marine turtles and, of course, cetaceans.

For many years the IWDG collected sightings from around the Irish coast, the vast majority of which came from land-based observers. From land, one can see approximately 11-15 miles, as far as the horizon. Occasional forays were made beyond the horizon in the early years by brave IWDG explorers in yachts. However, such voyages were expensive and the North Atlantic in force nine winds is no fun in a small yacht.

In 2001, the IWDG took its first steps towards a more structured approach to offshore cetacean monitoring when we established our first ferry survey route from Dublin to Liverpool. More routes were added as time went on and, today, we survey three routes across the Irish Sea, thanks to sponsorship from Irish Ferries and P&O Ferries. Well over 200 crossings have been conducted to date, by 78 volunteer surveyors.

While the Irish Sea was receiving due attention, the rest of Ireland's waters suffered an absence of ferries! We needed a different platform type, and in 2003 the answer arrived in the form of the national research vessel, *Celtic Explorer*. The IWDG has had a presence on the *Celtic Explorer* since the start, with our first survey conducted in October 2003.

As the years went by, funding from the ISCOPE and PReCAST (Policy and Recommendations for Cetacean Acoustics, Surveying and Tracking) projects enabled us to expand our efforts and to utilise a greater variety of platforms, including EU research vessels and Irish Naval Service ships. The total amount of survey effort fluctuated from year to year,

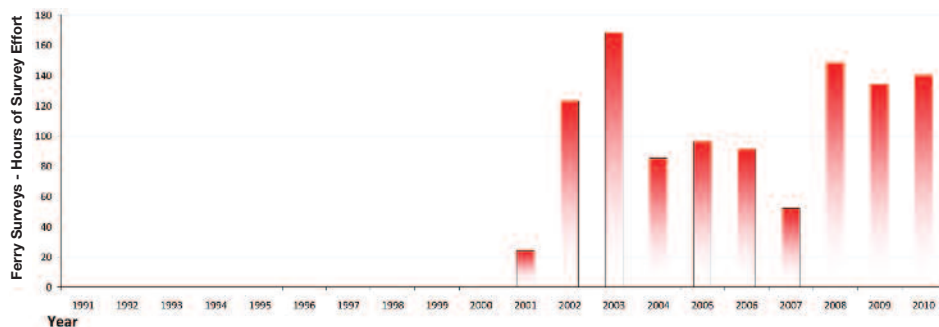
depending on funding, but reached a peak during the joint IWDG/GMIT PReCAST project, which ran from 2008 to 2011.

Since 2001, IWDG surveyors have spent over 1,500 days (or four years!) at sea, conducting surveys on board twenty-one different ships. We have recorded seventeen cetacean species, counted well over 35,000 animals and surveyed vast swathes of Irish waters.

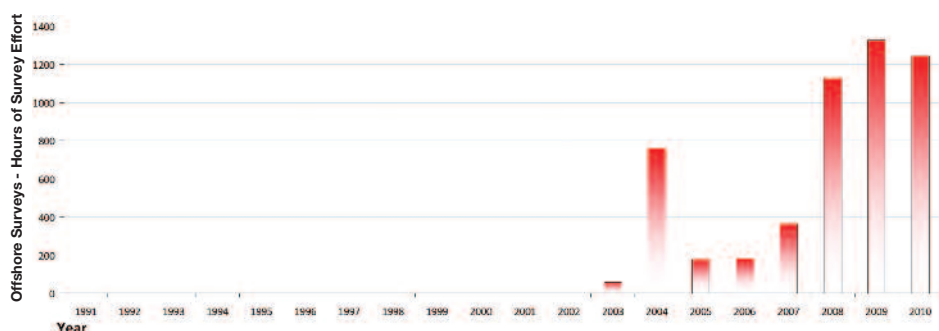
Yet the task of monitoring cetaceans in Irish waters is ongoing. In the past ten years we have barely accumulated enough baseline data to indicate important habitats and seasons for cetaceans in Irish waters. There are habitats, seasons and species which require more survey effort.

Following the completion of PReCAST the money for such surveys ran out and the IWDG now faces the prospect of having to halt its offshore survey work. We will be making strong recommendations to government on future priorities for offshore survey effort.

We have ships and surveyors available to us and we have developed a survey method that provides high-quality data at a very low cost. Let us hope that in this time of austerity we can



The number of hours surveying cetaceans onboard ferrys from 2001 to 2010.



The number of hours surveying cetaceans onboard ships of opportunity, 2003-2010.

convince government to provide the resources necessary to continue to explore and conserve what lies out there – beyond the horizon.

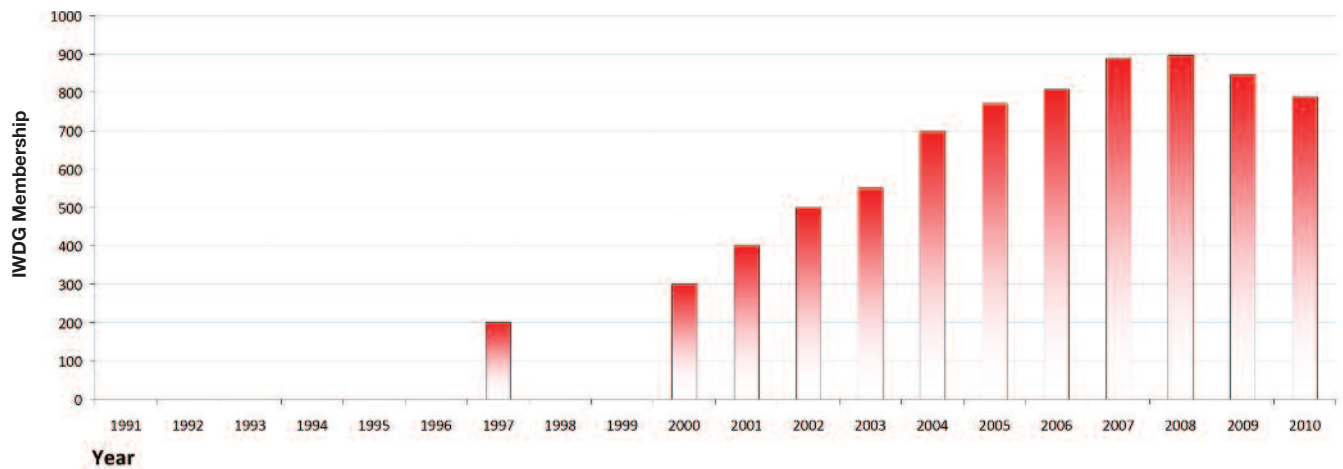
Dave Wall
Offshore Surveys Co-ordinator



IWDG team about to embark on offshore survey aboard the RV Celtic Explorer. © IWDG.

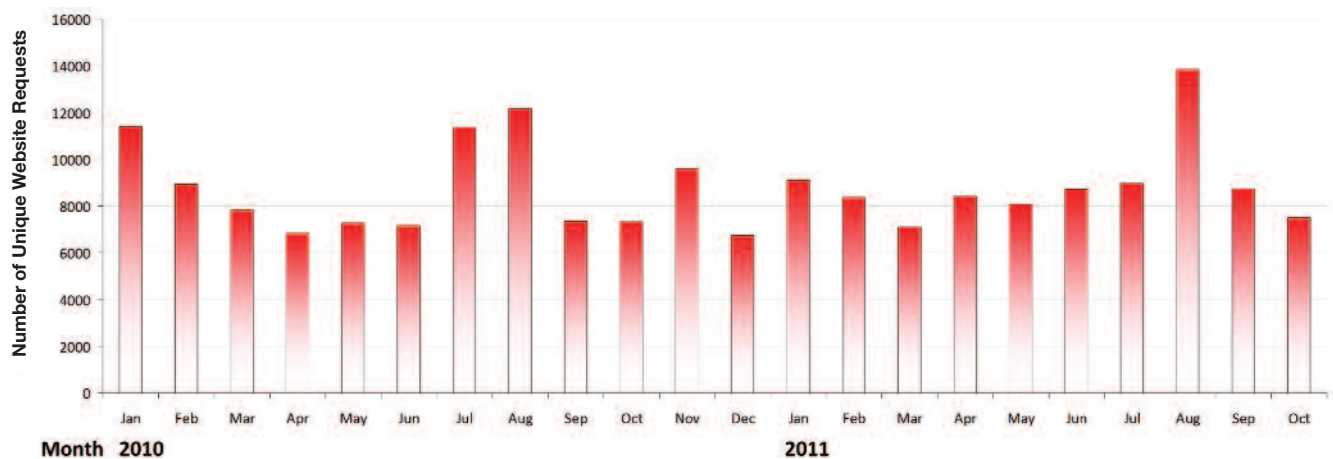
Impact indicators

Membership numbers (1990-2011)



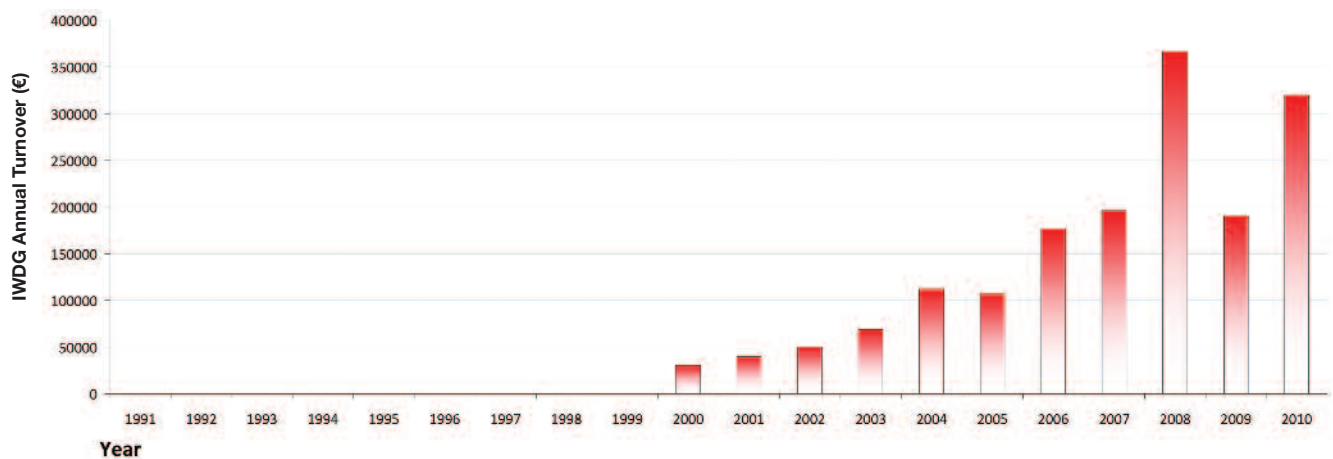
IWDG membership numbers, 1999 to present.

