

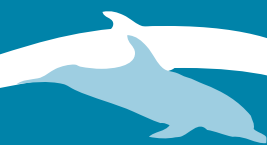
Seaquest Netsafe



Cornwall

July 2011

Issue 2



“The Seaquest Netsafe project will enable the Trust to increase its understanding of key cetacean species around the coast of Cornwall and work to identify practical means of reducing cetacean bycatch within our fisheries.”

Trevor Edwards, CEO, Cornwall Wildlife Trust

Welcome to the second issue of the Seaquest Netsafe newsletter. This update aims to explain a little more about this exciting project being run by Cornwall Wildlife Trust, what it involves, and how far we have come in achieving our goals.

Seaquest Netsafe is all about cetaceans – dolphins, porpoises and whales – and how we can strive to protect them. The results of this project will provide us with a much clearer picture of what is really going on around our coastline and work towards a future of much needed protection for these wonderful creatures.



Bottlenose dolphins in St Ives Bay. Photo by Dan Murphy

The background...

Fourteen species of cetacean have been recorded in the waters off Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The species most commonly encountered are harbour porpoise, common dolphin and bottlenose dolphin. These creatures, alongside other dolphin species and whales, are elusive spending a major portion of their lives underwater or in remote areas far out to sea. As a result, they can be extremely difficult to study.

The need for protection of cetaceans in the South West is well recognised, for instance, our research into cetacean strandings has shown that there has been a significant increase in strandings reports in Cornwall since 1970. The fact that Cornwall has the highest level of cetacean strandings and that the seas off Cornwall are some of the most intensively fished in the whole of the UK make it an obvious starting point for pioneering the establishment of bycatch mitigation measures, a key part of the Seaquest Netsafe project.

The overall aim of Seaquest Netsafe is to improve the protection of the inshore cetacean populations and their wider ecosystems around Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The project has three main elements;

1. To provide data on inshore cetacean populations and cetacean bycatch around Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.
2. To test bycatch mitigation measures with inshore netters and promote responsible fishing practices.
3. To develop management strategies around Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to protect cetaceans and their ecosystem.

As cetaceans are mobile animals and bycatch is a world-wide issue, the results of this work will hopefully be applicable both nationally and internationally.



Netted common dolphin. Photo by Darryl Thorpe

The Seaquest Netsafe project has presented an important opportunity for the Trust to develop its work with the Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority, and the fishing community to establish practical protection measures to protect cetacean species in our waters.

With the implementation of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 the government is legally obliged to designate and protect areas of the sea through a network of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). In the South West, the Finding Sanctuary Project has been the formal decision making process through which MCZs have been recommended to the Government. The Seaquest Netsafe project data, on distribution and key sites for cetacean activity around the Cornish Coast, has been made available to this process.



Common dolphins. Photo by Paul Semmens

So what are we doing?



Funding from Esmee Fairburn Trust, SITA, Frugi, the European Fisheries Fund through the Marine and Fisheries Agency, and through an appeal to Cornwall Wildlife Trust members has enabled us to deliver the following areas of work:

1. Monitor cetacean species at 8 key sites to develop a picture of the distribution, behaviour and movement of the populations.

The latest underwater acoustic monitoring devices (C-PoDs) have been deployed at key sites around the coast to collect data on the presence and behaviour of cetaceans, 24 hours a day. We have also set up a network of volunteer visual surveyors who have been trained to conduct effort-based surveys from the cliffs at sites overlooking where the C-PoDs have been deployed. Since our last Newsletter we have been able to add one permanent survey site at St Agnes (heavily supported by the St Agnes VMCA) to the list of other sites at St Austell Bay, The Manacles, Mullion, Rinsey Head (near Praa Sands), St Ives, and Boscastle.

By coupling passive acoustic underwater monitoring and effort based visual surveys we aim to get a much more holistic view of cetacean activity throughout the year, as well as a measure of how effective the two types of survey are. At present there are 107 volunteers coordinated by James Agnew. At last count volunteers had undertaken 3906 hours of survey getting some fantastic sightings, including bottlenose dolphin, common dolphins, harbour porpoises, basking sharks and sun fish.

Data will be analysed this autumn and with reports produced that will aim to highlight cetacean 'hotspots' to inform potential management strategies for cetacean conservation.



Bottlenose dolphin at St Ives Watch Point.
Photo by Dan Murphy



Sightings volunteers. Photo by Emma Cunningham

2. Gather data to establish the distribution, numbers and causes of cetacean strandings.

Cornwall Wildlife Trust's Marine Strandings Network has been busy this year. We have trained over 50 new strandings volunteers at St Mawes, Looe and Falmouth. As well as running a training event for the south coast of Devon to assist their strandings recording team.

The annual Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Strandings Report 2009 was also published on our website summarising all strandings in 2009. This shows that the Strandings Network responded to 74 stranded cetaceans, 61 Grey seals, five basking sharks and three turtles in 2009 alone. The 24 hour hotline received over 1000 calls reporting stranded animals and we recovered 18 cetaceans to the Veterinary Laboratory Agency, Truro, for post mortem.

