



Stonehaven Dolphin Research

Report: January- October 2010

This document contains the report of sightings land based and sea based surveys during this year 2010 from January to the end of October.

All of these sighting reports come from the Stonehaven Aberdeen and South of the North East of Scotland, these are mainly about the Bottle Nosed Dolphin which is a coastal species, but also other species of cetaceans include the Minke Whale, Harbour Porpoise, and our season visitation from the White-Beaked Dolphin.



Photographed by Ian Sim

The year began slowly in January 2010 to due to the main population migration of the Bottle Nose Dolphin June/ July 2009, causing less numbers in groups to be seen.

But still, constant sightings of the species the bottlenose were seen until 8th of January 2010 ,a number of 27 bottlenose in a group including 2 calf's had been the start of the migration back from the South

There are consistent groups or herds from 20 to 2 BND (bottle nose dolphin) from the North of Stonehaven from the 9th of February 2010 to the 22nd February 2010 foraging feeding and at times some of the groups would show a great ability to breaching displays.

Then on the 23/02/10 was one the best high lights of migration from the South to the North of Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire, and 60/70 BND including a numerous number of calves.

(K/N)

Again constant sightings of these animals, regular visitations to Stonehaven in a regular flow from the North to South and vice versa on a daily basis feeding around the waters of the area, of groups from 3 to15 BND being the most common species around the Scottish North Sea.

On the 5th of May at Aberdeen, Torry Battery a reported sighting by Caroline Weir 1 BND with spinal deformity called Kyphoscoliosis, which is now not a usual or rarity unfortunately in these coastal waters since 2006.

These dolphins are mainly calf's or young juveniles, how and why they are born in this severe condition maybe due to the possibilities to genetics or inbreeding due to the small population in this area. The images of some of these animals can be seen in the Aberdeen Identification catalogue by produced by Caroline Weir

Again at Torry Battery on the 11th of May the same juvenile appear with 4 other Band's including its mother, but struggle to swim due to exhaustion as the sea swell was high and S/ST 8/9, white caps everywhere.

A times on its back with mother trying to keep the calf a float to help the animal breath air, that was the last time the calf was seen alive on the 16th of May it was reported dead on the beach at Bridge of Don.



Then on the 29th of May on board the vessel based survey the first White-beaked dolphin in Portlethen/Muchalls area North of Stonehaven these animals normally do not appear until late June early to mid July in the area, the past three years these seasonal visitors have been arriving early than normal but the year 2010 has been the earliest arrival so far.

The mackerel may account for this as they too arrived earlier than normal so it may be due to the food supply.



This was not the only irregular pattern this year with the White-beaked species, they appear to be close to the shoreline than normal which usually these animals feed further off the coastal waters, which again could be due to the mackerel feeding habits.

The 17th of August is the best of encounters in the 11 years of sea based surveys I have experience with these 8 animals.

One particular Aero animal a possible male spent up to an hour with us Caroline Weir and myself circling and body surfing around the boat, the clarity of the water was clear that day as Aero circled around us many times catching his eye. As he swam off he turns his head and look up at us again almost like Aero was trying to make communication with us, what an incredible and special animal.

There had been many sightings since the best encounters as Caroline agreed. There had been large groups 8/30+ mainly through land based sightings around Stonehaven and Aberdeen area last seen around the end of August.

On the evaluation of the white beaked dolphin for this year and the following years the population of the species appears to be on the a slight increase except for 2006/07 the land base and sea based sightings suggests those past two years there were very little sightings around Stonehaven.

But the strong possibility that these animals had been feeding further of the shoreline as they are pelagic Dolphins, and due to the feeding behaviour habits.

But there also had still been sightings of Bottle nose dolphins in the area to group's from 3 upwards to 25 Bottle nose which the past 5 years had been leaving the area at the end of June to September with the exception of 2/5 in a single group on rare occasions. As well as

WBD around on the same day at tme17.33hrs on the 29/05/10 there was 25 BND at Stonehaven Bay and again a HP at Torry Battery, Aberdeen 19.34.

Other dates for reported sightings of the White-Beak 12/07, 30/07, 16/08, and the 17/08 all this year, but despite the past three previous years the Bottlenose have usual spread future South Montrose, Dundee and further South was assuming the two different species due to the bottle nose being more territorial.

As it has been seen to both species fighting over the feed, while Gannets taken advantage of this situation stealing the food from under their nose.

Picture left is unfortunately this calf did not survive, it is less than a year old and the severity of the conditions to which it lived, the calf would have never survived too becoming or grown to see its juvenile years.



