



# Dolphin Watch Newsletter

Ceredigion Coast and Countryside News

Spring/Summer 2005



Janet Baxter

## Welcome to Coast and Countryside's Dolphin Watch Newsletter for April 2005!

Dolphin Watch is an annual summer survey that takes place from six land-based sites along the coast. It looks at the impact of boating traffic on the Bay's bottlenose dolphin population - and is now in its 12<sup>th</sup> year. The study was intended to last for only 3 years, but the enthusiasm and interest shown by local people and organizations alike means that we have gone from strength to strength.

Some volunteers have been with us since the start in 1994, whilst some have joined in more recently - everyone is welcome! The active involvement of local people and organizations is the first step towards success and we really have been heartened by the fantastic response so far. The interviews with three of our local coordinators on page 2 gives an insight into what makes this study so attractive to so many.

I am pleased to welcome Meryl Cubley as guest editor. Meryl volunteered her services to the Dolphin Watch Project a couple of years ago at the Ynys Lochlyn site. A freelance journalist, writer and editor, Meryl has recently moved back to Ceredigion - making her a natural choice for compiling this edition.

We hope you enjoy the Dolphin Watch Newsletter. See you out there!

**Liz Allan**

Conservation Mangement Officer

### NEWS IN BRIEF:

#### Ceredigion Recreation Boating Scheme

This year we are glad to announce the opening of the new base for this scheme at New Quay harbour showing displays and information on cetaceans and boating traffic for both locals and visitors! Volunteers will be able to use this base for monitoring work and communication with the boat skippers. We also are aiming to provide more information at all launch sites.

#### We need YOU!

More volunteers are needed to help out at our new monitoring site added last year at Castle Point, Aberystwyth. The Friends of Cardigan Bay will be acting as the local co-ordinators and would be pleased to hear from you if you have a couple of hours to spare. Last summer saw a pod of dolphins obligingly appear for the training session a few metres offshore at the 11am start! What a great way to help people practice their ID techniques!

#### Cardigan Bay SAC changes:

Jamie Davies (CBSAC officer) went off to the Philippines in March to do a coastal management placement with VSO. We welcome his replacement, Annalisa Bianchessi from Italy, who has worked with the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and was responsible for the development of an international campaign for the protection of the Mediterranean common dolphin.

### IT'S OFFICIAL!

The SAC is no longer a candidate site as it was formally designated by the Welsh Assembly Government last December.

## Meet the team!



**Aberystwyth**

**Lorraine Hill**

**Janet Baxter** (No photo)

Friends of Cardigan Bay

**New Quay Birds Rock**

**Penny Sharp**



**New Quay Harbour**

**Helen Bates**

Sea Watch Foundation

**Llangrannog**

**Roy Evans**



**Aberporth**

**Ruth Harding**

**Mwnt**

**Lizzie Wilberforce**

The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales



## Coordinator Interviews:

by  
**Meryl  
Cubley**



This edition of the Dolphin Watch Newsletter saw us get together with some of your local coordinators. Their thoughts on the project illustrates just how important and rewarding a little of your time can be...

**MC:** What role does the Dolphin Watch scheme play for both the community and visitors to the area?

**LW:** A lot of people know relatively little about cetaceans, and it's a good opportunity to make people think about how they interact with dolphins on the water and the consequences of taking boats too close. I think Dolphin Watch is very important in the way it gets so many local volunteers involved. Ceredigion is a beautiful county and it's great that the occupants take pride in its heritage.

**MC:** What can a volunteer expect from giving their time to the Dolphin Watch Project?

**RE:** If they have a few hours to spare it will give them a great deal of satisfaction, time for their own thoughts, respite from everyday concerns and stress - or at least it will put them into perspective! They will gain a great deal of satisfaction in knowing they are part of a team helping to protect these unique animals and their habitat. The input of

information helps increase knowledge and provides vital information to develop future protection strategies.

