



# Shorewatch Newsletter

© Cath Bain

Issue: Autumn 2021



## Hello Shorewatchers

We hope you're managing to get some down time and relax after what feels like a very busy summer! With the change of the seasons, we bring you the Autumn edition of the Shorewatch Newsletter, where we explore all of your fantastic Big Watch Weekend efforts along with some hilarious pictures and the winners of our competitions. WDC's CEO Chris Butler-Stroud was in charge of judging these and it was no easy choice!

The colder, darker winter months bring us an opportunity to slow down and refocus. While the weather can be hit or miss, and often too cold to stand on a cliff for hours, we do tend to see humpback whales returning to our waters and there are also large groups of harbour porpoise at this time of the year, so it's still well worth getting out and having a look if the weather allows.

The Shorewatch team are busy organising some brilliant speakers for our winter webinar series, and we can't wait to share these with you (scroll down for a sneak peek of who will be our first speaker).

Katie has written a brilliant piece about her time spent marooned on the Shiant Isles for two weeks with her paddleboard and we bring you the latest whale and dolphin stories.

We hope you enjoy,

The Shorewatch team  
Emma, Katie and Alice



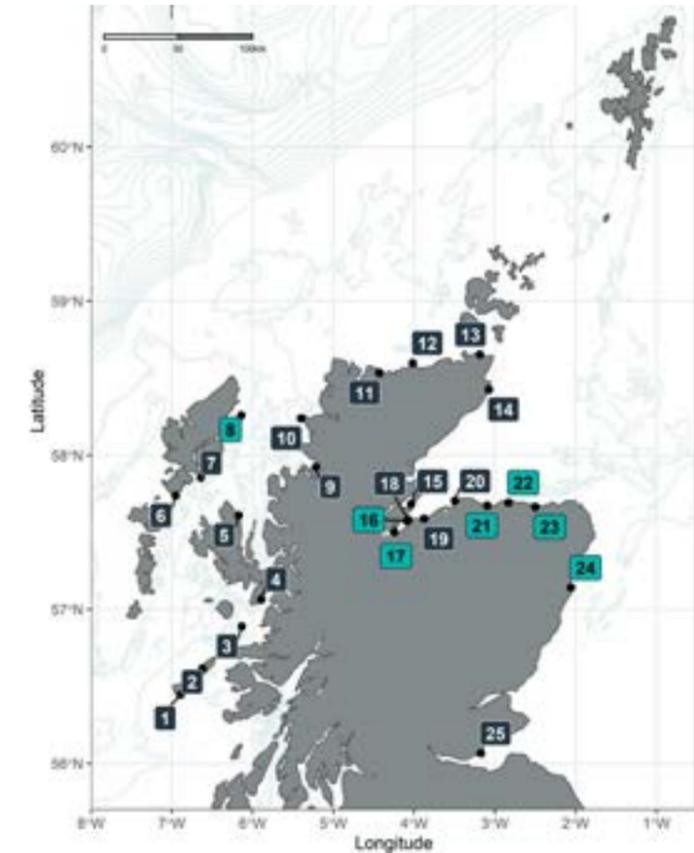
© Katie Dyke



## Patterns and Trends in Cetacean Occurrence around Scotland

Shorewatch data has just been published in a new research paper, and it's thanks to you, our volunteers, being out in the field collecting this data that has allowed us to carry out this analysis. We'll be sharing more information on the research paper and what it means for Shorewatch over the next few months, including a webinar with one of the scientists, Paula Gutiérrez-Muñoz, early in the new year. Hopefully this will give you a chance to read the paper and prepare your questions ready for Paula's presentation and Q&A. We'll also be sharing bitesize snippets in due course so don't worry if a scientific paper isn't your thing!

The paper is titled "[Patterns and Trends in Cetacean Occurrence Revealed by Shorewatch, a Land-Based Citizen Science Program in Scotland](#)", we're very excited to share this with you!



The analysis, using data from 2012-2018 has demonstrated that your Shorewatch data can be used to show patterns, trends and changes in how often the five most commonly sighted cetacean species are recorded in Scottish coastal waters. These are bottlenose dolphin, harbour porpoise, minke whale, Risso's dolphin and common dolphin.