Website visits (2010-2011)



Number of website visitor requests, 2010-2011.

Financial turnover (1991-2010)



IWDG financial turnover, 1991-2010.

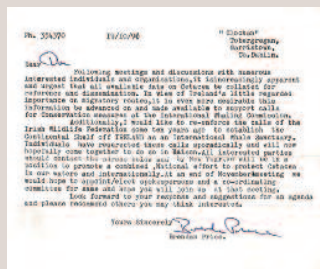
Milestones & memories



Milestones

December 1990

IWDG is formed in ENFO offices in Dublin city centre.



Letter from Brendan Price, dated the 19th of October 1990, calling for meeting of interested parties.



Stranded bottlenose dolphin calf sketch by Michael Viney for his column in *The Irish Times* of 15 December 1990, the first time IWDG was mentioned in the media.

2 March 1991

IWDG holds its inaugural meeting in University College, Cork.

A plunge into uncharted territory

Liam Lysaght



Dr Liam Lysaght is Director of the National Biodiversity Data Centre. He is an ornithologist by training but has a keen interest in all aspects of wildlife. Liam has extensive knowledge of conservation issues and policy in Ireland, having worked for the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Heritage Council prior to his current position.

My professional career, working for the conservation of Irish biodiversity – though we didn't call it 'biodiversity' back then – began around the time that the government declared all our territorial waters a sanctuary for whales and dolphins.

My experience of wildlife at that time had been of the solid, *terra firma* variety, shaped by personal experiences in Limerick and north Kerry. Like others of my generation, I had watched Jacques Cousteau and been fascinated by the sea life of the Mediterranean, Great Barrier Reef and other exotic, out-of-reach locations.

The declaration of Irish territorial waters as a sanctuary for whales and dolphins, although a largely symbolic declaration, brought the exotic world of the marine and whales closer to home. "What? Ireland is a sanctuary for whales and dolphins? Is Ireland important for these creatures then?"

My lurch into the mire of terrestrial conservation in Ireland coincided with the IWDG's plunge into the bright blue seas of cetacean conservation. I guess, for the IWDG, this was like the sea itself: rather uncharted territory and involving the pushing back of frontiers.

The need to unlock the secrets of the oceans and the cetaceans it supported; to educate people to the amorphous world of cetaceans and the threats they faced; to engage with a sector which saw the marine as a resource to exploit – and sadly, all too often, overexploit; and to bridge the gap between practice and policy...it was a daunting adventure. But the IWDG has achieved a huge amount over the 21 years since its establishment.

We now know that Irish waters are of inordinate importance for cetaceans and, through survey work, there is a greater understanding of the ecology and movements of these magnificent creatures. Slowly but surely, the mysterious world of cetaceans is being opened up to people, and there are now opportunities even to view these animals at close quarters on short whale-watching trips from Irish ports.

The fisheries and marine sector is now more aware of the needs of cetaceans, and improved planning and resource management should make the oceans a safer place for cetaceans.

As it comes of age, the IWDG can look back and reflect on the progress that has been made over the last 21 years in raising the knowledge and awareness of cetaceans, and it can be proud of the contribution it has made.

Ireland is a small country – the dry part, I mean – and people working in conservation tend to cross paths from time to time. So it was with me and the IWDG, as I was fortunate to have been invited to participate in IWDG's humpback whale expedition off the Cape Verde islands in 2006. To be part of a scientific expedition to an exotic location and to witness humpback whales up close was an incredible experience; it was my Jacques Cousteau moment. The IWDG team members typified the passion and dedication needed to study creatures that live in an unyielding environment, yet despite these challenges significant scientific discoveries were made.

I, too, made a valuable discovery over the course of the two weeks, being buffeted by gales and tossed around in high seas: my decision, 21 years ago, to plant my conservation efforts firmly on *terra firma* was a sound one!

A fitting home for the Celtic Mist

Lorna Siggins



Lorna Siggins is Western and Marine Correspondent with *The Irish Times*. It was during a circumnavigation of Ireland by boat for the newspaper in 1995 that she realised Dingle was not the only haven for dolphins. Her first substantial cetacean encounter was off the Antarctic peninsula when reporting on the Irish Shackleton expedition of 1997.

Serendipity takes many forms, and no more so than in the wake created by a 52-foot-long ketch. When the *Celtic Mist* motored up the Shannon estuary into Kilrush marina several months ago, it was almost as if she was finding her way home.

Just several months before that again, Conor Haughey, son of the late Taoiseach, had offered the vessel to the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG), and its first “outing” under the IWDG pennant was the first leg of the 2011 Tall Ships Race from Waterford.

On the home stretch back from Scotland, skipper Fiacc Ó Brolcháin, mate Garry Davis and fellow IWDG crew and marine mammal observers Deirdre Slevin, Bernie O’Brien, Gerry Healy and Michael Andrews recounted how they had recorded two sunfish and two harbour porpoises off Antrim’s Rathlin Island. There were 20 dolphins feeding near Achill island, Co Mayo, and there was a minke whale and up to 60 common dolphins “bowriding the boat for over three hours” after leaving north Galway’s Inishbofin.

It struck me then that the boat’s former owner could have been eavesdropping on this animated conversation from his otherworldly armchair above the clouds or below the waterline.

For it was in June 1991 – a little over 20 years before – that Charles J Haughey first declared Irish waters a whale and dolphin sanctuary, to mixed reaction at the time. Committed to the marine, he had already created a dedicated government department for same, and he had made no secret of his admiration for a young, enthusiastic scientist by the name of Dr Simon Berrow.

Haughey was still smitten by Berrow and his group’s work some 13 years later, when this writer had the good fortune to visit him at his Blasket Island retreat on Inis Mhicileáin. Although it was two years before the Moriarty Tribunal report revealed the full extent of his financial misdemeanours, his image was already well tarnished by then.

Still, he preferred to dwell on the positive – and we weren’t going to argue! – as he listened to *Port na bPúcaí*, the Blasket Faeries’ Lament, outside his cut-stone bungalow. He pointed out Puffin Island, the long, low shadow of Valentia and the Skellig outposts to the south, and talked of recent cetacean encounters, and contact with the IWDG. “I like to pass on all my sightings,” he said.

It is a measure of the IWDG’s impact that it had, and still has, so many diverse observers. Such is the enthusiasm that it has engendered, largely through a distinctly non-confrontational approach to environmental protection, that it is one of the best-known non-governmental organisations on this island.

And, with a fraction of the budget, it may have done more for public awareness of, and appreciation for, the rich marine environment around this 7,800km coastline than state organisations established for this purpose.

Small wonder, then, that the organisation should have been offered use of Ireland’s equivalent of a royal yacht to undertake research and fulfil its mission. And if the crew on watch should hear the strains of *Port na bPúcaí* out on deck some moonlit night off the Kerry coast, it may just be a former skipper putting in a call....

Milestones

7 June 1991

An Taoiseach, Mr Charles J Haughey TD, declares Ireland’s territorial waters a whale and dolphin sanctuary. The sanctuary extends to the limits of our exclusive economic zone (EEZ), up to 200 nautical miles from the Irish coast.



IWDG discussion document proposing Irish whale and dolphin sanctuary.

4 April 1992

IWDG holds its third meeting, in Trinity College, Dublin.

1993

The Constant Effort Sighting Scheme is inaugurated by IWDG.

May 1993

The Shannon Estuary Dolphin Project is launched by IWDG.



Bottlenose dolphins.

Milestones

June-July 1993

The Mayo offshore area is surveyed jointly with International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), aboard the RV *Song of the Whale*.

© Shay Fennelly/IWDG



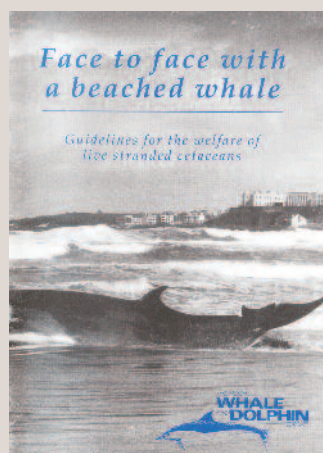
IWDG begins offshore surveys aboard the IFAW yacht *RV Song of the Whale*.

9 November 1994

“Up Whales” exhibition opens in ENFO, Dublin.

May 1995

IWDG launches its live-stranding guidelines, *Face to Face with a Beached Whale*, during a meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Dublin.



First edition of live-stranding guidelines *Face to Face with a Beached Whale*.

A world-class network of recorders

Erich Hoyt



Erich Hoyt is a Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) research fellow, marine conservationist and author of eighteen books, most recently *Marine Protected Areas for Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises*. As a programme lead on marine protection, he focuses on the identification of critical habitat and the design and implementation of marine protected areas (MPAs) around the world.

“We’ve waited a long time, for some of us a lifetime, but we are delighted to announce that blue whales have been observed and photographed in southwest waters, 15 September 2008.”