**MC:** How would you describe the importance of Dolphin Watch?

**PS:** On speaking to many other dolphin volunteers, we all feel the same, we are very lucky to live in this part of the world. And we know it. Therefore we do all we can to protect it and its wildlife.

**MC:** Can you give us an example of your best day since being involved in Dolphin Watch?

**RE:** Sitting doing observations at Ynys Lochtyn last summer, I

was approached by a family, Mum, Dad and three young children. After enquiring what I was doing, they said they had been on holiday for almost two weeks, on two boat trips out of New Quay, had sat on the pier for many hours - but not seen a solitary dolphin. As if to order, several appeared off the point of Lochtyn and preformed their synchronised swim. The whole family were spellbound and then an eruption of excitement came from the kids. The show lasted a good ten minutes with the dolphins swimming off towards New Quay. The parents explained how this incident had made their holiday. This gave me a great deal of satisfaction in being part of their very special experience.





**MC:** How does the species behave? What signs should people be on the look out for when identifying this fish?

**HB:** Sunfish are often seen swimming close to the surface nearly motionless, basking on their sides, perhaps getting warmed by the sun or soliciting seabirds to pick off parasites. It's not necessarily an indication that they are sick or injured. Whilst swimming at the surface the dorsal fin is clear of the water and it is common for their fins to be mistaken for sharks or giving it the animal in distress look. When swimming properly the sunfish will hold its body upright and move itself through the water using its long dorsal and anal fins.

With so many sightings of Sunfish (*Mola Mola*) occurring along our coast, we thought it was time to contact Helen Bates of the Sea Watch Foundation Cymru and get the low down on this unusual species of marine life.

usually found in tropical and subtropical waters, but young sunfish are regularly seen in Cardigan Bay and other areas of Britain during late summer.

**MC:** What are the common misconceptions surrounding Sunfish sightings?

**HB:** Usually that the animal is in distress - or a confusion with other species, from injured turtles to small dolphins or sharks. This is mainly due to the unusual shape of the sunfish and the fact that most people believe that such species can't be found in British waters.

**MC:** How about markings or features?

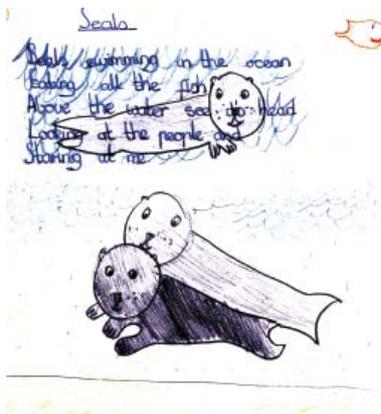
**HB:** The mouth is small and parrot like fronted by large fused teeth that are skilled at sifting and filtering seafood. Colouration wise, they usually vary from brownish grey to blue, becoming paler towards the belly. The Sunfish seen in UK waters are usually a maximum of 2 meters in length - suggesting that only the young fish are seen here.



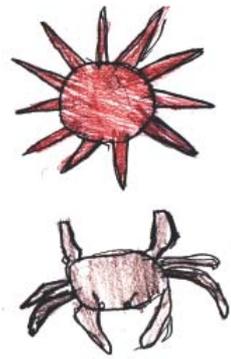
**MC:** Where does the *Mola mola* - or Sunfish derive its name and origin?

**HB:** Sunfish derive their name from the Latin word 'Mola' meaning millstone, describing the sunfish's distinctive flat oval or circular shape, with the head making up a third of the total body length. They're





# Childs Play



**Childrens Calendar**

Jamie Davies (previous Cardigan Bay SAC Officer) was busy doing the rounds of Ceredigion's primary schools last summer, as budding artists came together to create the Cardigan Bay 2005 Calendar. Pictures and poems by the children of Aberporth, Cardigan, Llanarth and Llanllwchaearn schools depict the area's special conservation status. Another calendar is planned for 2006 so make sure your local school is involved!

