

Bottlenose Dolphin

Tursiops truncatus (Montagu, 1821) Order: Cetacea

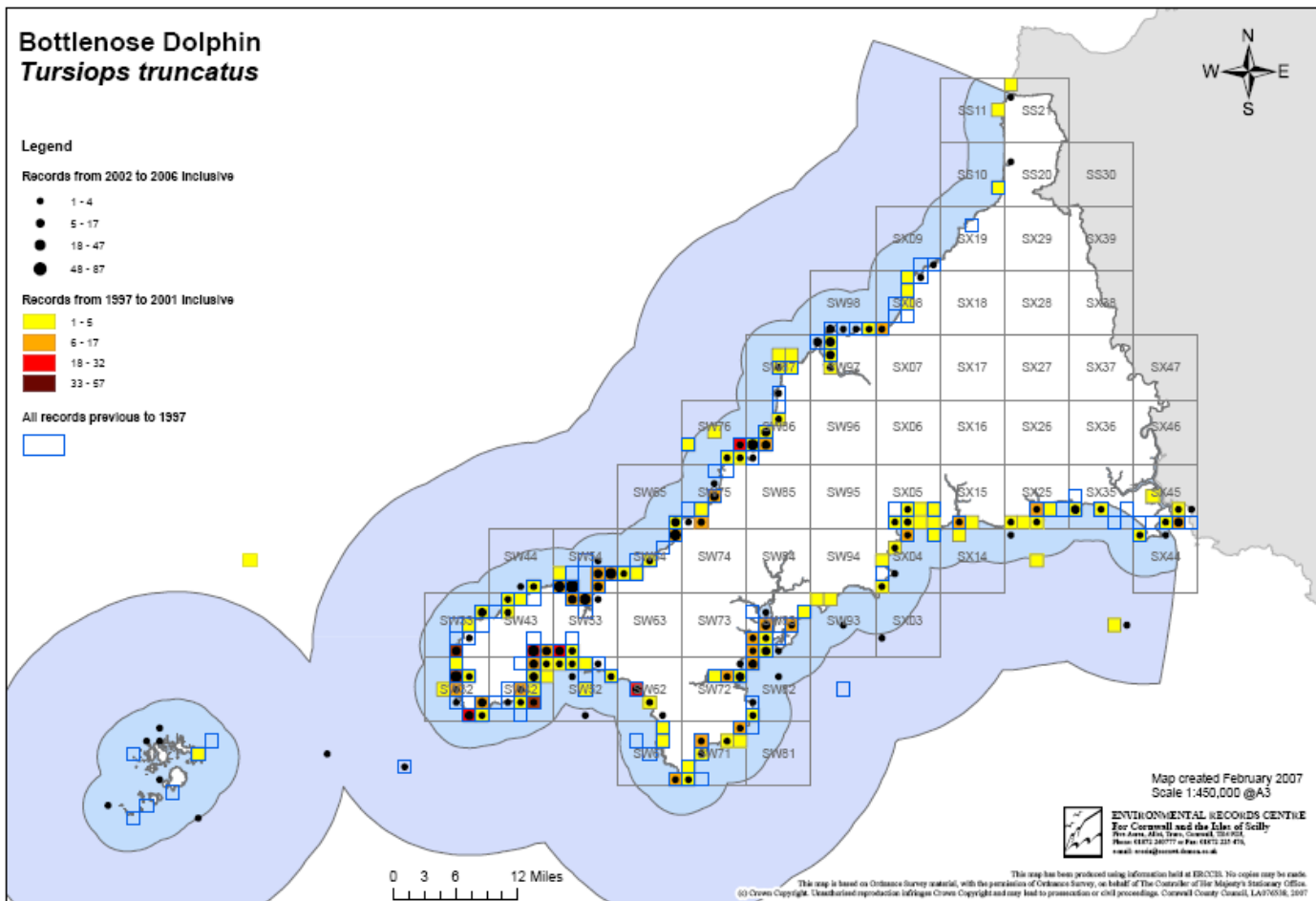


The appearance of the bottlenose dolphin varies dependant on individual characteristics and the geographic area it is found in. There are two main variants; the smaller inshore form and the more robust offshore form. Bottlenose dolphins are stout in body shape and one of the larger dolphin species seen in UK waters with an adult length of 3-3.6 m and a newborn of 0.98-1.3 m. Colourings in this species are very plain with a brown or dark grey back, lighter grey lower flanks grading to white on the belly. Bottlenose dolphins have a distinctive tall slender sickle-shaped centrally placed dorsal fin. The beak is often white-tipped and is distinct in its short and robust bottle-like shape. Sexual dimorphism is subtle in most cetacean species and the bottlenose dolphin is no exception. Females have mammary slits either side of the genital slit on the underside of the body, these are absent in the males, however due to the nature of sightings and the marine environment it is often impossible to distinguish the sex of live animals in the water. They are often seen breaching and bow riding so confused with the more agile common dolphin; however the absence of flank markings should aid identification.

Bottlenose dolphins are found in groups of 1-10 individuals inshore and up to 25 offshore, however pods of as many as 500 dolphins have been reported in offshore areas. Due to the marine environment and the associated difficulties of surveying marine species little is known about cetacean reproduction. In common with other cetaceans, bottlenose dolphins typically produce a single young. In UK waters birth usually occurs in summer months during periods of high food chain productivity (April – September), to sustain the lactating mother, females usually lactate for a 12 month period. The life span of the bottlenose dolphin is estimated (by sectioning teeth) to be 25yrs.

Bottlenose dolphins are extremely well adapted hunters and feed on squid and fish, they often display coordinated hunting activity, schooling prey into 'bait balls'.

There are very few natural predators to the bottlenose dolphins in UK waters; the only species to specifically predate on them is the Orca. Anthropogenic threats range from pollution, reduction in fish stock due to over fishing, accidental entanglement in fishing nets (bycatch) and increased noise in the marine environment. In coastal waters bycatch is of major concern and several mitigation measures are being trialled throughout the country.



Sightings of Bottlenose Dolphins occur right around the Cornish coast. Between 1997 and 2001 most records were from the Southwest around Lamorna Point, Lands End and Gwennap Head. Records also came from St. Ives Bay, Newquay bay, Falmouth Bay and Mounts Bay particularly from Porthleven. Between 2002 and 2006 were similarly distributed but with considerably more sightings from St. Ives Bay . The lack of records from other areas could be a result of lack of observers in the area rather than a lack of Bottlenose Dolphin activity.

Number of records per date class
 2002 to 2006 inclusive 132
 1997 to 2001 inclusive 135
 All records previous to 1997 1190
Total 1457

UK BAP species
 Protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
 Annex A of EU Council Regulation 338/97 and therefore treated by the EU as if they are on CITES Appendix I thus prohibiting their commercial trade.
 The UK is a member of the ASCOBANS agreement

Bottlenose dolphins have a huge distribution through cold temperate to tropical seas worldwide.

Survey Methods

incidental sightings records
 Surveys from vessels or land observation points.
 Acoustic monitoring to identify areas of high activity around the Cornish Coast.

Did you know?

Key references

Cawardine, M. (2000) Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises. Dorling Kindersley Handbooks
 Evans, P. G. H. (1987) The Natural History of Whales and Dolphins. Facts on File
www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk
 American Cetacean Society www.acsonline.org/index.html