

Friends of the Moray Firth Dolphins

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Over the year of 2006 the Friends undertook a series of workshops in various towns along the Moray Firth coastline.

From Nairn to Macduff we held land and sea-based watches, involving over 100 people all coming from a wide and varied background and coming from Inverness to Fraserburgh, and all with a passion to learn more about the cetaceans seen here along the Moray Firth.

The format of the workshops were nice and easy going but very informative. Many people that took part in the workshop have continued to watch and report their sightings to us at the Friends and to the Sea Watch Foundation.

The number of workshops totaled four, with each workshop starting with an introduction regarding the "Friends and the Moray Firth partnership. Then the morning was filled with a series of talks and powerpoint presentations on all the cetaceans seen here and around the UK. Video of the dolphins was also shown. The mornings ended with a question and answer session.

In the Afternoon we gathered at the harbour with 12 people boarding the boat we hired to undertake a survey from the water and the remaining 12 gathered for a land-based watch. The boat surveys were to enable each person to record data to sea and weather states, Photo ID of species and how to watch for possible disturbance from other boats in the area.

Land-based watching was as it suggests, watching from a good viewpoint towards the Firth and recording any cetaceans, but also various environmental data.

Each watch lasted 3 hours.

In the evening the workshop gathered, for a social event and to discuss the day's events. The second day the folk who were out on the boat then watched from the land and the land-based watchers took their place on the boat.

All the workshops took place in various weather conditions and various degrees of success regarding sightings. We experienced very thick fog at Nairn, but brilliant sunshine in the afternoon. Rough seas at Findochty, and calm hot sunny days overlooking Troup Head.

We recorded 4 different species over the workshops, with I guess the highlight being a breaching 30ft Minke whale seen from the shore at Tarlair, but missed by the people on board the Puffin, (based at Macduff) who at the time were all looking the wrong way in

search of a Harbour Porpoise. As ever Bottlenose dolphins were encountered along with a sighting of Common dolphin.

The First workshop took place at Nairn, with the local Accredited dolphin watching boat being hired as well as the rooms in the local Yacht club.

The day began in thick fog, but this was fine for the first part as we were inside the yacht club. Come lunch time the fog had cleared and we set about our watches. Sightings of 8 BNDs were recorded from the boat sadly only a drifting lilo was recorded from the shore. The following day we undertook a land-based watch at Burghead with sightings of Harbour Porpoise and Bottlenose Dolphins.

Our Second workshop was held at Macduff and Troupe head. The powerpoint and video displays were held at the local football club who gave us the use of the hall, we then later had a 4 hour watch from Tarlair and Macduff, while the second part of the group went to Troupe head on the local accredited wildlife watching boat the Puffin.

No sightings were recorded from the land that day, but it was smiles all round as the boat returned with a sighting of 3 species seen at Troupe and Pennan.

The Sunday saw us land-based watching from Tarlair and out on the boat with good sightings again. In the afternoon we then all gathered at Troupe head to meet up with the local RSPB team for a talk and watch from the cliffs. Sightings of the gannets and the Minke whales below enthralled everybody on the watch.

Our Third watch was held at Findochty and Buckie with the first day completely devoted to land-based watching and interpretation of the group and the species and the Moray firth. Sadly the weather was too rough for the boat on the Saturday so we held off till the Sunday for sea-based surveys. The worst thing you can do I think is try and tell someone how amazing it is out on the boat looking for dolphins while they are just trying to cope with not being sea sick.

Thankfully the Sunday was fine and we managed to see dolphins and porpoise.

Our last watch was over at Burghead, land-based watching and with the sea-based watching from the Gemini explorer based at Buckie. Sadly due to the weather we saw nothing and the boat trip had to be curtailed and was later undertaken on Dec 27th in fine calm weather and with a sighting of one Harbour Porpoise.

So another fine year of workshops and training folk up to be come cetacean watchers.

Many thanks for all your help with funding the workshops.

We look forward to working along side you in 2007

All things good

Peter MacDonald

Co-ordinator of the group

FMFD

