

UK strandings and CSIP background

For centuries, cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) have regularly stranded around the coastline of the UK. Ancient laws give the Crown rights to such stranded cetaceans or 'Royal Fish'. Where cetaceans strand on Crown or public land, this prerogative is still administered today by the Receiver of Wreck in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and by Marine Scotland in Scotland.

In 1913, the Natural History Museum began to routinely collate information on UK stranded cetaceans for the first time. In 1988, an outbreak of phocine distemper resulted in the deaths of many thousands of seals throughout Europe and as a result, in 1990, the then UK Department of the Environment initiated the funding of a long-term monitoring programme involving the systematic post-mortem examination of UK-stranded marine mammals, to routinely investigate causes of mortality.

The UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme (CSIP) as it is now known is a consortium of partner organisations funded by Defra and the UK Devolved Administrations, with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee acting as contract manager on behalf of Defra. Partner organisations are the Zoological Society of London, Scottish Agricultural College (Inverness), the Natural History Museum and Marine Environmental Monitoring. The CSIP is tasked with recording information on all cetaceans, marine turtles and basking sharks that strand around UK shores each year and with the investigation of suitable strandings through post-mortem examination.

The investigation of stranded marine turtles was incorporated into the projects remit in 2001, followed by stranded basking sharks in 2007.

Strandings and post-mortem data collected under the aegis of the CSIP is publicly available through the National Biodiversity Network gateway www.nbn.org.uk.



Sperm whale stranded in Norfolk 2003 (image © CSIP/ZSL)



UK CETACEAN STRANDINGS INVESTIGATION PROGRAMME

WWW.UKSTRANDINGS.ORG



**If you find
a stranded animal
please call
0800 6520333**



Information on Scottish strandings
www.strandings.org

Information on Welsh strandings
www.strandings.com

Cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises)

Each year, approximately 500 cetacean strandings are reported around the UK coastline. The majority of these are dead strandings, with a small proportion found live stranded. In total, 20 species of cetacean have been recorded stranded in the UK since the inception of the CSIP in 1990, making it one of the most species diverse regions in Europe. The species which are most commonly reported stranded each year are the harbour porpoise, which has a UK wide coastal distribution and the short-beaked common dolphin, which is predominantly found in waters off south-west England.

Seals

Two species, the grey and common seal are resident in the UK, although Arctic species of seal are also occasionally seen. It is normal for live seals to haul out on land, so please only call the stranding hotline if you are concerned for the welfare of the animal.

Marine turtles

Of the world's seven marine turtle species, five (the leatherback, loggerhead, Kemp's Ridley, green and hawksbill turtles) have been recorded in UK waters. The leatherback, the largest marine turtle, is the species most frequently recorded in UK waters. The other four species have hard shells and are less frequently encountered in UK waters, where they usually occur as stray juveniles carried by currents from warmer seas.

Basking sharks

A small number of basking sharks are found stranded around UK shores each year, most of which are reported in south-west England and in north-west Scotland.

Live Strandings - Urgent

If a live stranded animal is found, please telephone the hotline as soon as possible, so that the appropriate rescue organisation can respond. In addition, the Coastguard should also be notified by calling the 24-hour Maritime and Coastguard Agency information line on **0870 600 6505**.

Dead Strandings

When reporting a dead stranding, please contact the CSIP hotline and notify the relevant partner organisation, giving as much information about the stranded animal as possible (see rest of leaflet for further details).

Further background details on UK strandings and the work of the CSIP, along with additional information on species that strand in the UK can be found at www.ukstrandings.org.

Funding bodies



Contract manager



Harbour porpoise image: © WDSC/Lucy Molleson

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Partner organisations



Why do we need a strandings network?

The underlying causes of stranding events are not always clear. In particular, the role that human activity may play in either directly or indirectly causing strandings remains controversial. Information generated on stranded animals can provide a picture of what species are found in UK waters. In addition, strandings that undergo post-mortem examination can also provide unique insights into causes of death, diseases, environmental contaminant levels, reproductive patterns, diet and other aspects of the general health of cetacean populations. This provides important baseline data to help detect any future outbreaks of disease, unusual mortality events or responses to environmental change.

The CSIP collect a wide range of data on each stranding found on UK shores. In the event that you discover a dead stranded animal, please contact the CSIP hotline and give a description of the following where possible:

- location and date found
- species and sex
- overall length
- condition of the animal (see images)
- your contact details should further information be needed

Digital images are extremely helpful in the identification to species of strandings, as well as ascertaining whether the body may be suitable for post-mortem examination. If possible, please also forward any images that may have been taken with a digital camera or mobile phone.

Humpback whale found dead in the River Thames, 2009
image © CSIP/ZSL



Decomposition condition

An assessment of the state of decomposition helps ascertain whether the carcass may be suitable for post-mortem examination. The following images show harbour porpoises in increasingly decomposed condition, along with the category that would be given in each case.



