

Abundance of dolphins and whales in Atlantic

Wildlife: More than 1.5m mammals

The European Atlantic is teeming with more than 1.5million whales, dolphins and porpoises according to a long-term study.

The international survey, led by the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) at St Andrews University, showed a “stable trend in numbers” over 22 years.

The most abundant species were harbour porpoise (467,000), common dolphin (468,000) and striped dolphin (372,000), with a further 158,000 either common or striped dolphins.

There were also estimated to be 28,000 bottlenose dolphins, 36,000 white-beaked dolphins and 16,000 white-sided dolphins.

Deep-diving whales that feed primarily on squid in offshore waters were estimated to be 26,000 pilot whales, 14,000 sperm

whales and 11,000 beaked whales of several different species.

Filter-feeding baleen whales present include 15,000 minke whales and 18,000 fin whales.

The survey (Scans-III) is the third in a series that began in 1994, and continued in 2005.

Three ships and seven aircraft surveyed an area from the Strait of Gibraltar in the south to Vestfjorden, Norway, in the north over six weeks in summer 2016.

Teams of observers searched along 37,280 miles of transect line, recording thousands of groups of cetaceans from 19 species.

For harbour porpoise, white-beaked dolphin and minke whale in the North Sea, the series of abundance estimates shows no change and a stable trend

in abundance over the 22 years covered by the surveys.

For the other species in the region, at least one more survey will be needed before the conservation status can be assessed.

The survey was a collaboration among scientists in nine countries bordering the Atlantic.

The results, presented at the European Cetacean Society conference in Denmark, were co-ordinated by Professor Phil Hammond and Claire Lacey from the SMRU at St Andrews.

Prof Hammond said: “The results from these surveys have greatly expanded our knowledge of the distribution and abundance of cetacean species in European Atlantic waters, enabling fisheries bycatch and other anthropogenic stressors to be placed in a population context and giv-

ing a strong basis for assessments of conservation status.”

The new estimates of abundance will be integral to cetacean assessments undertaken for the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic quality status report and for the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive assessments of Good Environmental Status.

“The results have greatly expanded our knowledge”



Sea: Moray Firth seals 'deafened'

A new study has suggested that seals are being temporarily deafened by the extent of underwater noise in the UK's busy shipping lanes - including the Moray Firth.

Researchers compared the experience of the marine creatures to that of people living amidst the din of inner cities.

Ecologist Dr Esther Jones, from the University of St Andrews, said: "Like humans living in busy, noisy cities, some seals live in areas where there is a lot of shipping traffic and associated noise.

"The UK has some of

the busiest shipping lanes in the world, and underwater noise has been increasing over the last 30 years."

Her team drew up maps showing the extent to which grey and harbour seals around the UK were being affected by shipping traffic.

The scientists then investigated noise levels which individual animals were likely to be subjected to in the Moray Firth.

In the case of 20 of the 28 seals studied, the predicted noise was loud enough to cause temporary hearing loss.





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