So began a legendary members’ email from Pádraig Whooley.

Reading this missive from my home in North Berwick, Scotland, I reflected on what was yet another amazing sighting in the saga of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, who over the years have found and reported faithfully on the presence of one cetacean species after another in Irish waters.

There have been fin whales by the dozen, northern bottlenose whales in west Cork, plus other beaked whales, humpbacks, odd dolphins, a sei whale in Co Antrim, killer whales in Cork Harbour and now, not just one blue but a number of blues feeding in Irish waters.

It occurred to me, from my perch in Scotland, that the IWDG was hell-bent on trying to identify every species of whale and dolphin on the world checklist, all 86 of them, while insisting that they were all in Irish waters or at least visitors and suitable candidates for sighting reports.

I half-expect that a future email will give notice of a pod of Commerson’s dolphins swimming by Kerry, or a Southern right whale nudging into Dublin Bay. Who knows, the IWDG may yet see this and more.

Remember the gray whale that reached Israel in 2010? The most surprising thing about that sighting was that it wasn’t first seen in Irish waters! To me, that can only mean that it didn’t pass by Ireland on its way from the Mexican lagoons; otherwise, it definitely would have been identified.

What is true and significant, however, with all of the official IWDG sightings, is that the news goes out fast, the same day, often in the same hour that it is received and confirmed. This has made Ireland into a kind of tribal society when it comes to whales and dolphins. The talking drums of Ireland beat fast and hard with whale news, instantly permeating the entire country. And when the drum announcements come, the IWDG members are quick to respond, organizing impromptu land- and boat-based trips, carrying thermoses full of coffee, hot chocolate and tea, among other things.

I have been a great admirer of the IWDG almost since its founding, 21 years ago. In periodic conversations over the years with Simon Berrow, Dave Wall, Pádraig Whooley, Faith Wilson and others, I have always been impressed with IWDG’s raw enthusiasm, as well as its down-to-earth self-critical approach, trying to learn as it goes along and to improve the organization, to do more research, to serve its members better.

A core group of individuals long ago took on the job of selling the idea that Ireland has resident whales and dolphins all around its coast to a public that didn’t necessarily think it had any. Then they proceeded to persuade some of the politicians, as well.

Success along the way has been marked by the establishment of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Sanctuary; long-term research in the Shannon estuary, among other places; as well as educational programmes.

There have been setbacks, too – for example, in trying to get more protected areas for cetaceans. Of course, more can always be done.

From my observation of whale research and whale-watch networks starting up in more than 100 countries, reported on in various books and papers and most recently in *Marine Protected Areas for Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises* (Earthscan/WDCS, 2011), I see IWDG as a sterling example of what a small, informal yet professional organization can achieve country-wide.

Ireland has simply one of the best land-based whale and dolphin-watching networks in the world, ranking with the great California and Oregon sites for gray whales, and the premier Australian coastal sites for southern right whales and humpbacks. This network serves scientific goals in terms of monitoring and reporting, as well as educational and conservation goals, helping the public to appreciate the importance of the ocean.

Whale groups come and go, but IWDG has become stronger over the years, mastering new challenges as the research has become more complex and as the strategies for reaching and delivering messages to the public has changed.

Besides the superb sightings network, there are strategies to address stranded animals, dolphin-watching issues and habitat protection. IWDG has met the challenges of organizing conferences with international speakers; participated in films, TV and radio broadcasts; and explored the various new media and social networking opportunities.

Over the past year, I have followed the debate in the organization over whether to accept the donation of the sailboat *Celtic Mist*. I was so pleased that the challenge was taken on, even as it risked the grass-roots, low-key approach of the group. It is perhaps appropriate that IWDG takes on this challenge as it reaches the venerable age of 21, a turning-point year, a coming of age, and as it looks now into the future and what IWDG wants to do “when it grows up.”

A bit of maturity, perhaps, won't hurt the organization, but I certainly hope that IWDG will never grow old and jaded, and will forever remain young at heart – ready and willing to be overwhelmed by the simple yet extraordinary presence of a whale. IWDG members share this and have nurtured this feeling through the group and kept it alive. That is a kind of magic of its own – laudable, precious, substantial – and it is key in terms of the future of ocean conservation.

Beards, beached whales and bodhráns

Jim Allen



Jim Allen is a native of Coleraine, Co Derry, and has been involved with the IWDG since 1992 and as a north coast regional coordinator for the IWDG since 1994. He is an Environmental Education Officer with Coleraine Borough Council, specialising in coastal and marine processes and the impacts of marine debris and beach litter. He is a self-confessed wrecker and addicted beachcomber.

A big bearded man with warm smile and coat, held together with string, who could successfully audition as the next Dubliner. A dapper, sharp-eyed intellectual with iron-grip handshake. A poetry-loving Connemara teacher with hippy tendencies. A woolly-jumpered girl with soft, confident accent. A bald, brash Belfast bone-collector. A Sligo-based beachcombing lecturer. A slim, fresh-faced Englishman with brains to burn who seemed to be looking for somewhere to light a fire. These were some of the colourful characters at the epicentre and genesis of what is now one of the most successful wildlife conservation movements in Ireland.

Speaking fluent ‘blubber’ (including seals and even sea turtles), they entered stage left of my then 34-year-old life back in the early 1990s. I had been researching the impacts of marine debris on coastal wildlife and bare feet when I made the initial connection. I quickly learned a new word,

Continued next page →

Milestones

1995

The WhaleLog project is launched with the Irish Air Corps Maritime Squadron.



Members of the Irish Air Corps Maritime Squadron with the IWDG's Shay Fennelly (second from right).

September 1996

IWDG collaborates with UCC on the first count of the resident bottlenose dolphin population in the Shannon estuary.



Bottlenose dolphins, Shannon estuary.

1997

IWDG membership reaches 200.



Whale Watch Ireland 2002, Old Head of Kinsale, Co Cork.

Milestones

April 1998

First whale-stranding workshop is held at the North Bull Island Interpretive Centre, Dublin, jointly with British Divers Marine Life Rescue.



Participants on the first whale-stranding workshop with dummy whale.

Summer 1998

Series of exploratory west coast offshore cruises are carried out on *Seadrifter*.



Simon Berrow on *Seadrifter* during 1998 west coast cruises.

December 1999

IWDG is granted charitable status (Registered Charity No: CHY11163).

"*set-ay-shun*," which saved time on always having to say 'whales, dolphins and porpoises.' And they gave me an ego-fondling inside-track on marine mega-fauna.

Twenty-one years later, the cast has changed, and grown, but the show goes on, and guess what, it's a hit.

Like me, these southern-based conservationists viewed the island of Ireland as a continuous fringe of amazing coastline, unbroken by colonial borders or northern xenophobia. Like me, they loved the wet stuff surrounding the island and especially the stuff that lived in it. Unlike me, they had knowledge and were several laps ahead of me in experience in proactive conservation. They had made the Irish government sit up, take notice and act, and they were, at the time, in the throes of celebrating the declaration of Europe's first ever whale and dolphin sanctuary.

'Big Beard' and 'Dapper Iron-Grip' became my new pin-up eco-heroes as I looked out at the North Atlantic with a fresh focus, longing to catch sight of my first live fin as opposed to the dozens of rotting dead ones that had been washed ashore on the north Antrim and Derry coast where I lived and worked as an Environmental Education Officer for the local council. We quickly became friends and I was recruited as 'their man in the North.'

That first decade of exponentially growing interest in the life of the IWDG was adventurous, fulfilling and perfumed with the pervading smell of demised '*setayshuns*.'

During that time – as I and an adventurous, skinheaded, kayaking, Inuit-wannabe friend were amassing the largest display of whale-bones outside of Ireland's two natural history museums – a 29-foot female *setayshun* weighing nine tonnes lost her way along the north coast and ended up stranded on Portstewart beach surrounded by several hundred onlookers, all determined to carry out CPR.

Sadly, she failed to escape to freedom and then lost a four-hour fight for life, but she still provided the IWDG with the inspiration for *Face to Face with a Beached Whale* – the IWDG booklet on how not to handle a big, beached animal.

While web-footed skinhead and I were planning to recreate a historic voyage to Iona in a 40-foot currach, I met two other very amazing people. One was my beautiful wife-to-be, Janice, and the other was the not as beautiful IWDG secretary-to-be, Pádraig Whooley. A legend in his own bandana, this affable returned exile and Greystones native with a sense of humour to match my own, breezed in stage right with tales of killer whales in Vancouver, and helped 'Fire Starter' take this fledgling Irish wildlife organisation on to a new level of enhanced credibility and achievement. He went on to sit on more headlands than a knackered gull.

From Bray to Belmullet, from Cork to Coleraine; several thousand sightings, strandings and pie charts later; dozens of meetings, public talks, debates, workshops, campaigns, newsletters, watches, surveys, publications, AGMs, voyages, post-mortems, press columns and TV appearances later; and thousands of laughs, tears, a few babies, Monty Halls and one helluva big yacht later, the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group is not only online but very much on the map, in Ireland and throughout Europe, as a credible, reliable and significant wildlife organisation that hasn't lost its sense of humour or sense of direction.

And only because good, determined and skillful people are on deck.

But let us not forget that one-time bunch of bearded, intellectual, woolly-jumpered, hippy, beachcombing pyromaniacs who started it all.

A good friend of mine once stopped me on Portrush east strand and said: "Hey, Jim, why do you always smell as if you've just climbed out of a skip?" But that's another story!

PS: Any reference to people living or barely alive is purely intentional and aimed at keeping the fun in wildlife conservation.

Great passion and enthusiasm

Juanita Browne



Juanita Browne is a zoology graduate, author and media producer. She has worked in print, television and radio productions, specialising in communications on our natural world. Juanita is author of *Ireland's Mammals* (2005).

I have long been a great admirer of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group – it stands out as such a highly professional conservation organisation.

