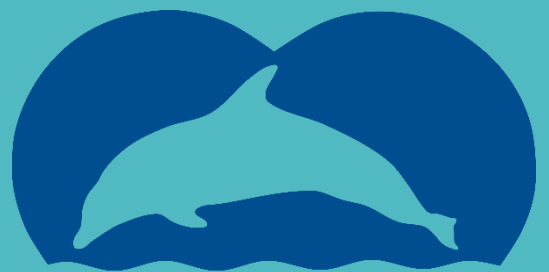


2023

# Annual Report



© 2023 MWDW/Ben & Katie Hellowell



Manx Whale and  
Dolphin Watch

---

# CETACEANS AND BASKING SHARKS IN MANX WATERS IN 2023

---

Manx Whale and Dolphin Watch

Amy O'Reilly

Bryony Manley

"To conserve and protect whales, dolphins, porpoises  
(cetaceans), and basking sharks in Manx waters  
through research and education."

---

# MWDW TEAM

---

The Manx Whale and Dolphin Watch team in 2023 was as follows:

## Trustees and Core Team

Paul Cain – Chairman/Treasurer

Jen Adams – Secretary and Education and Outreach Manager

Bryony Manley – Trustee and Researcher

Louise Chhetri – Trustee

Tom Felce – Research and Science Support

## Dolphineers

Amy O'Reilly – Full-time volunteer

Elan Shipton – Part-time volunteer

Chloe Gelling – Part-time volunteer

## Other Volunteers

Chris Kelly – IT and website Support

Richard Coase – Boat Maintenance and Skipper

Matt Dean – Boat Assistance

Roy Maddrell – Boat Assistance

---

# YEAR IN SUMMARY

---

This year MWDW was able to secure affordable available accommodation, which facilitated the recruitment of one fulltime 'Dolphineer', Amy O'Reilly. There were also two part-time (one day a week) volunteers to assist with surveys and office work.

There was a notable decrease in basking shark sightings this year. Sighting numbers dropped from 70 sightings in 2022, to just 17 sightings in 2023. All 17 sightings reported this year were reported from the public.

Due to ongoing boat problems which are still being addressed, we did not manage many boat surveys. However, land-based surveys and public sightings were in good numbers. Public events and outreach were conducted including several 'Sea Watch' events at the Sound.

There were several unusual sightings this year which are worth mentioning. Of particular note were the multiple humpback whale sightings. Humpback whales are occasional visitors to Manx waters, with the last one being reported six years ago in 2017, and before that in 2013. This year we have received six public sightings, along with multiple photographs and videos. The first humpback whale sighting was reported by a member of the public, on the 11th of July, ½ mile off the west coast. This was followed by another one in July, two in August, and two in November.

On the 27th of July, a fisherman captured a video of a pod of common dolphins with a juvenile Risso's dolphin. The two species have been known to mix but this is the first time such an interaction has been captured in Manx waters. On the 16th of August, a pod of Risso's dolphins and common dolphins were filmed from the coast associating West of the Sound.

A rare visitor, the sunfish was spotted on Friday 8th September, reported off Port Erin and west of the Sound, with accompanying videos.

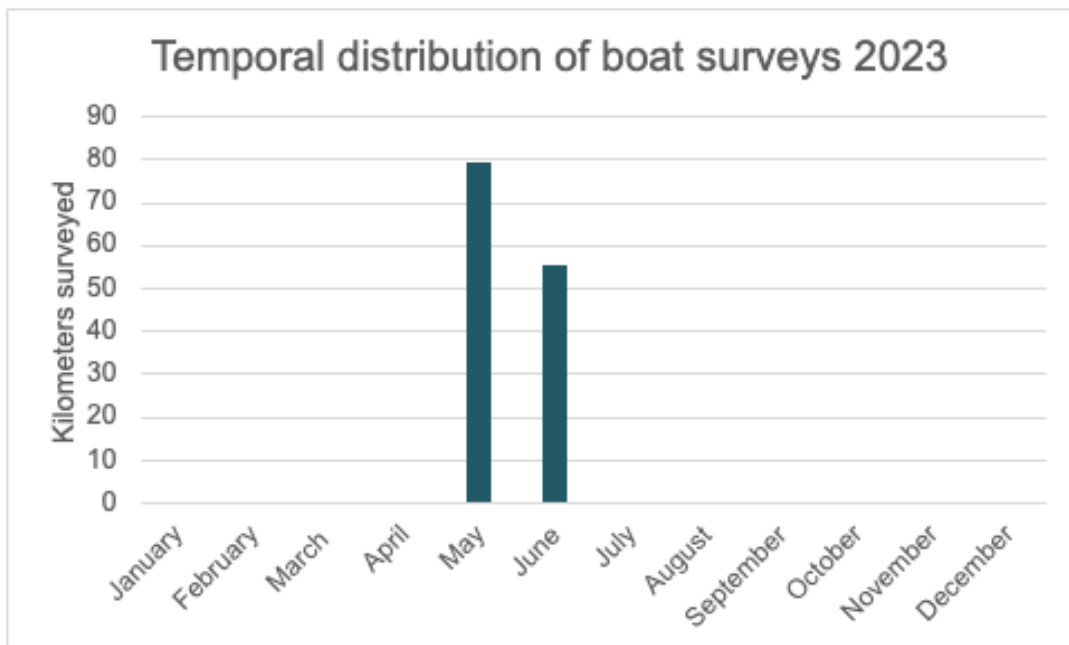
There have been two reports of Atlantic bluefin tuna, one on 9<sup>th</sup> of October and the other on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November.

