

Moray Firth Wildlife ID Guide

Project report to Moray Firth Partnership
Community Grants Scheme 2008



Spey Bay beach

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Introduction

The Moray Firth Wildlife ID Guide was first produced with the help of the Moray Firth Partnership in 2004 as an educational resource which could be distributed throughout the Moray Firth.

The Guide provides information and raises awareness on wildlife found in the Moray Firth in the form of a comprehensive guide of marine mammals and birds including useful facts and identification advice.

The main users are the WDCS Wildlife Centre which used it extensively through the educational programme, with visitors at the centre, during events, and the Dolphin Space Programme (DSP), which distributed them to all the DSP boat operators.

There has been positive feedback and numerous requests for further copies of the Guides from WDCS Wildlife Centre visitors, educational groups and organisations, local groups, boat operators, wildlife watching groups and tour operators within the Moray Firth.

Also the education programme at the WDCS Wildlife centre has developed and grown and, since WDCS took over the Dolphin and Seal centre at North Kessock, is extending into Inverness and the surrounding area. This is also true for the DSP and number of boat operators.

This grant has therefore enabled the Moray Firth Wildlife ID Guide to be reprinted and updated with the latest information and contact details allowing users to access further information and support. This has allowed the project to continue to reach local groups and future visitors to the area. Enhancing local environmental education promoting the amazing diversity of wildlife found in the Moray Firth to visitors.

Project Aims

The overall aims of the project were to raise awareness of the rich diversity of wildlife found in the Moray Firth and give locals and visitors to the area a means of identifying different species along the coastline.

These aims were achieved by working collaboratively with the WDCS Wildlife Centre and WDCS Dolphin and Seal Centre and Dolphin Space Programme to distribute the Guides to the following parties:

- Schools and educational groups through outreach work around the Moray Firth and visiting groups to both WDCS centres
- Members of the public visiting both WDCS centres, attending events on and off site and taking part in tours on wildlife watching boats
- Wildlife watching groups

Therefore the above parties benefited by having access to free high quality educational materials which helped promote and raise awareness of the local area and wildlife, encouraging enthusiasm for the natural heritage of the region and repeat tourist custom to the area.

Achievements

Production

The Moray Firth Wildlife ID Guide was updated with revised information about a couple of the bird varieties illustrated and correct contact information about the WDCS centres and DSP programme. Approval was given and the artist accredited appropriately and logos added.

WDCS MORAY FIRTH WILDLIFE
The Moray Firth is home to a rich diversity of wildlife. Here are just some of the different species to look out for along the coastline.

Harbour Porpoise (length 1.4-1.9m)
 • Made known about their local existence but tend to be seen in small groups of 2-5 animals.
 • They are usually away of boats, so more often seen from a distance or from land.
 • The worldwide population size is unknown but thought to be decreasing.
DO YOU KNOW? Harbour porpoises rarely jump out of the water, unlike their dolphin relatives.

Bottlenose Dolphin (1.9-3.0m)
 • The Moray Firth has the largest bottlenose dolphins in the world.
 • Only about 130 individuals live in the Firth - the population is vulnerable.
 • They are very sociable and seen locally in groups of up to 50 individuals. They are very active at the surface and can be seen bow riding, surfing at the waves and breaching.
DO YOU KNOW? Individual dolphins can be identified by their dorsal fins.

Minke Whale (2-7 tons)
 • They are the whales that are believed to have their food from the water.
 • Newborn calves swim to the water surface when to breathe for their first breath.
 • Some whales are still hunted by some countries.
DO YOU KNOW? They can swim about twice as fast as a dog (the equivalent of a pit bull) with only 10% of their body mass.

Grey Seal (1.6-2.0m)
 • The first recorded to be protected by modern law in 1940.
 • The spotted pattern on their coats appears to be individually unique and has been used in population studies to identify individuals.
DO YOU KNOW? Two thirds of their time is spent at sea, hunting and feeding.

Common Seal (1.2-1.8m)
 • Found to be present in the same areas, the Moray Firth is one of their important habitats.
 • Characteristic can cause mothers to produce pups which usually call for them, giving them the nickname 'Woolies'.
DO YOU KNOW? Common seals use special mounds to store their milk, making them more abundant, sometimes.

Many of these animals can be seen from the shores of the Firth. If you decide to take a boat trip, please choose one that is registered with the Dolphin Space Programme (DSP). DSP operators have agreed to a code of conduct to protect our wildlife from disturbance. For more information on the DSP visit www.dolphinspace.org

Gullweed (or 1st-1000)
 • A true sea bird, only going to land to breed.
 • Known to be attracted by many kinds of other pollutants to mate successfully.
 • Suspend tiny particles into the sea at night to avoid predators. They are fed at sea by their parents and they eat fish.
DO YOU KNOW? Gullweed eggs are just shaped which they stick to the same way as you might see on a wall.