Over the years, I have found IWDG coordinators so very helpful and thorough in providing information on Ireland's cetaceans.

Ten years ago, Pádraig Whooley was very generous with his time in supplying me with sightings and stranding reports, on behalf of the IWDG, for *Wild Ireland* magazine, which I was editing at the time.

The IWDG was always so helpful in meeting any request of mine for more information, or in offering their expertise in checking over cetacean content we were carrying in the magazine, and, of course, in supplying their own well-written articles on everything from humpbacks off Baja, California, to the value of whale-watching as an ecotourism venture here in Ireland.

Indeed, when I published a book on mammals in 2005, the IWDG's very own Simon Berrow kindly agreed to proof-read the section on cetaceans. All of the IWDG's own publications, be it their own magazine or their various special reports, have always been produced to the highest standards, translating often complex new research into digestible content for readers.

With hugely passionate people like Pádraig and Simon on board, the IWDG often pops up on television or on local and national radio, and this is to their credit. The constant reminders to viewers and listeners that this group is working away for Irish cetaceans gives the public great confidence in the IWDG. They are seen as a group that is going to be around for a long time.

The IWDG has managed to raise awareness of our cetaceans as an integral part of our Irish fauna. I have seen Pádraig speak at conferences and his enthusiasm for his subject is infectious. This is what a conservation charity needs most!

I would like to congratulate the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group on their outstanding contribution to our knowledge of whales and dolphins in Irish waters over the last 21 years. We look forward to the next 21 years and to new discoveries that may come your way!

Thank you for placing these amazing, beautiful marine mammals firmly in the Irish consciousness.



Whale-watching event, Loop Head, Co Clare. © IWDG.

Milestones

September 1999

Ireland's first cetacean rescue pontoons go into service, funded by IWDG members.



© Shay Fennelly/IWDG

Live-stranded northern bottlenose whale fitted with rescue pontoons during a refloating attempt in September 1999.

September 2000

IWDG is registered as a limited company.

June 2001

Three killer whales arrive in Cork Harbour and stay for the summer.



© Pádraig Whooley/IWDG

Killer whales enter Cork City docks on 16 June 2001.

Milestones

August 2001

IWDG holds its first all-Ireland whale-watch day, Whale Watch Ireland.



2001

Cetacean surveys commence with P&O ferries on the Rosslare-Cherbourg route.

Dave Wall © IWDG



Volunteer surveyors on a P&O ferry on the Rosslare-Cherbourg route.

2001

IWDG launches its first five-year plan (2001-2005).

Science-driven professionalism

Alan Knight & James Barnett



Alan Knight (*far left*) is a founding member and chair of British Divers Marine Life Rescue. He has been active in the field of marine mammal welfare and rescue since 1988. James Barnett (*left*) joined British Divers Marine Life Rescue in 1998 as veterinary director and later as consultant, having previously spent six years as vet for the National Seal Sanctuary in Cornwall.

The association between our two charities doesn't go back quite as far as twenty-one years, but it is still thirteen years since we were first invited to run a marine mammal rescue training day with members of IWDG in Dublin. One of us has been back for another course on the west coast since then, and we have committed to delivering another course in 2012.

There is no disputing IWDG's primary role in responding to cetacean strandings in Ireland and the great professionalism its members bring to the task. They have a pragmatic and evidence-based approach which is to be admired.

Just last year, British Divers Marine Life Rescue had another opportunity to liaise with the charity, after the near-stranding of a pod of pilot whales in the Hebrides in October. A few days later, IWDG members were on Rutland Island off the coast of Donegal, where pilot whales had stranded, and were able to confirm that they were the same pod. This was extremely useful feedback on a comparatively rare event in northwest Europe.

Of course, this is only a small facet of IWDG's remit, and their excellent research, education and conservation programmes are perhaps second to none in Europe. These are based on a sound, science-driven professionalism which has put them at the forefront of research in cetacean biology in Ireland for many years.

It was only recently that we learned that their research extends beyond cetaceans when they purchased three satellite tags from our organisation to deploy on basking sharks. (*IWDG research does not actually extend to sharks; these tags were purchased by GMIT! – Ed.*). We will be fascinated to learn what the charity manages to discover about the movements and distribution of this little-known giant of the sea.

Finally, we would like to commend the charity on its communication skills. The IWDG website is an excellent resource for any marine mammal lover or student of cetacean science, while the IWDG magazine has been of an exceptional standard for many years, setting the bar for what a good-quality, charity publication should look like.

IWDG's presentations at conferences, such as the European Cetacean Society's, have also illustrated their ability to communicate their research to an international scientific audience, and on this they are to be congratulated.

It just remains to be said that we, at British Divers Marine Life Rescue, wish IWDG a long and successful future, and we look forward to further fruitful exchanges and collaborations in the years to come.



Kate Hills and son attending to live-stranded Northern bottlenose whale, Killala, Co Mayo, September 1999. © Shay Fennelly.

Collaboration and education

Greg Donovan



Greg Donovan has worked with cetaceans for over 30 years and is the head of science at the International Whaling Commission. He also edits the *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management*. His major interests involve population biology and modelling to try and provide unbiased scientific advice on the conservation and management of these fascinating animals.

Comhghairdeas! It is with great pleasure that I extend my congratulations to the IWDG on its 21st birthday.

As a long-exiled Irishman who has worked now for over 30 years in international cetacean research aimed at improved conservation and management, I can honestly say that the impressive development of the IWDG over its 21 years gives me yet another reason to be proud to be Irish.

It is particularly gratifying since, when I started out, there was little or no interest in cetaceans off Ireland, or any idea of the great diversity and regularity of their occurrence. My first fieldwork was in Greenland, Iceland and off Spain – I had no idea of what was on my own doorstep.

So, nationality aside, why am I so proud of the IWDG and its achievements?

I think probably the key component that filters down through all of the achievements is the ethos, both implicit and explicit (just read the 'Mission' on the website), that effective conservation can only be achieved through good scientific information. Such information is only valuable when it is properly disseminated through non-patronising education to all, whether government or public, fishermen or whalewatchers, developers or users. When it comes down to it, we can't manage cetaceans – we can only manage human activities that may affect them.

There are other, noisier organisations that address conservation issues in a belligerent manner and often alienate the people whose activities may be affecting cetaceans; there is a place for all, but personally I find that approach often is counter-productive to effective (as opposed to paper) conservation. This is especially the case when scientific information is ignored or 'massaged' on an apparent premise that the 'end justifies the means.'

By contrast, the IWDG has followed the path of obtaining good information even in the absence of much financial support, in an exemplary manner. Through education, encouragement and collaboration with research groups and universities, it has encouraged its members (many of whom are not trained scientists) to collect and report information that can be used, both qualitatively and quantitatively, to improve the basis for conservation actions in Irish waters and beyond.

In presenting that information, a key virtue of the IWDG has been its desire to work with, rather than against, other marine users and coastal communities. Time and again it has been shown that working with fishermen is far more likely to solve problems of bycatch and competition than simply condemning and passing legislation.

Whalewatching can be educational and benign when conducted properly – unregulated expansion can cause serious problems. Particularly where people's livelihoods are at stake, co-operation and education are usually the only effective way forward. This has been at the heart of the IWDG's immense contribution to cetacean conservation in Ireland. The IWDG is a great example to the rest of the world.

There is much more that I would like to say and many people who deserve recognition – but 500 words is fast approaching so I'll just say to you all: "*Lá breithe shona dhaoibh agus go raibh míle maith agaibh!*"

Milestones

2002

Cape Clear Island summer whalewatching weekend courses commence, Co Cork.



© Pádraig Whooley/IWDG

2002

IWDG launches interactive website, www.iwdg.ie.

March 2003

First IWDG humpback whale expedition sets sail for Cape Verde islands off West Africa on the yacht *Anna M*.



© Pádraig Whooley/IWDG

The yacht *Anna M* on the first Cape Verde expedition.

Milestones

April 2003

IWDG launches first major multi-annual, multi-agency project: ISCOPE I.

October 2003

First collaboration with Crossing the Line Films: IWDG takes part in a programme in the *Wild Trials* television series.

Pádraig Whooley © IWDG



Ray D'Arcy at sea with the IWDG during the filming of *Wild Trials* by Crossing the Line Films.

Spring 2004

The *Wild Trials* television programme (filmed in 2003) finally airs, bringing fin whales to an Irish audience of 390,000.

December 2004

Return of the Humpback Whale is shown on RTÉ 2 on Christmas Day. The first Irish-made whale documentary, it tracks IWDG's first expedition to Cape Verde.

The road to a World Whale Sanctuary

Brendan Price



Brendan Price is perhaps Ireland's best known wildlife advocate. Born in 1954, he attended University College, Dublin, and graduated with a degree in agricultural science. Among other things, Brendan was the instigator of the Dublin Zoo Inquiry; the catalyst for ratification of CITES; a founder member of both the IWDG and the Irish Seal Sanctuary; and an advocate for a National Marine Conservation Centre. Above all, Brendan has been a good friend and mentor to IWDG.

Among whale folk, the search for sanctuary has as its zenith, ultimately and inevitably, a World Whale Sanctuary.

By measured steps from childhood, through the various stages of life, we reach closer and closer, never quite getting there. And when our labour has exhausted us and enlightenment eluded us, in rest we realise sanctuary resides within; however, we toil without!

Sanctuary is a word that defies definition. It is as much about the quest as the conquest; and as much about the journey as the destination. The search for sanctuary is a carousel: we step on and off, putting shoulder to the wheel and to appointed tasks.

Effort and comradeship are the reward rather than the result. Sanctuary is of the heart, and the more true hearts bond together, the greater their embrace on our external world.

It is worth relating one sanctuary story I was privileged to witness and be part of; a story not yet ended, which may be the greatest of all. That is the tale of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, which gave life to the sanctuary of the same name.