**Little Art School - Big Results**

There has been more creative goings on at The Little Art School, Llangrannog this year. Liz Allan (Coast and Countryside Section) said: "The children have produced some great art of the marine wildlife, and the work will be displayed in the form of a mosaic at the old shelter on the beach." Look's like Llangrannog's beach will be brighter than ever this summer.

## Calendr Plant Ardal Gadwraeth Arbennig Bae Ceredigion 2005

THE CROWN  
ESTATE  
OF NODDWDYD Y  
CYHOEDDLAD HWN GAN

*Yma ar arfordir Gorllewin Cymru, y mae'n hawdd iawn anghofio pa mor lwcus ydym ni. Mae amgylchedd morol gwych Baeau Ceredigion yn cynnal amrywiaeth enfawr o fywyd, a bortreadir mor wych gan blant lleol yn y calendr hwn. Bydded i ni wneud ein gorau glas, a gweithio gyda'n gilydd er mwyn gwarchod yr ardal hon sydd o bwys rhyngwladol, a hynny er bydd a mwynhad ein plant a chenedlaethau'r dyfodol.*

*Y Cyngorydd Hag Harris,  
Cyngor Sir Ceredigion*



*Here on the west coast of Wales we don't appreciate just how lucky we are. The outstanding marine environment of Cardigan Bays supports a huge diversity of life, as so excellently portrayed by local children within this calendar. Let's ensure we do our utmost to continue to work together to protect this internationally important area for the benefit and enjoyment of our children and future generations.*

*Clr. Hag Harris,  
Ceredigion County Council*

## Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation Childrens' Calendar 2005

THE CROWN  
ESTATE

THIS PUBLICATION WAS MADE POSSIBLE WITH THE SUPPORT OF





## Expert Feature

**Chris Pierpoint, an independent marine researcher living in Pembrokeshire, who has worked on the analysis of Dolphin Watch data since 1999, got together with us recently to talk about the marine wildlife projects he's involved in. Chris has studied marine mammals across the globe and works on many locally based projects - including the new map and form systems introduced last year.**

**MC:** Why become a marine mammal researcher?

**CP:** Really I was looking for my work to involve close time with marine mammals at sea. Like many people, I find cetaceans and seals fascinating. Finding out even the most basic things about how they go about their everyday lives is usually a challenge, but that's part of why I enjoy the research so much. Placing pieces in the puzzle is very rewarding.

**MC:** Can you tell us something of the local projects you have worked on?

**CP:** I've been involved in tracking the movements of individually recognisable grey seals between Wales and Ireland, as well as understanding the nocturnal behaviour of harbour porpoises and the importance of the tides in porpoise ecology. In 1996, along with Mick Baines, and Sarah Earl, I looked for effects on cetaceans following the Sea Empress disaster - and more recently a group of us mapped the first baseline of porpoise distribution between St. Ann's Head and Aberaeron. I've also worked with Rod Penrose, the Welsh strandings officer, examining the importance of this region for porpoise breeding and calving. We also collated the first national database of marine turtle records.

**MC:** What are your thoughts on the Dolphin Watch Project?

**CP:** It's a unique project. Local communities have invoked it and the scheme involves hundreds of volunteer observers working over the last eleven years - it's driven by peoples' love and enthusiasm for the wildlife of Cardigan Bay. The information the observers have recorded has documented the importance of the Heritage Coast for bottlenose dolphins, providing