Freshly dead



Slight decomposition



Moderate decomposition



Advanced decomposition

It should be noted that in addition to decomposition, scavengers may also have a significant impact on carcasses.

Sex differentiation (cetaceans)



The top photograph shows the underside of a male harbour porpoise, with the anus towards the tail and a genital slit towards the head end of the body. The lower photograph shows a female harbour porpoise, with two smaller mammary slits either side of the ano-genital slit. All cetaceans have a similar appearance.



Harbour porpoise found stranded in Norfolk, 2003
image © Graeme Cresswell

Some damage to carcasses is not caused by scavengers and it is important when reporting a stranding to mention the presence of any straight cuts or unusual injuries that may be related to human activities.

Collaborating organisations





Short-beaked common dolphin

*Delphinus delphis*¹
 Adult length: 2.1m -2.4m,
 40-50 pairs of small,
 sharp conical teeth



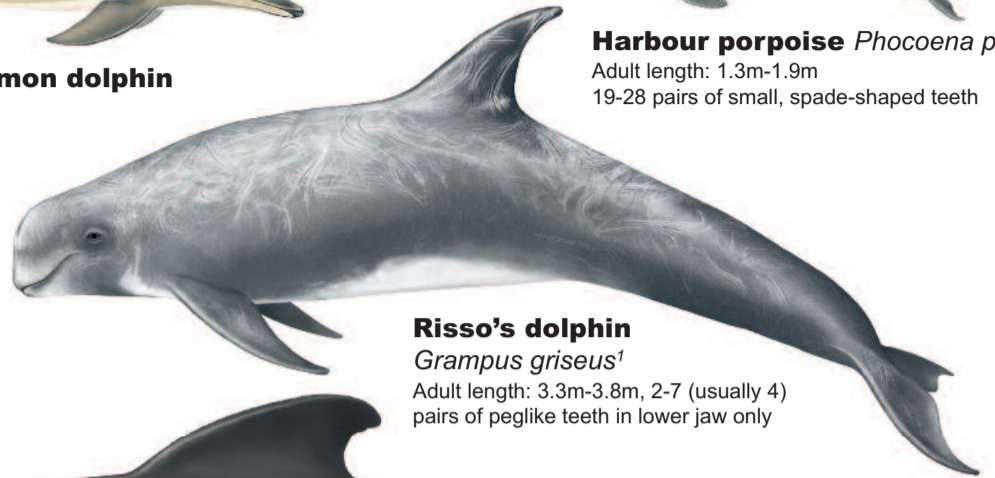
Harbour porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*¹

Adult length: 1.3m-1.9m
 19-28 pairs of small, spade-shaped teeth



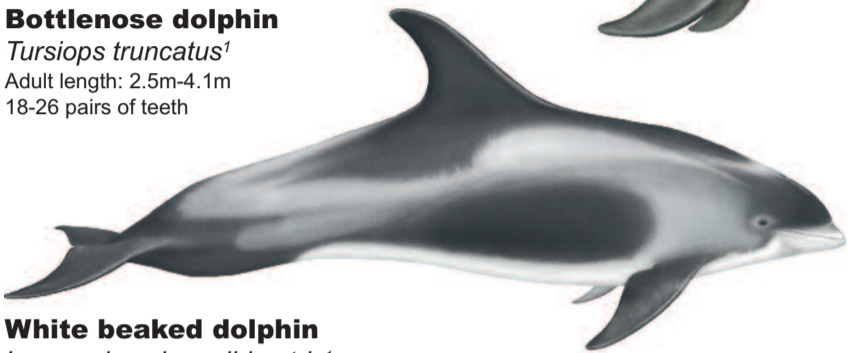
Bottlenose dolphin

*Tursiops truncatus*¹
 Adult length: 2.5m-4.1m
 18-26 pairs of teeth



Risso's dolphin

*Grampus griseus*¹
 Adult length: 3.3m-3.8m, 2-7 (usually 4)
 pairs of peglike teeth in lower jaw only



White beaked dolphin

*Lagenorhynchus albirostris*¹
 Adult length: 2.5m -2.7m
 22-28 pairs of conical teeth



