

### **Cetaceans, pinnipeds and other animals (southern North Sea only)**

Summer 1990 was remarkable in many respects. Again it was a hot summer, again it followed a mild winter. Several most unusual sightings and strandings this spring and summer may have been related to the unusual environmental conditions. *The Independent* reported on at least 8 dead Sperm Whales *Physeter macrocephalus* on western Scottish beaches early summer (2 June 1990, RY). We recall Sperm Whale strandings in Denmark (2 alive, Fanø) and the Netherlands (1 corpse, Terschelling) early April. The review of sightings, now following,

includes all reported cetaceans from March through August, since the record was rather incomplete in Sula's last issue.

In recent years, Harbour Porpoises *Phocoena phocoena* are seen every winter along the Dutch coast during seawatching. The last two specimens spotted from coastal sites this winter and spring were seen at Camperduin (Noord-Holland, NH) on 23th and 24th March (LS, NH) and at Egmond aan Zee (NH) on 6th April (2; RS, WS). Summer records were always very rare, however. A pod of 6 Porpoises seen heading S at Camperduin on 6 July 1990 was therefore quite exceptional (NH). Offshore sightings include two solitary specimens on 28th March, north of the Wadden Sea islands (MFL, TP; MV Holland). Harbour Porpoises were also seen twice on a trip NW of Vlieland on 9 (3) and 10 April (1) (MFL; MV Aurelia). Three (solitary) Porpoises were spotted from MV Tridens II, 25th and 26th April, in the German Bight. A crossing on board MV Waterproof (formerly Plancius) on 10 May 1990 produced several small groups of Harbour Porpoises in the Indifatigable Banks area, totalling 32 specimens, in flat calm conditions (BC). Herd sizes were 1, 3, 4, 4, and (unusually large) 20. On board MV Tridens II, late August, 2 Harbour Porpoises were spotted in the Central North Sea (north of 57°N), while 18 Porpoises were observed in the German Bight (54°44'N, 7°E; MFL, MHL), operating in small pods of 2-3 individuals. All sightings south of 56° N are mapped in figure 1.

Mid April, two Bottlenose Dolphins *Tursiops truncatus* showed up along the Brouwersdam, of which one animal stayed all summer (mentioned before). On 26th April, a corpse of a Bottlenose Dolphin was seen floating NW off Texel (MFL; MV Aurelia). During aerial surveys of Dienst Getijdewateren (Rijkswaterstaat) on 8 and 9 June 1990, 28 Bottlenose Dolphins were observed in the following group compositions (adult+immature): 2+2, 2+1, 2+1, 1+0, 1+1, 1+0, 1+0, 3+2, 1+1, 1+0, 2+0, 2+1 (all mapped). This means at least 9 females and calves (young animals were 1/3 to 1/2 of the length of accompanying adults) and only 10 other (males?) dolphins were seen.

The aerial survey in June in previous years normally produced the highest number of White-beaked Dolphins *Lagenorhynchus albirostris*. In 1990 only a single animal of this species was spotted (HB). A herd of 100 White-beaked Dolphins was seen off Razende Bol on 31 March 1990. It is thought that the herd of ca. 50-60 'unidentified dolphins' seen one day earlier off the Delta area, was in fact the same group. However, they were described as 'unpatterned' and may have been Bottlenose Dolphins. Three White-beaked Dolphins were seen NE of the Dogger Bank (56°07'N, 4°27'E) on 22nd August (MHL, MFL; MV Tridens II). Further cetacean records include a floating corpse of an unidentified small cetacean on 24th August off the Danish coast (probably a Porpoise; MHL, MFL; MV Tridens II), 3 unidentified dolphins, shortly at the bow (MHL, MFL; MV Tridens II) and a Minke Whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* in the Central North Sea (56°59'N, 4°31'E; MHL, MFL; MV Tridens II). A Bottlenose Whale *Hyperoodon ampullatus* turned up in the Sloehaven, Vlissingen on 25 July to stay

there one day (many newspapers, 26 July 1990, GJ, PW).

Other unusual sightings, besides the unprecedented influx of Bottlenose Dolphins, during June's aerial survey were 4 sharks sunning or swimming just below the surface (including a rare, 1.5 metre Smooth Hammerhead *Sphyrna zygaena* and a 2 metre (probable) Thresher *Alopias vulpinus*). A dead, unidentified, sea turtle was seen floating. In all, it looks as if an influx of warm water species took place this summer.

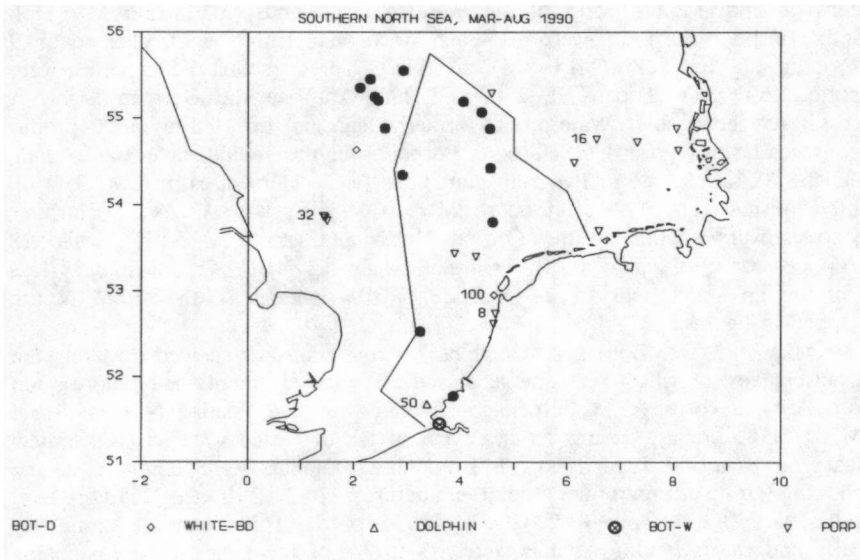


figure 1. Sightings of Harbour Porpoises (Porp), Bottlenose Whale (Bot-w), Bottlenose Dolphin (Bot-d), Whitebeaked Dolphin (Whitebd), and unidentified dolphins ('dolph') in the southern North Sea (south of 56°N), Mar-Aug 1990.

Information from: H.J.M.Baptist, DGW Rijkswaterstaat (HB), B.Couperus (BC), N.vd.Ham (NH), G.Jonker (GJ), M.H.Laks (MHL), M.F.Leopold (MFL), R.van Splunder (RS), W.van Splunder (WS), L.Stegeman (LS), R.Youngman (RY), P.A.Wolf (PW), The Independent, De Volkskrant, Algemeen Dagblad, Trouw.