

South Wales Porpoise Project 2002-2003

The Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) is the smallest member of the whale and dolphin family, measuring less than 2 metres in length. It feeds exclusively on fish and can often be seen close inshore, pursuing prey in the strong tidal currents at rocky headlands.

South west Pembrokeshire is well known as one of the most important Porpoise areas of the north-east Atlantic but little is known about their occurrence off the coast of South Wales. Although Porpoise are frequently seen, they are shy and secretive animals - unlike dolphins, they rarely behave spectacularly or come to boats - and are difficult to study.

The porpoise has been identified as a local biodiversity action plan species. Yet, amazingly, little is known about this important social predator. Many basic questions remain to be answered: how many use our coasts, where and when do they feed, how far do they travel, do they breed here?

The South Wales Porpoise Project aims to find answers to these questions. Enabled by joint working between Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnerships in South Wales, this practical project will collect information for at least a year, beginning in November 2002.

The project is built around two investigative techniques:

- regular sea-watches from key vantage points (Burry Holms, Port Eynon Point, Sker Point)
- a series of submarine hydrophones, placed to continuously detect and record the echolocation calls of Porpoise.

Casual sightings records - of any marine mammals- are also very useful and welcome, and can be passed to any of the partner organisations - listed opposite - or telephoned to (01639) 710239. Key information to note is "what, where and when"

Hydrophones will be permanently moored in Carmarthen Bay, off Burry Holms, off Port Eynon, in Swansea Bay and off Sker Point. Their mooring buoys are marked "scientific equipment" and carry a contact telephone number, and exact position-coordinates are logged with South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee. The co-operation of all sea users is requested to ensure no disturbance to this equipment.

For further details about the project, including opportunities for volunteer involvement, please contact the Gower Marine Mammal Project:

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