Further, it confirms that the observation effort of our Shorewatch volunteers is high quality and produces data of a standard that can be used towards monitoring and reporting on the status of whales and dolphins in Scotland. This is extremely valuable in our work in protecting cetaceans around the coast.

Congratulations to all of the volunteers who contributed to this publication and to all of those who have joined Shorewatch since.

## The paper analyses:



## Big Watch Weekend - Competition winners

**A big thank you to everyone who got involved in Big Watch Weekend this September.**

As usual we ran our Big Watch Weekend competitions and we would like to congratulate our winners!

WDC CEO Chris Butler Stroud judged our haiku and photo competitions. He found it difficult to judge our winners as they were all so good. He made special mention to Mike and Joyce for wonderful Haiku also and highly commended both the Macduff and Fort George Shorewatch teams for their photo entries.

**The Pringle family won the Photo competition**

**Sarah Macdonald Taylor won the Haiku round**

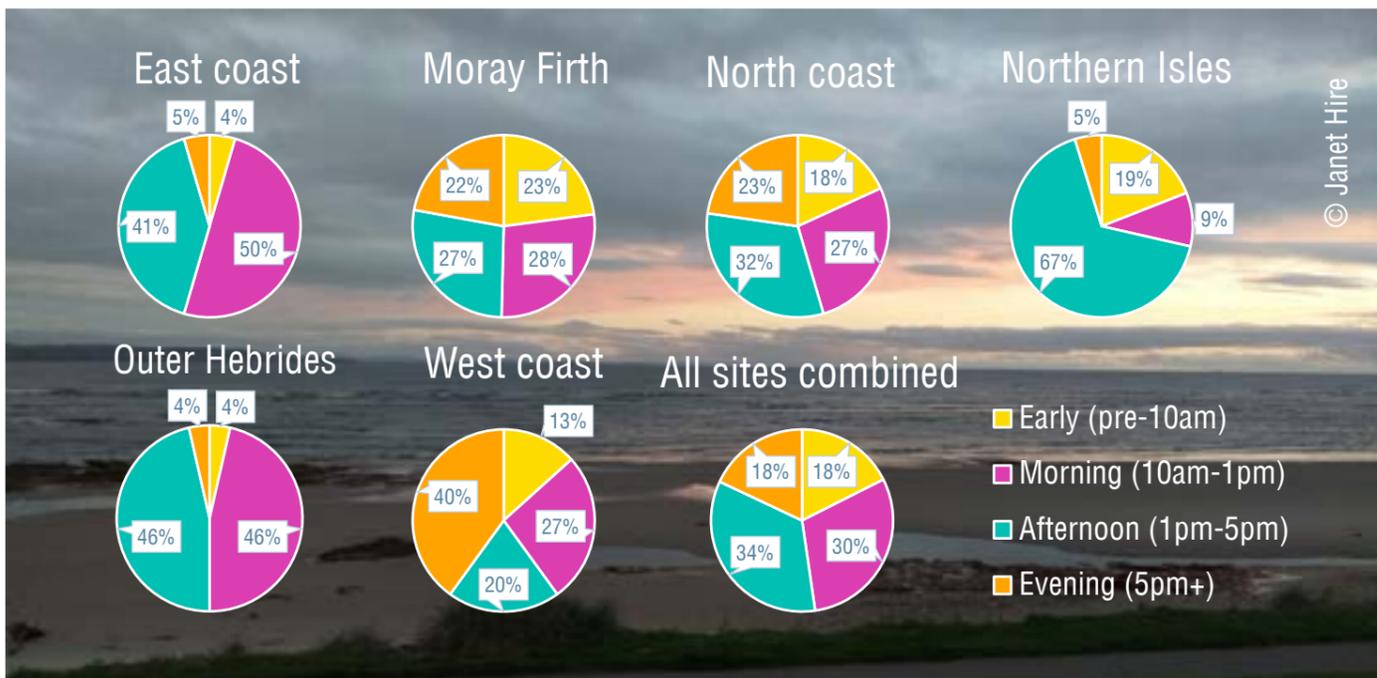
**Sal Macdonald Taylor won latest watch at 2013**

