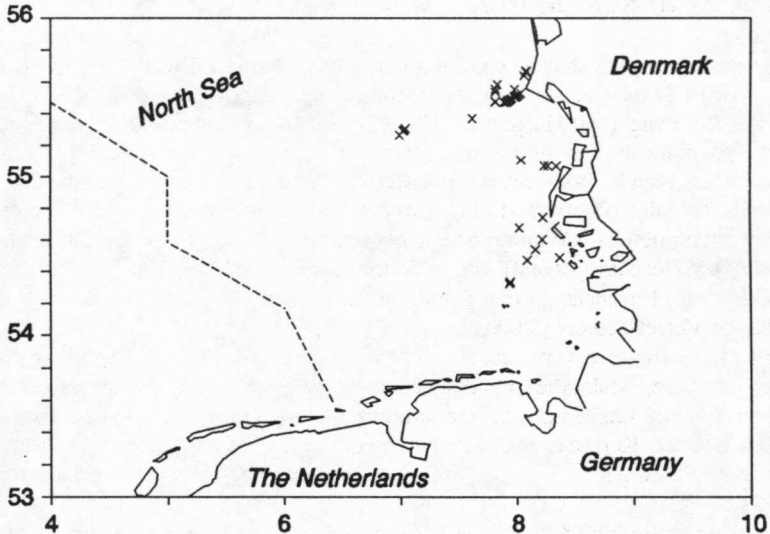


Marine mammals, March - May 1992

The only cetacean seen during offshore surveys in this period was the Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*. During the extensive surveys in (shallow) coastal waters of the German Bight in April, some 82 porpoises were spotted (see map). With 56 sightings, the average herd size was 1.46 ± 0.73 (range 1-4 individuals). Most animals were seen just off Blåvandshuk, Denmark, in a very shallow area known as Horns Rev (MFL). Most of the rest was observed just off the German Wadden Sea islands (Sylt-Süderoog; MFL, HS). The 23rd of April was the most spectacular day, with no less than 36 sightings (flat calm conditions). As usual, little notes on behaviour could be made, for a ship like MV Navicula will scare porpoises away. However, three sleeping individuals were spotted and some porpoises remained quiet and were seen surfacing several times. There were no indications for the presence of calves. Not a single porpoise was seen during cruises off the Dutch Wadden Sea islands.

The last Harbour Porpoise of this winter, as seen during seawatches in Noord-Holland, was recorded at Egmond aan Zee on 15 March (SL). In all, this leaves us with 14 sightings (18 individuals) during seawatches between October 1991 and May 1992 (last sighting in March). One was seen at Schiermonnikoog (12 Oct), 1 at Den Helder (19 Oct), the rest at either Camperduin or Egmond in Noord-Holland (NH). Seawatching data leave us this season with an average herd size of 1.28 ± 0.8 individuals. A paper on the occurrence of the Harbour Porpoise in the southern North Sea is now in preparation (Camphuysen, Leopold & van der Ham).



Harbour porpoise sightings, SE North Sea, March-May 1992.

Interesting was the stranding of a fresh Common Dolphin *Delphinus delphis* near Harlingen on 22 March 1992 (HC). This is a rather rare species in our waters, of which strandings seldom occur. Beached bird surveys this spring resulted in one record of an (very old) corpse of a Harbour Porpoise (Schiermonnikoog, 5 May 1992, MH, BL).

Very numerous during the offshore cruises in the German Bight were Harbour or Common Seals *Phoca vitulina*. Large groups were seen on sand banks: 85 at 55°12.8'N, 08°31.3'E (Fanø Bugt, Danish Wadden Sea) on 24 April, 60 at 55°03.7'N, 08°26.4'E (off Sylt, German Wadden Sea) on 26 April, and 43 at 54°39.8'N, 08°15.7'E (off Amrum, German Wadden Sea) on 29 April 1992. Solitary Common Seals were seen regularly in April and early May, including a few off the Dutch Wadden Sea islands. Only a single Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus* was spotted (55°59.6'N, 08°05.8'E, near Hvide Sand, Denmark, close to the beach, 22 April 1992).

Information from: NIOZ, NZG marine mammal database, Nick van der Ham (NH), Mark Hoekstein (MH), Sander Lagerveld (SL), Mardik Leopold (MFL), Bob Loos (BL), Henrik Skov (HS), Harlinger Courant 24/3/92 (HC). CJC/MFL