Long finned pilot whale

*Globicephala melas*¹
 Adult length: 3.8m-6m
 16-24 pairs of teeth



Striped dolphin *Stenella coeruleoalba*²

Adult length: 2.25m-2.4m, 45-50 pairs of sharp, conical teeth



Northern bottlenose whale

*Hyperoodon ampullatus*²
 Adult length: 7m-9m
 2-4 teeth in lower jaw only



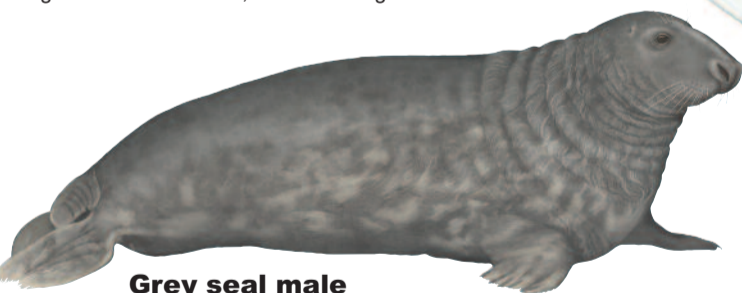
Atlantic white-sided dolphin

*Lagenorhynchus acutus*¹
 Adult length: 2.5m -2.7m
 29-40 pairs of conical teeth



Minke whale

*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*¹
 Length adult: 8.0m -8.5m, 50-70 throat grooves



Grey seal male

*Halichoerus grypus*¹
 Adult length: 2.1m-2.45m



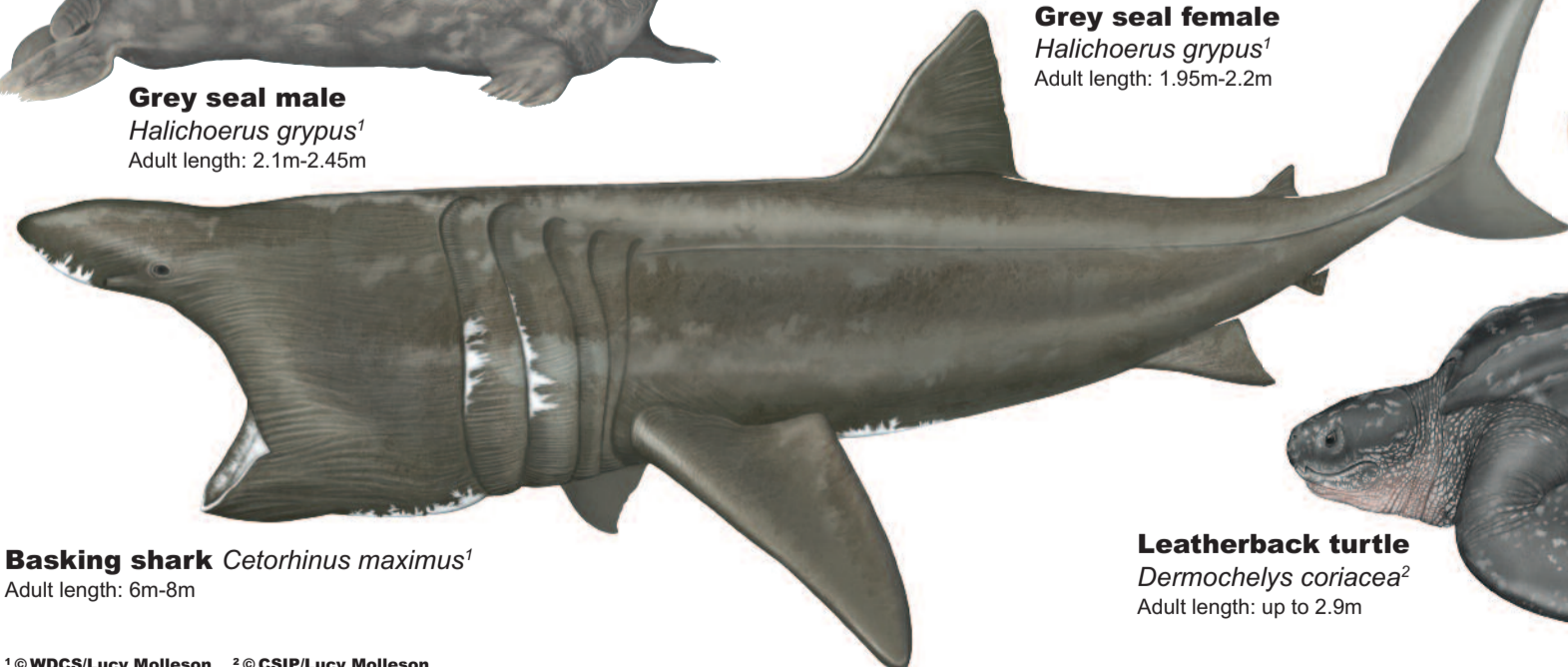
Grey seal female

*Halichoerus grypus*¹
 Adult length: 1.95m-2.2m



Harbour seal

*Phoca vitulina*¹
 Adult length: 1.6m-1.8m



Basking shark *Cetorhinus maximus*¹

Adult length: 6m-8m



Loggerhead turtle

*Caretta caretta*²
 Adult length: 0.7m-1m



Leatherback turtle

*Dermochelys coriacea*²
 Adult length: up to 2.9m

¹© WDCS/Lucy Molleson ²© CSIP/Lucy Molleson

Funding bodies



Contract manager



Partner organisations