Oystercatcher (or 1st-1000)
 • They spend the summer in Scotland and the winter in South Africa or Spain.
 • Birds can be used for up to 18 years and can grow to 2 meters across.
 • Feed mostly on fish and are able to close their mouth while catching prey.
 • Feeds include shrimps in Southern Europe, egg-eating and pollution.
DO YOU KNOW? Oystercatchers were once extinct in the UK. They have made a great comeback since they were introduced to the UK.

Fulmar (or 1st-1000)
 • They are good swimmers because of their large webbed feet and powerful muscles.
 • Capable of diving to depths of 50 metres to find food.
 • The UK's fastest bird in horizontal flight, capable of 50mph.
DO YOU KNOW? It says the about 10% of its diet is made up of fish and squid.

Curlew (or 1st-1000)
 • Very efficient hunters, often being to considerable depths to catch fish.
 • Often seen standing on joints or rocks with their wings outstretched trying to dry their feathers.
 • Found on all British coasts and surrounding islands.
DO YOU KNOW? The name curlew is derived from the Latin words 'curvus' and 'lewis' meaning 'low voice'.

Gannet (or 1st-1000)
 • The largest seabird in Europe.
 • Have specially strengthened skulls and a system of air sacs to help counter the effects of their dives.
 • Two thirds of the world's gannet population breed in the UK.
DO YOU KNOW? They can dive into the water at speeds of 50mph. With half their wings they plunge deep underwater to catch fish.

Herring Gull (or 1st-1000)
 • They are scavengers, eating almost anything.
 • Before they are 10 days old, they pick at the rot put on their parent's back, stimulating them to regurgitate food.
 • Have suffered massive declines over the past 25 years.
DO YOU KNOW? Herring gulls have been seen here from the Mediterranean and sometimes four years ago.

Oystercatcher (or 1st-1000)
 • Seen on the UK year round, more coastal in the winter.
 • Many young young birds.
 • Nest on pebbles, on the coast or amongst grass, sand.
DO YOU KNOW? They eat oysters, clams, squids and sometimes but not oysters.

Ringed Plover (or 1st-1000)
 • The black band around the neck is more pronounced in summer.
 • They call a low whistle that sounds like 'trump'.
 • Can be seen year round in the UK.
DO YOU KNOW? The adult can get out and sing a louder song to attract a potential partner away from its nest.

The WDCS Wildlife Centre at Spay Bay has a free exhibition all about the local wildlife. It is also a fantastic place to see many of these species in their natural environment. The WDCS Dolphin and Seal Centre at North Ferrylock is a great place to learn about and spot dolphins. To find out more about the WDCS Visitors' Centres, call 01343 820229 or visit www.wdcs.org/wildlifecentres. WDCS is a registered charity No. 1014725.

A local environmentally friendly printing company was used to print 6000 laminated Guides with vegetable oil based inks on recycled card.

Distribution and publicity.

The Guide has been displayed and given out to members of the public visiting both WDCS centres and, attending events on and off site, including the shore-based watching site Chanonry Point.

At both centres the Guide is used as an important interpretation tool in talks and whilst guiding walks.

A few Guides have been distributed to rental holiday homes around Scotland.

All boat operators linked to the Dolphin Space Programme have been given Guides to hand out to members of the public participating on wildlife watching tours. They have also been distributed on *Out of the Blue* guided cetacean watching holidays.

It has been used as an invaluable resource for schools and educational groups through outreach work around the Moray Firth and visiting groups to both WDCS centres.

Training has been given to local and residential WDCS volunteers using the resource as a reference guide to help identify the different species of birds and cetaceans in the Moray Firth for use on land and boat based surveys.

Further training has been given to local wildlife watching groups and rangers for use with events and interpretation.

The Moray Firth Partnership logo has been prominently placed on the Moray Firth Wildlife ID Guide to publicise and acknowledge its contribution to the project.



Moray Firth Wildlife ID Guide being used on a guided walk at the WDCS Wildlife Centre, Spey Bay

Conclusion

The Moray Firth Wildlife ID Guide project was a great success and has since had great feedback from users.

'It's been fantastic to have such a simple and effective tool to aid with training new volunteers in species-ID for both boat-based and shore-based work.'

KTP Research Associate

'I like having pictures and quick reminders about the birds and cetaceans that I might see as an observer on the survey.'

Research volunteer

'What a great visual resource and easier to use with pupils'

Local Primary School teacher

'This is great I will now know what I'm looking at!'

WDCS Wildlife Centre visitor

The added new facts that were previously missing from some of the bird species create a more uniform design which is a great visual resource as well as educational tool.

The sustainability of this project has been considered very carefully and guide was produced as an environmentally friendly, reusable resource. Recycled card and vegetable oil based inks were used and the finished Guide was given a laminated protective coating for use outdoors and against normal wear and tear.

This project will continue through wider distribution channels using a variety of different outlets including volunteers, other partner organisations, educational establishments and outreach work.