Overall, when compared to 2022, the number of public sightings reported has increased. There were similar sighting numbers for common dolphins and Risso's dolphins. There was a slight reduction in bottlenose dolphin sightings and an increase in minke whale and harbour porpoise sighting numbers. Resident mother and calf bottlenose dolphin pair Moonlight and Starlight are still present in Manx waters and are regularly reported, making up one third of all public sightings reported this year.

# BOAT BASED SURVEYS

**Table 1:** Boat-based survey effort and cetacean sightings during 2023

<b>Number of surveys</b>	<b>2</b>
Dedicated	2
Opportunistic	0
<b>Kilometers surveyed</b>	<b>134.37</b>
Sea states 0 and 1	127.49
Sea states 2 and above	6.87
<b>Number of sightings (individuals)</b>	<b>16 (30)</b>
Bottlenose dolphin	0
Common dolphin	0
Harbour porpoise	14 (22)
Minke whale	1 (1)
Risso's dolphin	1 (7)

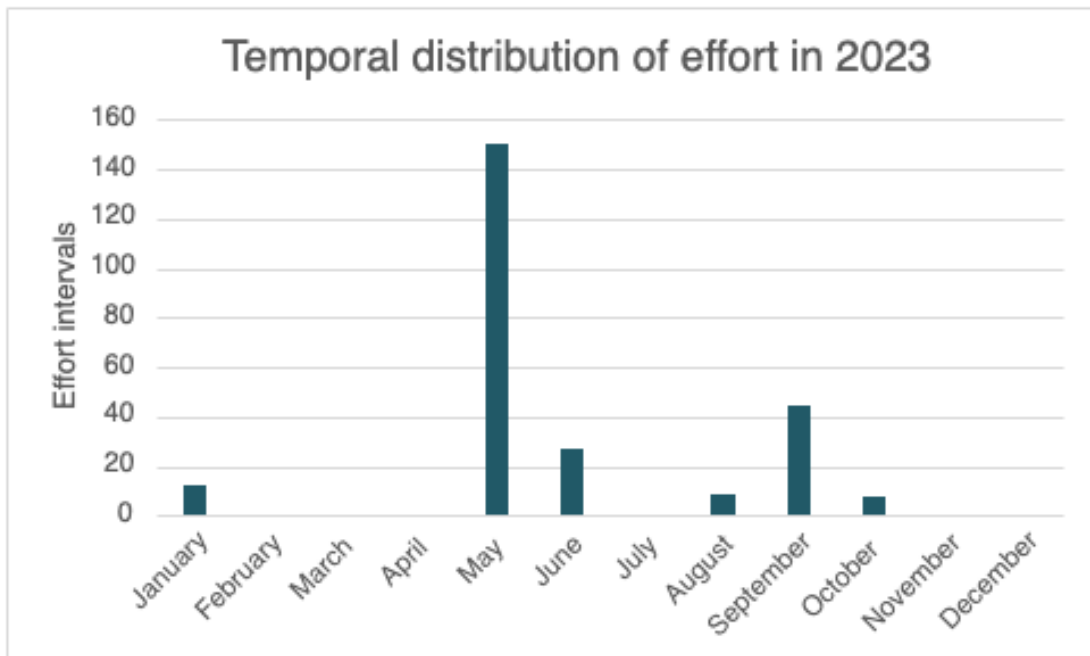


**Figure 1:** Temporal distribution of the kilometers of boat-based surveying during 2023

# LAND-BASED SURVEYS

**Table 2:** Land-based survey effort and cetacean sighting rate during 2023

Location	Hours of effort	No. of intervals	% cetacean +ve
Calf East	7.75	31	48.4
Calf West	12.5	50	72
Marine Drive	12.75	51	23.5
Niarbyl	9	36	30.6
Port St Mary	8	32	71.9
Sound	12.25	49	20.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62.25</b>	<b>249</b>	