Following a 'drizzly November' of the soul and the exhortations of one Gabriel of the Quayside, a simple summons was sent out across the island of Ireland that sought to bring together a quiet, shuffling group of men and women on 1 December 1990, to meet in a "toxic" building in the nation's capital.

As apprehensive and hyper as Ishmael amidst whale-hunting men, that first night in "The Spouter's Inn," the group set out to chart a new future for the whale. As sure as St Elmo's Fire charged the lances and chilled the souls of Ahab's harpooners in their mono-maniac quest for the great white whale, a spark ignited among that group, uniting them in common purpose to secure the sanctuary of Irish waters for all whales and dolphins, the very Nemesis of the hunts which brought the great whales to the very verge of extinction in our time.

Unlike Ahab and his bedfellow, revenge, or the mono-maniac hunt for profit, this unity of purpose, giving rise to simultaneous and spontaneous whale sanctuary and guardians, was borne of a romantic love and truth such as that which sustained the troubadours of Middle Europe in the Middle Ages, emerging from a very dark age.

This group heralded an Age of Enlightenment for the welfare and well-being of whales and dolphins, and built on its popular base, representing so many inhabitants of the island of Ireland, and it has grown and developed the knowledge and science of these great animals. Anyone who has attended a whale stranding or whale-watch event becomes transformed by the experience, passion and dedication of this group and their all-consuming effort, in protection of whales.

In that room, at that moment in time, the stars were aligned, the opportunity was right and the right people were there to seize it. To this day, the state authorities have yet to register the sanctuary at international level, but the hearts of those who brought the dream to reality live by its bounty and play in its waters, nay, sustain it! *Gan tír, gan croí!*

Sanctuary has brought benefits of tourism, employment, science and enlightenment for many: the Taoiseach of the day, one Charles J Haughey, gave it his imprimatur and whatever legal standing it has; and his family recently donated *Celtic Mist*, the family yacht, to explore sanctuary

the more. Sidney of England, father of modern whale-watching, exhorted other nations that the sanctuary “contagion spread.”

Under the guidance of Simon (not Peter, but a rock nevertheless), a group of modern knights gathered around – Pádraig, Don, Dave, Emer, Sean, Mac, Johnny, Mick, and more – and their successors, each with their own magic and bound by chivalric code, as guardians of the sanctuary.

Sighting schemes, stranding schemes, rescues, whale-watching, eco-tourism, science, research – all flourished on the backs of the whales and this new sanctuary. Needless to say, the whales are safer, and what new threats they face, the group faces with them! Sanctuary blesses giver and receiver alike!

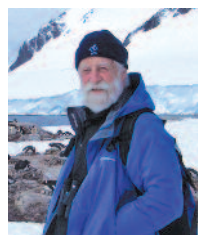
And so sanctuaries, like tectonic plates, are merging and coalescing, and in less than thirty years we have welcomed Antarctica; Antarctica extended; Indian Ocean; Ireland (as Europe’s first); Ligurian Sea; Chile; with proposals for Mexico; Hawaiian Islands; Great Barrier Reef; South Atlantic; South Pacific; and more. We have seen nations accord constitutional and legal rights to nature.

As the spark was lit, the contagion became a conflagration and the greatest unfinished tale of any group, yet told, in defence of the whale and promotion of sanctuary. The stories and successes of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group are now legion and ground-breaking at global level. It has been my great pleasure to journey with them a while, along the road and in their company, one and all; I see the range of sanctuary extending.

The final page of World Whale Sanctuary is yet to be writ and there is no doubt but that the IWDG will continue to be part of that glorious quest. The moral of the tale must be, a group, however small, united and with sanctuary in their hearts, can chart the course of natural history and Earth for the good.

Keepers of Irish cetacean records

Oscar Merne



Oscar Merne is retired head of Bird Research, National Parks and Wildlife Service. He worked as a research ornithologist with the (now) National Parks & Wildlife Service from 1968 till his retirement in 2004. For the first ten years he was responsible for the development of the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve. He then moved to NPWS Research HQ where he had responsibility for bird research and conservation, implementing the EU Directive on the conservation of birds.

My first real experience of cetaceans was way back in the late summers of 1967 and 1968, when a small group of us, mainly seabird enthusiasts, spent several weeks cruising off the coasts of west Cork and Kerry in search of pelagic seabirds.

We ventured out to the Labadie Bank, the edge of the Continental Shelf, and to other areas of upwelling where plankton – and seabirds – were abundant.

In the group was a very young Peter Evans, later the author of the landmark book *The Natural History of Whales and Dolphins* (Christopher Helm, London, 1987). At the time, the cetacean “establishment” were very sceptical about the possibilities of reliably identifying cetaceans out at sea, and much of the emphasis was on museum records of stranded whales and dolphins. However, Peter was convinced that field identification was possible in most cases, and he was already developing methods to achieve this. His enthusiasm for cetaceans spread to the rest of us, helped by numerous sightings of bottlenose, common, Risso’s and Atlantic white-sided dolphins, off the southwest coast.

Continued next page →

Milestones

2004

IWDG commences offshore ‘Ships of Opportunity’ (ShOp) surveys.



© IWDG

The RV Celtic Explorer.

June-July 2004

IWDG delivers second ENFO exhibition: “Flukeprints: On the Trail of Irish Whales.”

September 2004

IWDG holds its first international whale conference, “Míol Mór,” in Rosscarbery, Co Cork.



© IWDG

Rosie Seton addresses the IWDG international whale conference in Rosscarbery, Co Cork, September 2004.

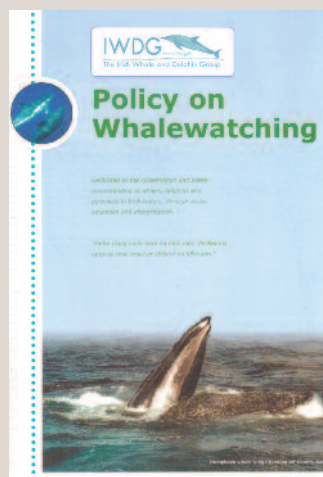
Milestones

2004

IWDG membership reaches 700.

2004

IWDG publishes its first policy document, *Policy on Whalewatching*.



February 2005

IWDG exhibits at the RDS Boat Show, Simonscourt, Dublin.

© Shay Fennelly



Crowds flock to the IWDG stand at RDS Boat Show, Dublin, 2005.

I'm afraid my interest in these wonderful animals waned for many years as I became more and more involved in bird research and conservation work. However, when I got word of the proposal to establish an Irish NGO specialising in cetaceans in Irish waters my interest picked up again. I was working for the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) then, and, with none of my colleagues having any particular interest or expertise in these marine mammals, I decided to become a founding member of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, and to keep an informal "watching brief" on behalf of NPWS.

At around that time, the idea of establishing an Irish whale sanctuary was being floated, and I like to think that my recommendations within NPWS in support of such a sanctuary helped in persuading the then Taoiseach, Charles J Haughey, to accept this concept, and a sanctuary was declared in 1991.

Thereafter, my own involvement in IWDG was minimal. I simply paid my annual subscription, enjoyed reading the organisation's newsletters, e-mails and website and reporting my own occasional sightings of harbour porpoises, Risso's, bottlenose and common dolphins and a few minke whales.

However, on my travels during the 1990s and the "noughties," I did have some wonderful encounters with cetaceans in such places as New Zealand, South Africa, the Galapagos Islands and in the Drake Passage between Cape Horn and the Antarctic Peninsula.

My most memorable experience was at De Hoop Nature Reserve on the South African coast, about 220km east of Cape Town. My wife and I crossed the coastal dunes to the shore and saw what we first thought were low, dark, rocky reefs exposed at low tide. However, the "reefs" started breaching, blowing, fluking and fin-waving, and we realised there were about thirty Southern right whales with their calves lolling about in the warm shallow waters of their nursery.

But enough about my memories and experiences. I wish the IWDG continuing great success in the coming years and decades. From small beginnings, the organisation is now highly professional and has an established reputation both in Ireland and internationally. Apart from organising and carrying out comprehensive surveys and scientific work on Irish cetaceans, it has also managed to elevate public concern for these wonderful marine mammals, which can only benefit their conservation into the future.



Humpback whale HBIRL8, off West Cork, 28 November 2008. © Pádraig Whooley/IWDG.

Winning the support of the public

Tom MacSweeney



Tom MacSweeney, journalist and broadcaster, was RTÉ's first Marine Correspondent and he presented *Seascapes* on RTÉ Radio 1 for 20 years. He has worked in all aspects of the media for 45 years and is now an independent marine journalist, working as a Special Correspondent for *The Marine Times* and as a columnist for *The Evening Echo* and for *Afloat* magazine.

Whales on the Irish coast were unheard of when I started in journalism 45 years ago. When the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group started there was some belief in the presence of dolphins – but whales?! That was the stuff of *Moby Dick* and other legends which had some basis in reality from the film-making days of John Houston and the hiring of practically the entire population of Youghal, or so it seemed, to make that legendary film.

But whales? What kind of organisation was it that claimed whales could, and would, be seen off the Irish coast? That seemed to be the most regular question where the media were concerned.

I liked the people I met up with, even if they did seem to be idealistic and focused on what was never likely to happen – whales off the Irish coast! “Really, are you sure? There are dolphins, okay” was the view, but not whales; never!

That all seems a long time back, as indeed it is, but gradually the IWDG gained respect, and reputation, and proved its point. A sanctuary for whales on the Irish coastline didn't cost the politicians much more than a statement – protection was not something they were going to spend money on – but they would gain some kudos for the declaration, and politicians are never slow at doing that. Who would ever really expect whales on the Irish coastline?

But then, as with many aspects of the marine sphere, the politicians did not know their Irish maritime history. Whaling had been part of the Irish marine scene in centuries past, off the northwest coast. So there had once been a presence of whales.