**Graham Kidd won earliest watch at 0608**

**Cullen won most watches with 45**

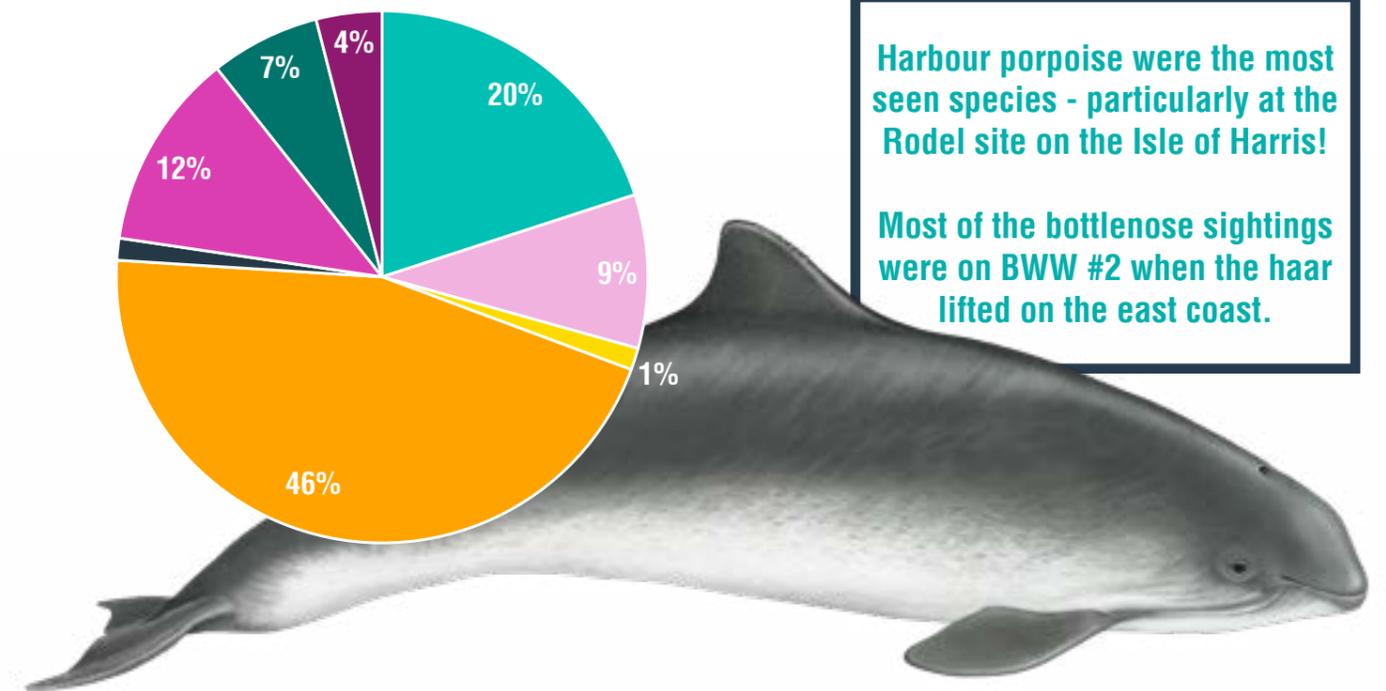
**Marie Newman won the prize draw**

## When were we watching?



## Big Watch Weekend - results

	BWW #1	BWW #2	Combined
Number of efforts	76	164	240
Number of sites watching	15	27	30
Number of people watching	24	44	50
Sightings (Shorewatch / casual)	41 (27 / 14)	34 (23 / 11)	75 (50 / 25)
Bottlenose Dolphin	2	13	15
Common Dolphin	2	5	7
Dolphin (unidentified)	1	0	1
Harbour Porpoise	26	8	34
Killer Whale	0	1	1
Minke whale	4	5	9
Risso's dolphin	4	1	5
Whale (unidentified baleen)	2	1	3



**Harbour porpoise were the most seen species - particularly at the Rodel site on the Isle of Harris!**

**Most of the bottlenose sightings were on BWW #2 when the haar lifted on the east coast.**



© Katie Dyke



© Ian Williams



© Katie Dyke



© Egle Tamulyte © Alex Glasgow



© Pippa Stevens



© Geoff Pringle

We love seeing your pictures of cetaceans, Shorewatch sites, other wildlife and pets on the Shorewatch Facebook page so please keep sharing!