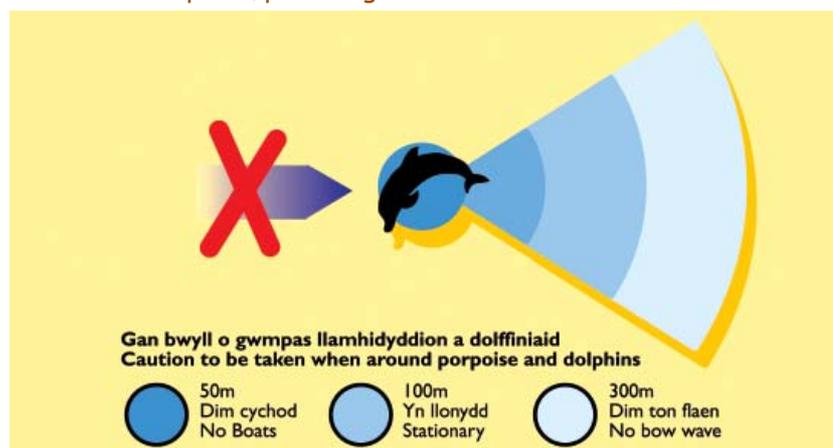
Ceredigion County Council and the Countryside Council for Wales, the basis upon which to manage boat activities and to safeguard coastal habitats. Ten consecutive years' data make it one of the longest running marine mammal studies in the UK and it's now allowing us to monitor longer-term changes in habitat use by dolphins.

**MC:** The information gathered from the volunteers helps us to understand the relationship between cetaceans and boat traffic - why is this so crucial?

**CP:** The survey data allow coastal managers to see at which sites most interactions between boats and dolphins occur, which boat users are involved and the circumstances in which the code of conduct is infringed. This information is then used to target public awareness information appropriately, with the aim of keeping the dolphins in their favourite habitats and reducing accidental injury.

**MC:** Dolphins have a reputation for being sensitive creatures who share an affinity with humans - is this just romantic thinking?

**CP:** There has always been a close bond between dolphins, sea workers and coastal folk.



The dolphins seem to encapsulate something of our feelings towards the sea. They have their own family ties and communities - perhaps even traditions. When we watch them leaping together in glassy seas or travelling up the coast in wild and stormy weather, we can't help but anthropomorphise. As we know, some unusual, solitary dolphins even actively seek out close interaction with humans. The truth is however, that they are top marine predators. They are long-lived animals that maintain complex social relationships with other dolphins. For at least part of the year, more than 150 bottlenose dolphins rely on the coastal habitats of Cardigan Bay. We need to understand more about their ecology so that we can offer them some protection, largely from our own activities. The systematically recorded observations of the Dolphin Watch project are helping us do this.

**This year's survey June 9<sup>th</sup> - September 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Pre-season volunteer get together and training session**

**May 10th at 7.30 at New Quay Yacht Club.**

**MC:** How does the relationship stand between dolphins and harbour porpoises?

**CP:** Rod Penrose has identified that the number one cause of death for harbour porpoises is traumatic injury resulting from aggressive interactions with bottlenose dolphins. Some dolphins are literally beating porpoises up! There are several theories as to why this occurs and why it's happening at an increasing rate. Direct competition for food may be responsible, or aggressive 'play' by bands of adolescent dolphins. Infanticide is another possibility, which has been recorded for adult male bottlenose dolphins elsewhere. Dolphin Watch observers are in a position to possibly witness attacks on porpoises themselves. Just as important however, are observations of how porpoises and bottlenose dolphins more usually co-exist together. I hope that our observations will pick up on differences in the ways that these species use coastal habitats and the circumstances in which interactions take place.

## And Finally

Dolphins

I spied a dolphin  
From the quay  
Riding the sea

Call it happiness  
Call it anything  
I spied a dolphin

And skies were blue  
And rainbows came  
And it was green, green, green.

I spied a man  
I spied a crowd  
All looking out to sea

And there was hope  
And there was love  
And everything was still

I cried a cloud  
I cried an ocean  
Tears for a soul of infinity

What was paint  
What was song  
What were words  
When sky and water touched  
With dolphins in between.

*Dorothy Clancy, 2004.*

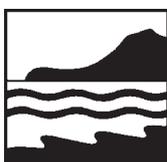
Remembering Dorothy Clancy (Dot), Dolphin Watcher at New Quay since 1994, who died suddenly in January.

**Website Revamp:**

Go to [www.cardiganbaysac.org.uk](http://www.cardiganbaysac.org.uk) **NOW!**



Janet Boxter



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