The annual Strandings Network forum was also a resounding success with over 100 volunteers and guests attending, including representatives from Sea Mammal Research Unit, The Institute of Zoology, Exeter university, the new Cornwall IFCA, Natural England and the Veterinary Laboratory Agency, Truro.

The event offered an opportunity for existing volunteers to brush up on their training as well as providing details of interesting strandings over the last 12 months, and how that data feeds into other national projects and databases

This year has also seen the completion of the mass stranding protocol, which provides guidelines for dealing with a mass stranding in the future, ensuring as much data is collected as possible should another such incident occur.



Volunteers at a stranding. Photo by Jeff Loveridge

3. Trial BEEP (Bycatch Evidence Evaluation Project) methodology

A database of all strandings photographs has been created to enable comparison between photographic evidence, gathered by trained volunteers on the beach, and post mortem examinations. This will be done by identifying marks which we think might be 'bycatch indicators' and then examining a large number of cetacean carcasses which have also undergone post mortem examination. We will then compare the results of our analysis to results of the post mortem examinations to determine which type of 'marks' can reliably be used as indicators of bycatch.

The BEEP methodology has also been presented at the annual European Cetacean Society Conference, and Strandings Network Coordinators Jan and Jeff Loveridge attended the European Cetacean Society annual conference to present the BEEP project. This resulted in several European countries adopting the BEEP methodology providing valuable additional data to the trial.

Members of the Strandings Network also attended a conference in London at the Institute of Zoology to mark 20 years of the UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme.

4. Pingers trial

Pingers are acoustic deterrent devices designed to alert small cetaceans to the presence of nets and therefore reduce the chances of cetaceans becoming accidentally entangled in nets (bycaught). Current EU law states that vessels over 12m length setting bottom set static fishing nets must use pingers, however there is no such regulation for smaller inshore fishing vessels.

Bycatch in inshore fisheries has been recognised as a potentially critical problem for resident cetacean populations, such as the bottlenose dolphin.

Our pinger trial has now been completed and the results are in press with the Journal of Cetacean Research and Management. The trial tested the effectiveness and practicality of using acoustic deterrents on fishing nets on inshore (<12m long) vessels setting bottom set nets. Results were extremely positive with a 48% reduction in harbour porpoise activity around nets with pingers as apposed to those without pingers. Though this is not a direct measure of bycatch it is presumed that the lack of porpoise activity will mean a reduced chance of entanglement in a pingered net. Feedback from skippers on the practical aspects of using the pingers was also very positive. Of course there were some initial issues in deployment method and attachment to gear, but once these were ironed out fishermen were very happy that pingers did not affect their normal activity and feedback from all involved was that they would be happy to deploy pingers on their nets.

Unfortunately the pingers tested did have two major problems. Firstly the battery life was not as long as expected, which coupled with the fact that the batteries are not replaceable, proved to be a major problem. Secondly the cost of the individual units was a major concern by fishermen as they felt a £3000 investment every 10 months was too much, even if funded.

These concerns meant that we could not recommend this type of pinger for use in inshore Cornish waters, even though it was extremely effective at influencing porpoise activity. However a new type of pinger has recently come onto the market (the "Banana Pinger"), which has the



Pinger after being hauled with nets.
Photo by Tom Hardy

potential to solve these problems, by having a replaceable battery and costing just £20 per pinger.

Natural England are funding an extension to the original trial to test these latest pingers. It is hoped that these pingers will not have the battery life problems and they are already significantly cheaper for initial outlay. Fishermen have again agreed to trial the new gear as part of a partnership project allowing the fishing industry to have direct influence on the outcomes of the trial, by providing their feedback on the practicalities of these devices.



The new Fishtec Banana Pinger. Photo by Tom Hardy

5. Develop management strategies around Cornwall to protect cetaceans and their ecosystem

The aim is that the results of the monitoring and data gathering activities detailed above can be used to inform the implementation of practical protection measures for areas where cetaceans occur in greatest abundance and are currently unprotected.

With this aim in mind the Trust has continued to play a major role in cetacean conservation, meeting with stakeholders, the new Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Agencies and representatives from the fishing industry. The Trust has also fed all its cetacean data into the Finding Sanctuary project, to ensure cetaceans are considered during the designation of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ's).



Cornwall Wildlife Trust



Cornwall

The Trust is the leading local charity working to protect and enhance Cornwall's wildlife and wild places. We are passionate about all aspects of nature conservation and work only in Cornwall. We want to see Cornwall richer in wildlife, cared for and appreciated by one and all. Our marine conservation projects take us closer to that goal.

If you too believe that Cornwall's wildlife should be protected and that everyone should have the chance to enjoy it, then please consider joining as a member. You will be part of something wonderful.

To join:

Go online to cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/join Phone us on (01872) 240777



Useful Information and numbers

For more information on any aspect of this project please contact us at **Cornwall Wildlife Trust**.
www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/conservation/livingseas

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Dead stranded marine animals:
Marine Strandings Network
0845 2012626 (24 hours)
www.cwtstrandings.org

Live marine animals in difficulty:
British Divers Marine Life Rescue
(01872) 765546 (24 hours)
www.bdmlr.org.uk