## #LOCKDOWNNEVERENDS

For the many whales and dolphins in captive facilities around the world, lockdown never ends. They sadly face a lifetime confined in tanks and forced to perform for human 'fun'. Most whales and dolphins live in complex family groups - with generations often staying together their whole lives. In captivity, they are separated from their families.

### How does captivity affect whales and dolphins?

**Shorter lives** – the death rate for captive orcas is 2.5 times higher than in the wild. Bottlenose dolphins and belugas also have higher death rates in captivity than in the wild.

**Attacks** – frustration can cause captive whales and dolphins to attack each other and sometimes trainers and members of the public.

**Repetitive behaviours** – in confinement, whales and dolphins may swim endlessly in circles, lie on the floor of the tank for many hours, chew on the sides of the pool and repeat the same patterns of behaviour over and over.

**Dorsal fin collapse** – orcas kept in tanks spend most of their time swimming in endless circles, causing their tall dorsal fins to collapse to one side. Dorsal fin collapse happens to 1% of wild orcas. 100% of captive male adult orcas have collapsed dorsal fins.

**Drugs** – some parks give captive whales and dolphins tranquillisers to relieve the stress that they are feeling.



We're calling on TUI, the world's biggest tour operator, to help end lockdown for whales and dolphins by pledging to only work with captive attractions that commit to our phase out model of no performances, no breeding, no wild captures, no transfers and support for sanctuaries.



**MORE THAN 26,000 PEOPLE SIGNED OUR PETITION**

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION](#)

# WDC { Spirtle gives birth!

## Good news for Spirtle!

Our superstar Moray Firth bottlenose dolphin Spirtle has given birth! WDC Field Officer Charlie Phillips spotted the pair swimming in the inner Moray Firth in mid-August, with baby sticking very close to his/her mum.

Spirtle captured our hearts back in 2016 after stranding in the Cromarty Firth. Stuck on mudflats in the sun for 24 hours, she ended up badly sunburnt however trained medics from British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) managed to rescue and send her back out to sea. The white scarring on her side shows how well her sunburn has healed over the years.

Hopefully Spirtle's little calf is as resilient as she is and we look forward to Charlie's updates.



© WDC / Charlie Phillips

Remember if you see a young neonate dolphin on your Shorewatch, you can now record this on the data sheet! Neonates are usually very close to their mothers, often looking a little clumsy when surfacing for breath and have foetal folds on the sides of their bodies.

## Tune in to the latest episode of The Resident Pod

In Episode 3 of The Resident Pod, Katie and Emma had a chat with Mariel ten Doeschate who works for the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme (SMASS). SMASS are involved with carrying out post-mortem examinations on dead cetaceans - listen in to find out more!



[CLICK HERE TO CATCH UP](#)

# WDC { Porpoise Surveys



## Waving the porpoise flag with the Shetland Community Wildlife Group!

The Shetland Community Wildlife Group are working with WDC Shorewatch to gather more detailed data on harbour porpoises at a few sites in Shetland. The group has set up two additional Shorewatch sites - Quendale Bay and South Nesting Bay - as they are thought to be important areas for porpoise.



At certain times of year, large aggregations of porpoise are seen in these areas, along with Mousa Sound.

To try and better understand why this might be, and whether large aggregations are happening at the same time in all three locations, we are asking our Shorewatch volunteers to record some additional information down if porpoises are seen at any of these three sites - either during the Shorewatch, or when they are seen as a casual sighting.



© WDC / Charlie Phillip

## Barney the humpback is back!

In our Spring 2021 edition of the Shorewatch newsletter, we shared with you the story of Barney the humpback whale and his/her adventures around Scotland. We were really excited to learn that Barney has been spotted again, this time off the coast of Skye, by Shorewatch volunteer Cath Bain.



