



Moray Firth Partnership Community Grants Scheme 2006

~ Dolphin Space Programme End of Grant Report

Background Information

The Dolphin Space Programme (DSP) is an accreditation scheme for wildlife tour boats in the Moray Firth, Scotland. The DSP provides a code of conduct giving guidelines on how approach dolphins, whales and porpoises (cetaceans) without causing disturbance. Boat operators who sign up to the scheme agree to follow the code of conduct, to market their tours in line with the aims of the DSP (e.g. not showing boats too close to dolphins or people swimming with or touching dolphins) and to take part in DSP training events. In return for signing up to the scheme, the DSP provides operators with free training, educational and interpretive resources for boats and assistance with promotion and marketing. The DSP is coordinated by a project officer and is overseen by a steering group comprising VisitScotland, the Wildlife Tour Boat Operators' Society, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, the Northern Constabulary, Grampian Police, The Highland Council, Inverness Harbour Trust, the Maritime Coastguard Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Project Summary

The DSP was awarded £697 from the Moray Firth Partnership Community Grants Scheme 2006. This grant was used to help fund the DSP Training and Interpretation Project. The Training and Interpretation project had two key aims in 2006. The first was to offer DSP accredited operators a free training course to provide guidelines on how to approach a range of marine wildlife species in addition to cetaceans. The second was to produce a folder of high quality interpretive resources providing information on the Moray Firth environment and wildlife, for use by visitors on DSP accredited wildlife tour boats.

To accomplish the first aim the DSP collaborated with the well established and nationally recognised Wildlife Safe (WiSe) scheme (www.wisescheme.org). This accreditation scheme provides guidance on how to approach seabirds, seals, turtles and basking sharks as well as cetaceans. In addition to this, the national status of WiSe provides additional marketing benefits for DSP operators who join the scheme. A proportion of the MFP grant was used to help fund the WiSe training course; specifically to pay for the trainers expenses, to hire a venue (Nairn Yacht Club) for the day and to provide refreshments for participants.

Due to the high number of people taking part in the WiSe training course, the fee's for the trainer were reduced. Therefore, of the £280 budgeted in the application form for the WiSe training course only about £150 was actually spent on the WiSe course. The remaining £130 was used for the development of the interpretation materials.

We are continuing to work closely with the WiSe scheme and have been invited to help with the training at the next WiSe training course in February 2007. This course is being aimed at wildlife tour operators from the Scottish east coast. The DSP has been asked to provide information on the North East Bottlenose Dolphin population as this group of operators will also encounter this population of dolphins due to the expansion of their range out of the Moray Firth and further to the east and south.

The development of interpretive folders was the main project funded by the MFP grant. The aim of this folder was to provide members of the public on wildlife watching tours with high quality, accessible information about the environment and wildlife of the Moray Firth, the threats they face and how to help and/or get involved with conservation. Prior to the development of this pack the quantity and quality of interpretive resources on DSP tour boats was very variable. Many operators did not have the time or resources to update or expand their interpretive materials and had suggested that it would be useful if the DSP could provide something that all the boats could use. Before the folder was produced a significant amount of time was spent researching interpretive planning and development to ensure that the final product would be a useful, accessible and enjoyable resource for a wide range of users.

A theme was developed to help us structure the layout and content of the folder and to clarify what our message was going to be. This theme was 'The Moray Firth is Full of Life' and a beautiful logo was designed to represent this. We chose this theme as it delivers a number of key messages. Firstly that the Moray Firth is biodiverse, secondly that the firth has many human uses and a rich human history and thirdly that there is lots to do and see here. The logo shows aspects of all of these key messages and represents the interaction between wildlife, habitats and human use of the firth. Within this main theme were several sub-themes; (1) The Moray Firth is a special place, (2) The Moray Firth is home to lots of fascinating wildlife, (3) Some of this wildlife faces threats and (4) There are lots of ways that you can help protect the Moray Firth and its wildlife.

The MFP grant was used to; buy two books needed for the development of the materials, cover the costs of printing and folder production and to develop the logo and layout for the folder. The first designer we approached did not produce a logo that we liked, so we went to another designer who produced the final logo, a page template and helped with the layout of the folder. Each operator will be provided with two copies of the folders for use on their boat and/or shore based facilities.

The completed folder was presented to the DSP operators and steering group at our recent meeting in December 2006 and was very well received. Over the next two years we plan to continue the development of the DSP interpretive resources. We will continue adding to and updating the information in the folders and are also looking into developing a box of 3D interpretive artefacts for use on the DSP boats. This would compliment the information in the folders and could contain items such as a replica dolphin skull, whale baleen, examples of prey species, models of cetaceans, puppets for younger children and recordings of cetacean and seabird sounds.

We'd like to thank the Moray Firth Partnership for their support of these projects through the Community Grants Scheme. In addition we are grateful to MFP for kindly allowing us to use many of their educational and web-based resources in the development of the interpretive folders.