The IWDG progressed from photography of dolphins to whales, to recording sound and video, and encouraging journalists who were prepared to get into a boat to go and see for themselves. The first television pictures taken for one of my reports showed the public whales in Irish waters. Over the years, there were pictures of dolphins swimming into the city centre in Cork and, unfortunately, scenes of stranded dolphins and whales around the Irish shores. But public awareness was raised.

I remember crisp, cold mornings on whalewatching trips, and Simon Berrow and Pádraig Whooley talking about their favourite subject during many interviews and features on radio and television. Simon holding forth to visitors to the group's Kilrush centre as we filmed reports. Pádraig on top of the wheelhouse of the *MV Holly Jo* off west Cork, shouting and pointing to a blow ahead where a whale had surfaced.

Over the years, I've had some good memories of an organisation which has proved itself, with focused determination, and has won public support to show that, yes, Ireland does indeed have whales off its shores.



RDS Boat Show, February 2009. © IWDG.

Milestones

October 2005

IWDG exhibition “Flukeprints” travels to Portrush Countryside Centre, Co Antrim.

2005

“Guidelines for Correct Procedures when Encountering Whales and Dolphins in Irish Coastal Waters” is given legal status in Marine Notice 15 of 2005, following consultation with National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources.

2006

IWDG adopts second five-year plan (2006-2010).

Milestones

March 2006

IWDG organises second humpback whale expedition to Cape Verde islands.



On the second Cape Verde expedition.

May 2006

IWDG takes delivery of its first research vessel, *Muc Mhara*, a 6m RIB.



The IWDG RIB, *Muc Mhara*.

June 2006

ISCOPE seminar is hosted by the Marine Institute, Galway. A Joint Irish Marine Mammal Database is established, hosted by the National Biodiversity Data Centre.

Working to change attitudes

Johnny Woodlock



Johnny Woodlock qualified with an MSc in environmental science and is a member of the Institute of Fisheries Management as well as a chartered environmentalist. He helped set up Skerries Marine Watch and to found the Irish Seal Sanctuary and the IWDG. He has worked in inland fisheries for sixteen years. Johnny is currently a member of the Marine Group of IEN (the Irish Environmental Network). He recently set up Balbriggan Maritime Museum.

Around 1988, I helped to set up Skerries Marine Watch, which became fairly well known through media coverage of our rescue and rehabilitation work with seals and other wild animals. We also conducted an educational programme with local children, raising awareness of marine life in the Skerries area.

Founder member Brendan Price had mentioned that the then Taoiseach, Charles J Haughey, wanted to declare the waters around Ireland a whale and dolphin sanctuary. We, as a group, applauded his intent. However, to help further his idea we knew we would need a group of more than just a few individuals in north Dublin, more than just Skerries Marine Watch.

In 1990, when a minke whale washed ashore in Rush, Co Dublin, we were called to examine it and to suggest how to dispose of it. This was when it was recognised that there should be a national group formed to deal with cetaceans: to record them and to promote whalewatching. There were no guidelines in place for rescue operations or for recording sightings.

At this point Brendan began researching who would be interested in establishing such a group. A call was sent out in the summer of 1990 for interested parties to attend the inaugural meeting of what was to become the IWDG, in the ENFO offices in Dublin.

People such as Paddy Sleeman, Don Cotton, Terry Bruton, Don Conroy, Dick Warner and Simon Berrow attended on the day, and Don Cotton was elected chairman.

A committee was set up to run the everyday affairs of the group, and a number of sub-committees were established, including one to put pressure on Mr Haughey to fulfill his promise of declaring Ireland's waters a whale and dolphin sanctuary. This involved seeking support from established environmental NGOs in Ireland, among them Greenpeace, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the Irish Wildlife Trust, and encouraging schoolchildren, by means of a letter campaign, to write to government ministers demanding the sanctuary.

Within six months, Charles Haughey announced that all of Ireland's 200 nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone would be declared a whale and dolphin sanctuary. This did not require any specific legislation, as cetaceans in Ireland were already protected by Irish law, but the declaration was still an important and unprecedented political statement.

At a later date, I was present with Don Conroy and Dick Warner when a painting of Don's was being presented on behalf of the IWDG to Mr Haughey, in the Taoiseach's office. I learnt a lot about politics that day as, when we met him, he expected a photographer to be present, as we did, but there was none. As soon as he realised this, Mr Haughey switched from being the imposing leader of Fianna Fáil to being a man with a simple interest in marine mammals. He regaled us over a cup of tea with stories of watching marine mammals around Inishvickillane, his Blasket Island retreat.

One major event in the early days was the meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Dublin in 1995. Various smaller events were planned around the event, including a premier of *Moby Dick* by the Galway-based street theatre group Macnas, in St Stephen's Green. As the show progressed I wandered backstage and noticed a large number of black balloons held down under a net. I finally located the director and asked him what he planned to do with the balloons. He told me they'd be releasing them during the finale, which was to be the harpooning of the puppet whale.

I, probably not very politely, suggested that they drop this part of the act. He was a bit put out, at first, until I explained my reasons. Planet Earth consists of 70% ocean, and balloons released in St Stephen's Green will invariably end up as marine debris, endangering marine wildlife, especially species such as turtles, which may eat them.

Thankfully, Macnas agreed to drop the balloon act. I felt this was a good example of how the IWDG can bring about a change in attitudes through working with and educating people.

Adventures on the high seas

John Leech



John Leech, CEO of Irish Water Safety, was an officer in the Irish Navy, where he was in charge of the Naval Diving Section. He commanded *L.E. Aisling* and *L.E. Orla*. He also served as Harbour Master at the Haulbowline Naval Base. In February 2001, after twenty-one years' service, he retired from the Irish Navy and joined Irish Water Safety as CEO.

I was raised about fifteen feet away from the River Shannon in Athlone, Co Roscommon, and from this environment I gained a deep and everlasting love of nature in the aquatic environment. We had a family of otters living in the bank beneath our house, and it was a wonderful treat on a summer's evening to listen to them interacting as a family.

Being a keen sailor, I read a number of books on the sea before I joined the Irish Navy, which stimulated my interest in the mammals of the sea. So, when I finally went to sea I was fascinated by them when the ships which I served on encountered them.

As a cadet and young officer, it was not for me to decide to alter a ship's course to investigate such sightings, and I can remember on several occasions being very excited by distant sightings, though they were blissfully ignored by the captain, or the OOW (Officer of the Watch). The sense of disappointment for me was huge and I would come down off a watch in a state of near-depression.

When I finally qualified as a watch-keeper in 1983 I was then allowed to alter the ship's course to investigate any sightings. So I purchased a few books on cetaceans to try to learn more about them. I used to have the ship's crew primed that I was to be notified when we had a sighting, so you can imagine the fun they had winding me up with phantom sightings. However, what I did achieve through my enthusiasm was to encourage some other members of our ship's company to develop a genuine interest in cetaceans.

I always found it difficult to watch the Norwegian boats harvesting basking sharks in the summer months while we were on patrol. At the time, it was heartbreaking to see them being legally landed on deck and dispatched for consumption back in Norway.

Occasionally, we would come across French trawlers which had accidentally drowned a common dolphin in their trawls. They would hang them up on the fish deck and roast parts of them for their meals.

One of the duties assigned to the Navy's ships was to act as guard ship for the Taoiseach, Charles J Haughey, when he was staying at his holiday home on Innishvickillane in the Blasket Islands, affectionately known as Tír na nÓg. Occasionally, Mr Haughey would invite a number of the crew from the ship, anchored off the island, to come up for lunch.

The first time I was invited up I had a fascinating conversation with him. Mr Haughey was knowledgeable about, and had an obvious love for, Irish cetaceans and he demonstrated great vision in declaring our waters a whale and dolphin sanctuary.

Continued next page →

Milestones

2006

IWDG publishes its first book, *A Guide to the Identification of the Whales and Dolphins of Ireland*, co-authored by Simon Berrow and Jim Wilson. It is launched during the IWDG Irish Cetacean Research Seminar held in the Marine Institute, Galway, in June.



Pictured at the launch of the IWDG's first book, *A Guide to the Identification of the Whales and Dolphins of Ireland* (from left): Simon Berrow, Ciarán O'Keeffe (NPWS), Jim Wilson and Anne Wilson.

2006

ISCOPE II (2006-2009) is launched.

2006

IWDG, in cooperation with the Natural History Museum, sets up a cetacean genetic tissue bank.

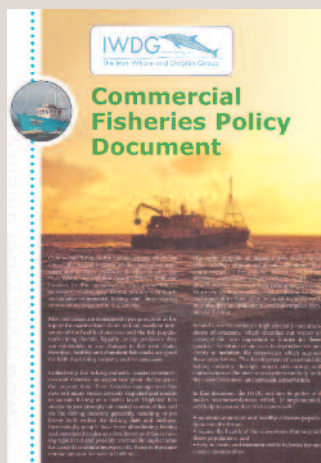


Striped dolphin.

Milestones

June 2006

The IWDG's second policy document, *Policy on Commercial Fisheries*, is launched at Fish Ireland Expo, Killybegs, Co Donegal.



Fisheries policy document, 2006.

July 2007

IWDG logs its 10,000th cetacean sighting which, not surprisingly, was of a harbour porpoise.

© Niall Keogh/BirdWatch Ireland



Harbour porpoise off beach at Kilcoole, Co Wicklow.

August 2007

IWDG holds its first overseas guided whale-watching holiday, to Iceland.

He would use his binoculars and sight both dolphins and whales as they passed his island, and could recall being able to hear them on quiet evenings as they transited this strategically important part of our coast. I thought it very fitting that his family should leave his yacht, the *Celtic Mist*, to us, the IWDG, and I hope that we can finance its maintenance and operation to further our mission.

When I was officer in charge of the Naval Diving Section, I was keen to get our divers involved in the IWDG's live-stranding courses, when they were being devised, as I felt that in the long term we could be of assistance to the IWDG on those occasions when cetaceans became stranded.