It had been reported by a witness reported that the calf was attack by a male dolphin in order to mate and reproduce with the mother as this calf had been the fathered of another male dolphin. As this is a natural action in male dolphins to kill a calf, allowing them to reproduce with the female.

But failed for some reason in his attempt to complete his killing task, identified as a male call Paper Clip and possible left the calf in a state of deformity.

Last seen alive on 16th of May this year at Aberdeen mouth of the harbour entrance know as Torry Battery and on the 18th of May was washed up dead at the Bridge of Don beach Aberdeen. Possibility of a male in the group finishing off the job Paper Clip failed to do. Pictures taken by Sarah Canning and Caroline Weir.



Paper Clip: Left side of dorsal fin



Paper Clip: Right side of dorsal

Since the Date the 11th January 2010 there has been no less than 120 Land Based Sightings of BNDs and of the lager group of up to 60/70 BNDs and other groups of 50, 45, 30 and groups of 20 of BNDs, and sub smaller groups of 15, 10, and 7 and smaller BNDs up to 12th November this year with 6 Calf with spinal deformities including Juvenile.

White- Beaked Dolphins 2010

Seasonal visitor first witnessed 7 White-Beaked Dolphin on the 29th of May from Portlethen/Muchalls which were also larger groups of WBDs around the area of Aberdeen and south sighted 30th of July 46, the larger group of 62 seen on the 28th of July at Don beach area and Aberdeen Girdleness on 17th of August 30 WBDs which had been the last sighting of them on that date by Caroline Weir, and around Stonehaven 16th August 20 WBDs.

Also on the 12th of June and smaller sub groups of 7 to 10 all feeding on the Mackerel.

Picture right a Minky Whale again seasonal visitor to the coastal waters July/ August on their migration to the North for their winter feed to the Atlantic Ocean very few of these have been seen for the past two years for some odd reason, Although there has been a significant number of mackerel small sized stock only.

There have been only two sighting in the area of Stonehaven this year and the previous years there had been only one sighting.

It maybe because they are feeding further off the coast line.



Photographed by Ian Sim

The Harbour Porpoise

This all you will usually see of this usually shy and solitary animal until the collation of them usually around August for the Propose of mating and reproduction of the species of mammal.

You will only see the fin and back of these animals and very rarely breach or bow ride the water, you will never see then around boats. If spotted by BNDs they will kill them but not for food.



Photographed by Ian Sim

There has been 10 reported sightings of the Harbour this year around Stonehaven area on the 18th August a group of 8 being the largest group sighted from land based sightings around the same time of a sighting of WBDs which will not attack HPs as BNDs do it may be that because the BNDs are coastal animals causing them to be territorial.

Also these HPs used to be quiet common in this inshore coastal water again not for the past four years but however we have more further off shore on our vessel base research.

The largest group of Bottlenose Dolphins in October 25th a total of 20 BND (BND Bottle nosed Dolphins) at Stonehaven place great displays of breaching.

November had been a good month for reported sightings, although the groups of animals had been reported was in small numbers the being again around 20 BND on the 31st but reports by observers animal s at Aberdeen, Stonehaven, Inverbervie, Balmedie and on the 11th of this month 8 BND's including 1 juvenile and a calf with a spinal deformity at Torry Battery.

December the final month of 2010 there had been no less than 4 large groups of BND the largest being the number of 45 animals at Stonehaven on the 22nd also on the 16th 18 BND again Stonehaven.

On 25th 20 BND Aberdeen Torry Battery and 20 BND on two Separate occasions on that day at Stonehaven.

The most rare visitor we have had this year was a Humpbacked Whale as in there had been a humpbacked three years ago in November with 5 BNDs interacting with the Humpbacked



Photographed by Ian Sim

Whale. And two year ago a very rare visitor a Sperm Whale whist on a sea survey.

Over the past 11 years I have seen Killers and Pilots Whales and Risso Dolphins being a tropical water dolphin.

This is a picture of a Sperm Whale unfortunately it not a very good image as I only had a camera with film role and a little bit out of focus.

This is my report for cetaceans 2010, It is not a detailed report it is based on sightings and part theory, but in scientific research always has been until is proved buy hard facts and more money invested in these projects.

My thanks to Caroline Weir, Sarah Canning and all those who report the sightings to me, also like to thank Stonehaven Golf Club for letting me use the club house, and all the members, for my land Based Sightings for the past five years, also to Sea Watch Foundation. My thanks to Barbra Cheney of Aberdeen University for the use of the image of the deformed calf.