© Cath Bain

Barney was identified in waters off Coll, on the West Coast of Scotland in August 2020 and then spent a few months patrolling the firth of Forth at the beginning of 2021 - the first confirmed re-sighting of a humpback whale from Scotland's East and West Coast. Barney was nicknamed by local school children because of a distinct barnacle on his/her dorsal fin.

It's great to see Barney still doing well and back on the West coast - thanks to Cath for sharing her sighting and Lyndsay McNeill from Scottish Humpback ID for confirming the sighting.

Like many species of cetacean, we can recognise individual humpback whales if we get a good quality image. In humpback's, we're looking at the distinct patterns on their tail fluke - each individual is different.

## Risso's research

You have probably heard or seen us talking about the Risso's ID catalogue off the coast of Lewis - and how important WDC's research was in securing the Marine Protected Area for Risso's dolphins just last year.

WDC are now expanding this research, and we need your help! We're looking for your pictures of Risso's dolphins - past, present and future - from around the whole coast of Scotland. This is so we can try to build up a clearer picture of the home ranges of Risso's in Scottish waters. It's just like a really great, never ending game of spot the difference!

Please send any pictures you have, that meet the detailed criteria, along with the number of individuals seen, time, date and location, to [nicola.hodgins@whales.org](mailto:nicola.hodgins@whales.org).

We'll be putting together an ID catalogue of Risso's dolphins around Orkney and the North Coast, and one for Shetland - we're really interested to learn if Risso's are travelling between these areas and whether they travel to/from the Outer Hebrides/West coast as well.



Thanks to your contributions we are already starting to solve the Risso's Riddle. Here's an example of a match that we have. NE40 was first seen in 2014 and again resighted in 2018 and 2021!

## Marooned on a deserted island in the Hebrides Katie Dyke

**You don't have to travel outside of the UK to enjoy awesome wildlife encounters.**

Living and working in Scotland, opportunities for adventure are on my doorstep and I am fortunate that my job looking after WDC's citizen science project Shorewatch takes me to beautiful coastal spots across Scotland. With a year of work-related travel halted due to the pandemic, I was craving exploration.

One of my favourite places for whale and dolphin watching is Eilean Glas on Scalpay in the Outer Hebrides. From there you can see a variety of wildlife including porpoises, common dolphins, minke whales, seals, gannets and eagles. Looking out over the water to the land masses in the distance you can see Skye, Uists, Lewis and the intriguing and lonely Shiantis Isles - a place that has been calling me for years for its history, remoteness, and wildlife.

Much has been written about the bird colonies of the Shiantis, it hosts 250,000 puffins, the second largest colony of shags in the UK, guillemots, razorbills, gulls and fulmars. It's a birders' heaven, but little has been reported about the marine mammals around the three islands and I wanted to understand more and so decided to take some leave from work to explore on my paddleboard.

Getting to the Shiantis isn't easy, which adds to the excitement. It takes three boats, and a leap to shore. As we crossed the Minch in flat calm seas, a pod of common dolphins surrounded our boat and escorted us to the shore.

As I waved off the boat, with my belongings on the rocks at my feet, the reality of being alone on two islands with a combined length of less than five kilometres connected only by a small beach, with no electricity, no shower, no loo hit me and I was beyond excited.

An island that does not see much human traffic makes the wildlife hugely inquisitive and as I took to the water on my paddleboard, thousands of puffins approached me from all sides and I was surrounded by the characterful red footed birds. It was comical listening to their groans as they communicated.



As I travelled on my paddleboard I marvelled at the shags who circled above me at every sunrise, the wind passing through their wings making a delicate whistling sound. The big draw for most visitors, as well as the puffins, is the guillemot

and razorbill colonies. They'd already left, but that allowed me to focus on other species, like fulmars and the smaller rock pipits and wrens and the two families of eider ducks who kept me company as they navigated the bays looking for tasty treats.

The seals were curious about me too. Harbour seals and grey seals swim around the islands and use the impressive rock formations as their haul out sites. At times I feared they would join me on my board they got so close. They played under my board, showing off how agile they



are under the water. Some fun-loving seals took shelter in the caves of the Galtas Islands and seemed to enjoy making bellowing howls and listening back to the echoes. I am glad I spotted the seals before hearing the haunting sounds as it is easy to get lost in the tales of ghosts and spirits also inhabiting the islands.