I don't go to sea as often as I would like to now, but when I escape my current desk job you can be sure that I will spend a lot more time at sea again and become more active in one of my favourite passions.

Whales and dolphins before IWDG

Don Cotton



Don Cotton has lived in Co Sligo for over 30 years, where he was a Senior Lecturer in Ecology at the Institute of Technology before he retired. During this time he recorded 111 stranded cetaceans of 15 species. He was a founder member of the IWDG and has been editor of 'Cetacean Notes' for the *Irish Naturalists' Journal* since 1999.

For a small island at the periphery of Europe and bordering on the great Atlantic Ocean, we had a poor knowledge of what was beyond our shores, if the archaeological and historical records are anything to go by.

Very occasionally, pieces of whale-bone turn up in archaeological digs, and there are a few fleeting references to whales stranding on our shores, such as in the *Annals of Loch Cé*, where it records that "a whale came ashore at Cuil-irra in Cairpre of Druim-clíabh, which brought great prosperity and joy to the entire country." This stranding is dated 1246, near Drumcliff in Co Sligo.

Boats were flimsy affairs in those days, and people rarely strayed out of sight of the land, but they knew that "here be monsters."

When whales did wash in, the meat, blubber and whale-bone was a great bounty, so much so that the English King Edward II (1307-1327) enacted to claim them as 'Royal Fish' belonging to the monarchy. The royalty in Denmark and Normandy did the same.

Calling whales and dolphins 'fish' is perfectly understandable and goes back to long before the first serious attempt to classify these animals by the Roman author Pliny the Elder in his *Naturalis Historia*, completed in AD 77. He likewise believed they were fish.

This ignorance and fear of sea monsters was replaced by attempts to commercially harvest them, beginning in 1736 from the port of Killybegs, Co Donegal. It is a piece of Irish history that the first successful harpoon gun was fired in Donegal Bay in the 1760s.

Curiosity about the natural world flourished in the 1800s as our planet was explored. This is when occupants of the great houses and demesnes took the bones from great whales that washed up on shore to create whale arches, and when the museums went to great lengths to have skeletons cleaned and mounted as key features of their displays.

The humpback whale skeleton that hangs from the second ceiling in the Natural History Museum, Dublin, was stranded at Inishcrone, Co Sligo, in 1893, and it must have been a 'whale' of a task to de-flesh and mount it.

The idea of commercial whaling off the Irish coast never went away, and from 1908-1922 the Norwegians established a whaling station on Rusheen Island and later nearby on the shore of

Blacksod Bay, Co Mayo. During those years, 899 whales were slaughtered. Their populations are only now beginning to recover.

Professor James Fairley wrote a fantastic book in 1981, entitled *Irish Whales and Whaling*, that was so thoroughly researched that I believe no stone was left unturned and nothing was missed; so, this book is seminal as a starting point for anyone interested in whales in Irish waters, and it is a good read.

It was only in the latter half of the 20th century that attempts were made to scientifically document what was living out there in Irish waters. During the 1970s and 1980s a small group of dedicated individuals often travelled a hundred miles to see and record a dead whale stranded on the shore. To the fore of these people was the aforementioned James Fairley who had taken on the task of trying to ensure that their occurrence was scientifically documented in the *Irish Naturalists' Journal*. He was a one-man 'whale and dolphin clearing house' who was, correctly, very particular about ensuring that records were fully verified, to the dismay of some observers!

At the same time, the publications in 1972 and 1981 of Dr O'Riordan of the Dublin Natural History Museum attempted to pull all of the information together. This was followed by Drs Simon Berrow and Emer Rogan who, in 1997, reviewed all records from 1900-1995, providing a solid foundation to assess the status of whales and dolphins in Irish waters.

Then, something happened in late 1989 and 1990 when it seemed that larger numbers of whales and dolphins than usual were washing up dead on our shores. I don't know if an answer was ever found. It might have been that more people were getting interested and so better coverage was resulting in additional observations; or perhaps there were more deaths actually taking place.

This was the stimulus that brought the few interested people from around the country together in Dublin – and the rest is now history. We are a much better informed nation about whales, dolphins and porpoises, and systems are now in place to record stranded and living animals along our coastlines.

However, for some, whales are still big fish, dolphins are still porpoises, and the seas around our coast continue to be mysterious places where "Here be monsters."



Long-finned pilot whale spy-hopping off continental shelf edge. © Conor Ryan/IWDG.

Milestones

2007

WhaleLog Project with the Irish Air Corps resumes, funded by the Heritage Council.



© Pádraig Whooley/IWDG

Irish Air Corps CASA Maritime Patrol aircraft.

September 2007

First Irish international humpback whale match is recorded when an animal identified off Holland is re-identified in Ireland.



© Conor Ryan/IWDG

Humpback whale (HBIRL7) photographed in Holland in May 2007 and resighted in Ireland in September 2007. It returned to Holland in December 2007.

October 2007

Guidelines for "Mitigating the effects of acoustic surveys on marine mammals" are developed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in consultation with IWDG.

Milestones

2008

IWDG, in collaboration with GMT, commences PReCAST (Policy and Recommendations for Cetacean Acoustics, Surveying and Tracking) project (2008-2011).



May 2008

IWDG delivers its first Cetacean Post-Mortem Workshop, held at GMT.

May 2008

IWDG delivers Ireland's first Marine Wildlife Tour Operators Course on Cape Clear Island, Co Cork.



Marine Wildlife Tour Operators certificate.

A personal reflection of a journey

Emer Rogan



Emer Rogan is a lecturer in UCC, specialising in the conservation biology, ecology and management of marine mammals. She is a longstanding member of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group. She acted as the main contact for strandings, but was also treasurer (1991-1995), co-ordinator (1995-2000) and director (2000-2010).

It doesn't seem like 21 years ago that we were sitting in a room in Dublin discussing whether to establish the IWDG.

It was a smallish group of people with some big ideas – the biggest being Brendan Price's sanctuary for whales and dolphins in Irish waters – but the fundamental idea was to raise awareness of the importance of these waters for whales and dolphins – not just Fungi!

From these original ideas came a small committee of volunteers, a logo and a newsletter. There were public meetings which alternated between Dublin and other venues around the country, including Cork, Sligo, Belfast and Dingle.

We attended Connemara Sea Week, our membership grew, we developed a more organised strandings programme, then sightings forms, and then a whale and dolphin sanctuary was declared under the last of Charles J Haughey's governments – a very good start!

From there came exhibitions at the ENFO centre, applications for funding to support public events, and the publication of our cetaceans ID poster, with and without the "half-way" mistake (what??).

We published the *Face to face with a beached whale* handbook on dealing with live-strandings, and we issued Irish whale & dolphin sanctuary tee-shirts and a sanctuary discussion document.

Then, with the help of other organisations, including SeaWatch Foundation and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), a more structured sightings programme was developed. This even included a dedicated survey on board IFAW's *Song of the Whale* yacht in the Mayo offshore.

Ireland hosted the International Whaling Commission's 1995 annual meeting in Dublin. The IWDG marked this event with a performance by Macnas of *Moby Dick* in St Stephen's Green, in front of a large audience. All this against a background of low, but increasing, public awareness of cetaceans and the marine environment in Ireland.

Nowadays, thanks to huge changes in technology, communication is much faster and easier. We use mobile phones instead of looking for phone boxes to try to get directions to dead marine animals on beaches. We use digital cameras instead of printing photos to validate strandings. We use GPS instead of maps to get 'lat-long' positions. And, of course, we have the enormous advances in computer and wireless broadband technology.

IWDG has whole-heartedly embraced all these new technologies. The IWDG website is the "front-of-house" for all information and communications on matters whale and



Harbour porpoise, River Bann, Coleraine. © Geoff Campbell.

dolphin in Ireland. It provides a wealth of up-to-date information on strandings and sightings, news and events.

Of course, behind the website are many people whose energy and enthusiasm continue to drive the IWDG forward. The committee members and directors. The people who run the sightings courses to improve our identification skills. People who inform us of areas where cetaceans can be seen from cliff-tops. People who run observers programmes on 'ships of opportunity.' People who run strandings courses, who teach rescue skills, who pull together the magazine. People who highlight issues and deal with the media, and who write funding applications to sustain the work of the IWDG.

Despite the changing technology, these are the people who continue to push forward, probably working harder than ever raising awareness, making Brendan's sanctuary a reality as opposed to a paper exercise.

Did we achieve our aims of increasing awareness of whales and dolphin in Irish waters? I think the answer is undoubtedly 'Yes!'

Through persistence, adaptation, engagement with the media and continued success with funding, the general public is now more aware of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group and know there are more dolphins than Fungi in Irish waters!

The organisation is bigger, with more members, which presents its own challenges. But it has still at its core people who believe in the principal objectives of increasing the profile of cetaceans in Irish waters, highlighting issues and gaps, and coming forward with solutions.

It was a fitting tribute to all this work that the IWDG inherited CJ Haughey's yacht, *Celtic Mist*. The yacht will give IWDG greater flexibility to explore the less-studied waters beyond the coastal zone, and to carry out increased dedicated sightings surveys. It will also help IWDG continue to enhance our awareness and knowledge of cetaceans in Irish waters, leading to better conservation and management.

How the sanctuary was declared

David Cabot



David Cabot was educated at Dartington Hall School, University College Oxford, and at Trinity College, Dublin. He taught zoology in University College, Galway, and worked for 20 years for An Foras Forbartha. He has worked as a consultant in eastern Europe for 10 years, and was Special Advisor on Environmental Affairs to the Department of the Taoiseach for four years. He is a documentary film producer, lecturer and broadcaster, and author of four major books.

The declaration of Irish waters as a whale and dolphin sanctuary on 7 June 1991 was a seminal moment in the history of whale and dolphin conservation throughout Europe, and indeed the world, as well as for Ireland and the IWDG.

Since the declaration, the IWDG has gone from strength to strength and has become one of the leading and inspirational organisations in Europe, and indeed globally, for all things whales and dolphins. And hopefully the whales and dolphins in our waters are also saying their special squeaky thanks. All Irish people can be extremely proud of the care and attention we are today affording our whales and dolphins.

Following the inaugural meeting of the IWDG at UCC in early 1991, the IWDG proposed to government that they should introduce an Order under the Wildlife Act 1976 to create the

Continued next page →

Milestones

2008

IWDG appoints Patrick Lyne as Marine Mammal Observer Co-ordinator.

September 2008

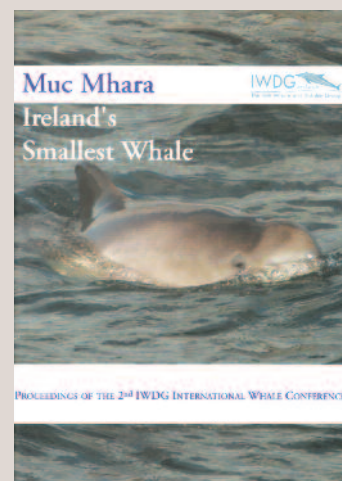
First Irish blue whale is photographed in offshore southwest waters by IWDG member Ivan O'Kelly.



© Ivan O'Kelly

September 2008

IWDG hosts its second international conference, "Muc Mhara," in Killiney, Co Dublin.



Proceedings of "Muc Mhara," the IWDG international conference held in Killiney, Co Dublin, in September 2008.

Milestones

January 2009

Fin whale live-stands in Courtmacsherry, Co Cork. It is filmed and reported on RTÉ News and the IWDG website receives 10,000 visits. The post-mortem is filmed for the Channel 4 series *Inside Nature's Giants*.

© William Helps



Fin whale live-stands in Courtmacsherry, Co Cork, January 2009.

February 2009

IWDG holds second overseas whalewatching holiday, to Baja, Mexico.

© Pádraig Whooley © IWDG



Gray whale encounter on whalewatching trip to Baja, Mexico.

July 2009

IWDG logs its 2,000th stranding record, a Risso's dolphin in east Cork.

© Mick Mackie/UCC



Risso's Dolphin live-stranded in East Cork, the 2,000th stranding record.

January 2010

Humpback whale is seen breaching off Hook Head, Co Wexford. It is photo-identified and filmed for RTÉ News and for the *Wild Journey* series by Crossing the Line Films.

sanctuary. But some time before this proposal other organisations, such as the International Whaling Commission, had apparently been pressing for such a sanctuary.

Concerned individuals such as Brendan Price and Gabriel King – Simon Berrow kindly gave me a photocopy of an undated but early letter from Brendan to himself – were also pressing for conservation measures.

Throughout 1990 and 1991, I was Special Advisor on Environmental Affairs to the then Taoiseach, Charles J Haughey, our only ever Taoiseach to have taken a personal interest in environmental affairs.

An official letter was sent to the Taoiseach by the IWDG, and the issue was sent to my desk for 'action.' It was very clear to me that there was a strong and compelling case for the establishment of such a sanctuary. Anyway, it was fortunate that the request came to the Taoiseach, because if it had gone to a Minister the probability of it being followed up would have been much less. It needed the authority of the Taoiseach for implementation.

So, I did a bit of research and made some enquiries about a possible declaration. I then sent a memo to Mr Haughey urging him to go ahead, and he responded positively. And the rest is history.

Just before the press release on 7 June 1991 from the Department of the Taoiseach, Mr Haughey called me to his office and said: "You know, David, the great thing about the establishment of the whale and dolphin sanctuary is that it will cost us nothing."

He was delighted that by his action he could do something for the conservation of whales and dolphins in Irish waters and, *inter alia*, stimulate greater interest in whales and dolphins. And with little or no cost to the State.

The IWDG responded to the declaration with its traditional enthusiasm and vigour, and I wish it another successful 21 years. I am just sad that Mr Haughey is not with us to see the positive impact of the declaration.

The first contact in Northern Ireland

Terry Bruton

Terry Bruton was curator in the Zoology Department of the Natural History Museum, Belfast, for over 30 years, and he was the first contact person for the IWDG in Northern Ireland. He is now retired and living in Belfast.

Prior to the inauguration of the IWDG, I had recovered and conserved some important and rare cetacean specimens for the Ulster Museum.

In those days, much of the information came from Professor James Fairley at University College, Galway. By that stage, the rarest specimen I had encountered was a True's beaked whale which had stranded on a beach in Co Mayo in 1983. The original discovery and identification had been made by Michael Viney, columnist with *The Irish Times* and author. He was extremely helpful to me during the recovery of that specimen, and afterwards.

My first involvement with the IWDG came in March 1991, at a meeting in Co Cork. There was subsequent collaboration with Simon Berrow and Emer Rogan regarding press statements, newsletters and so on. At about the same time, contact was made with John Milburne of the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland) concerning the possibility of grant-in-aid towards expenses.

Joe Gatins, the Republic's then Wildlife Officer for northwest Ireland, arranged for me to collect

three *Euphrosyne* (striped) dolphins. Joe was most helpful. This was in marked contrast to his first contact with me when I was threatened with arrest for importing specimens from the Republic into Northern Ireland!

In November 1991, I went to Sligo to retrieve what turned out to be a Gervais' beaked whale. Don Cotton very generously invited me and my wife to stay at his house. It was a highly memorable weekend, which we also remember for the fantastic *Aurora borealis* display.

IWDG members were always helpful and friendly to me and, in truth, I will always be a little embarrassed by this, as we were living in a two-up, two-down terraced house off the Shankill Road in Belfast and therefore felt we were not in a position to return the hospitality so kindly shown to us.

In 1992, there was contact from the European Cetacean Society and a meeting of the IWDG in Dublin. I think I may have offended some members by seeming to be more concerned about the skeletons of cetaceans rather than the welfare of living ones! I can only offer my apologies – after all, dealing with skeletons was my job at the Ulster Museum.

From 1992 until my retirement in 1998, I collaborated with Prof Fairley and others on the annual publication of the IWDG stranding records, plus other authenticated records, in the *Irish Naturalists' Journal*.

As part of my involvement with the IWDG I did a few radio interviews and gave a number of talks to RSPB groups and others. There was also close and friendly co-operation between the Veterinary Research Laboratory at Stormont, myself and the IWDG.

Finally, may I offer my thanks to all IWDG members for their kindness and co-operation over the years. I feel honoured to have played a very small part in the success of the group. It has become an organisation that is internationally recognised for its work on cetaceans.

Looking back, it has to be said that my work with cetaceans, in combination with the enthusiasm of IWDG members, gave me a feeling of awe at the variety of adaptations evolved by these animals for life in the world's oceans.



Common dolphin poses for BBC AutumnWatch, off Youghal, Co Cork, on 6 November 2011.
© Pádraig Whooley/IWDG.

Milestones

Summer 2010

Monty Halls' Great Irish Escape series for BBC2 is filmed in Conamara, featuring the work of IWDG.

May 2011

IWDG accepts gift of 17m yacht *Celtic Mist* from the Haughey family. It will be used for cetacean research.



© Pat Flynn

The yacht *Celtic Mist*, donated to IWDG by the Haughey family, at anchor in Kilmursh, Co Clare, in July 2011.

September 2011

IWDG logs its 18,000th cetacean sighting.

6-7 November 2011

IWDG collaborates with BBC AutumnWatch, filming fin whales and common dolphins off Waterford coast. Viewing audience c2.6 million).



© Pádraig Whooley/IWDG

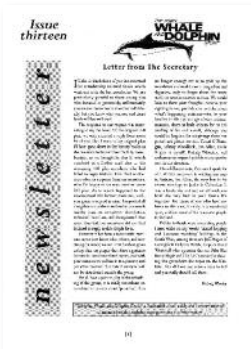
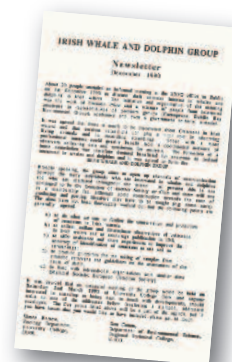
Fin whale, Mine Head, Co Waterford, 7 November 2011.

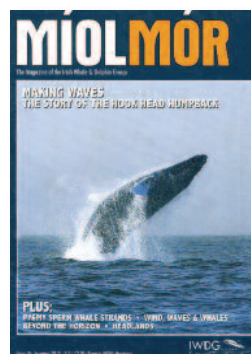
1 December 2011

IWDG is 21 years old.

IWDG newsletter: a brief history

The IWDG issued its first newsletter, *pictured right*, in December 1990, but the series of designed and printed newsletters, produced twice a year, was launched in April 1991. The newsletter remained a simple black-and-white affair for a full eight years, until the summer of 2000 when it was redesigned and 'spot' or two-colour introduced. Four years later, another revamp introduced full colour to what was now a small magazine. Four years later, it was again completely revamped and also rebranded with the title *Míol Mór*. The final issue appeared in summer 2010 when the IWDG decided to move to an ezine to reduce costs and embrace digital communication.







Humpback whale HBIRL15 feeding among Manx shearwaters off Sleat Head, Co Kerry, 22 August 2011. © Nick Massett.



The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG) was established in December 1990 and is an all-Ireland group dedicated to the conservation and better understanding of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) in Irish waters through study, education and interpretation.

This publication documents 21 years of the IWDG with reflections on the past and the future by key supporters and contributors. Throughout this review iconic images of cetaceans in Ireland are presented together with a timeline highlighting key events and successes over the past 21 years.



Bottlenose dolphins offshore. © Dave Wall/IWDG/GMIT.

The IWDG relies on members and partnerships to achieve its goals.

Please visit www.iwdg.ie and join the IWDG.