# WDC { Katie heads to the Shiant's

# WDC { Pick of the Pics

The bay at the foot of the impressive 100 metre columnlike rock formations that make up the cliffs of the northeast of the island is home to at least 40 grey and harbour seals, I spent hours watching youngsters frolicking about in the water with the somewhat lazier adults looking on. White-tailed sea eagles shared this bay with them, young eagles using the sheltered haven to practise hunting while the adults were off hunting on the other islands. My paddleboard sat in the shadow of their two metre wingspan. Eagles were non-existent here just 20 years ago so it was wonderful to see eight eagles calling this island home.



On shore I located numerous spots to give myself the best vantage point to see whales and dolphins out at sea. After several hours of still seemingly empty waters, I was beginning to think that perhaps they avoided the islands because of the strong currents that rip around the coast. Then I got a glimpse of the slick, dark grey, triangular dorsal fin of a harbour porpoise. In fact, I saw ten of them! I had 58 separate sightings of porpoises in total and all quite close to shore at the southern and northern headland of the islands. One group came so close I heard their characteristic puffing sound before I saw them. Common dolphins visited in big active pods of about 60. Always making for an exciting display. On my last day, I had decided to camp on Garbh Eilean, the rough island, taking my camping stuff on my paddleboard to my perfect camp spot. I woke up to a fantastic sighting of six Risso's dolphins and a calf! Sadly due to my temporary campsite, I didn't have my camera with me to take pictures for WDC Risso's ID catalogue.

Following a magical two weeks of wildlife sightings worthy of a BBC wildlife documentary and a humbling time spent with little distraction, seemingly far from the pressures of a consumption hungry society. I was reminded of the wonders of the natural world and while removing plastics and rubbish from the shores, shown the ongoing need for and importance of us humans being mindful of our actions and striving to live in balance with nature.

Even though I don't have an engine on my paddleboard, I can still cause disturbance to marine mammals. So, I make sure that I don't get too close and I always let them lead the interaction - if they come to me, great, if not I give them space and only watch them for a length of time if I'm at a very safe distance.

The wildlife and scenery I experienced from my paddleboard was incredible, but it was other worldly as I dived into the icy water to take a peek at what was below.



©Katie Dyke



© Jill Sowden



© Walter Innes



© Steve Dodd



© Samantha Dennis



© David Shaw



© Sam Tedcastle

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**Shorewatch winter webinars are back!**  
**Charlie Phillips is kicking off this season on the 26th October 7pm.**

Join us this winter for a series of talks brought to you by the Shorewatch team.

Each month during autumn & winter we will bring you a different speaker to discuss numerous topics with a cetacean or marine theme.

This month we will be hearing from Photographer and WDC field Officer, Charlie Phillips. He will tell us all about his season of dolphin spotting from the Moray Firth and beyond.

[On the night click here to join Charlie's Talk](#)  
Using this password 071811



© Charlie Phillips

## Can you help us collect more data over winter?

The recent Shorewatch publication confirms how important it is for us to get consistent data across the entire year, so that our data can effectively show trends in populations.

### So can you up your winter watching game?

It can be daunting getting out for a Shorewatch during winter, it's cold, often windy and wet and there's not much day light to fit everything in!

To add a little more incentive to us getting out over winter, everyone who conducts over 20 watches from now until Feb 28th will be entered into a prize draw for a £25 gift voucher to spend at the Scottish dolphin Centre (can be used online).

Happy Winter watching

## Don't forget our online **Shorewatch Clinic:** **- First Wednesday of the month**

**7pm** Update from the Shorewatch team, focused talk from Shorewatch team or guest speaker

**7.20pm** Your queries answered

**7.40pm** A good blether with the team and watchers

If you have specific questions to ask the Shorewatch team, please email them in advance to make sure they get answered.

This paddleboarder had a spectacular encounter with a Southern Right Whale in Puerto Madryn, Patagonia, Argentina. The drone footage was taken by photographer Maxi Jonas - click on the image to watch the full video.