**Figure 2:** Temporal distribution of land-based effort intervals during 2023

**Table 3:** Number of cetacean and shark positive intervals, different sightings, and different individuals of each species recorded during land-based surveys in 2023

<b>Species</b>	<b>No. of +ve intervals</b>	<b>No. of different sightings</b>	<b>No. of individuals seen</b>
Bottlenose dolphin	0	0	0
Common dolphin	0	0	0
Harbour porpoise	80	81	132
Minke whale	32	14	16
Risso's dolphin	14	5	15
Unidentified large cetacean	1	1	1
Unidentified dolphin	1	1	1
Basking shark	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>165</b>

---

# PUBLIC SIGHTINGS

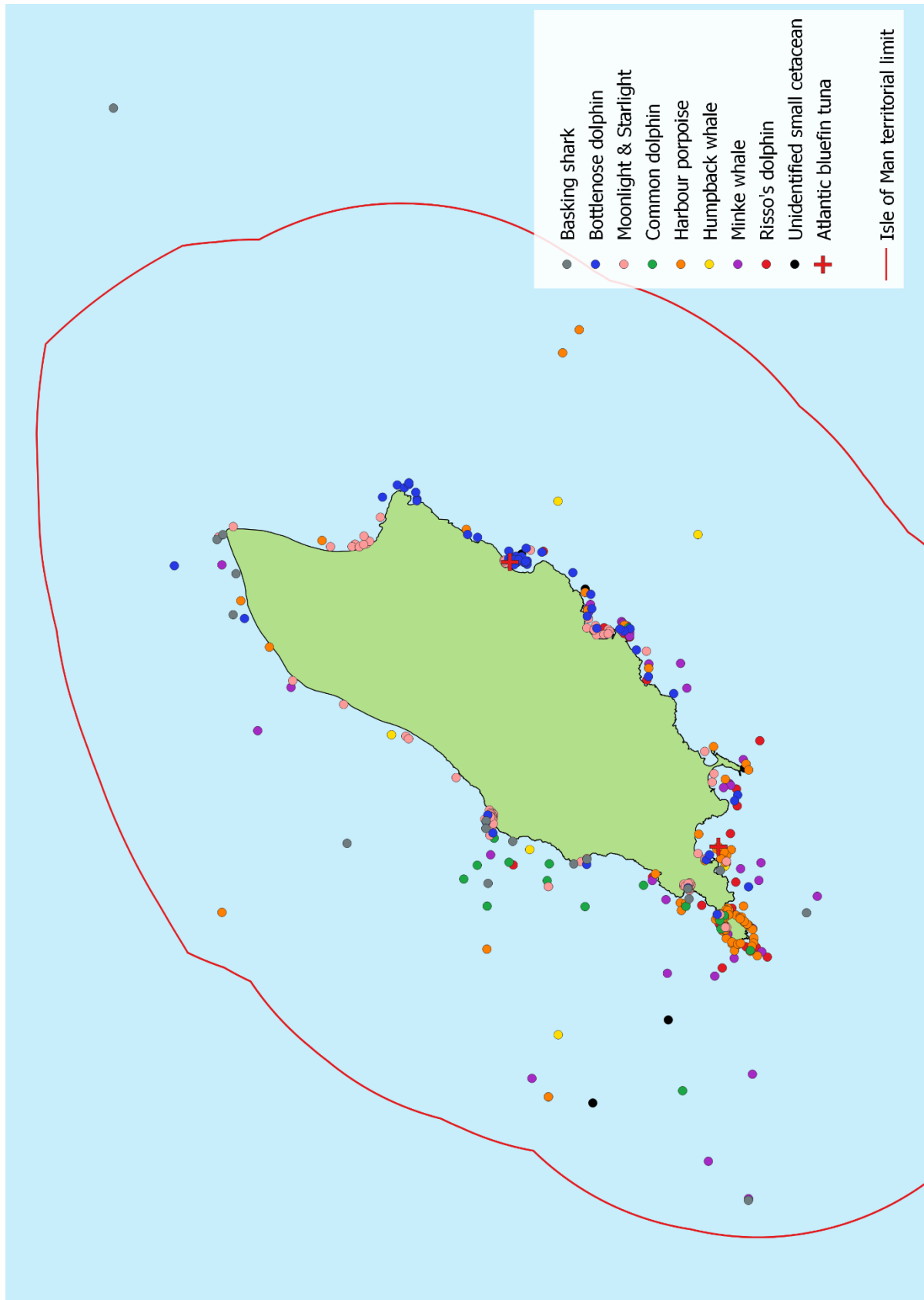
---

**Table 4:** Total number of opportunistic sightings, individuals and juveniles of each species observed during 2023.

Species	No. of sightings	No. of individuals	No. of juveniles	% of total sightings
Bottlenose dolphin	51	1262	239	13.6
Moonlight & Starlight	104			27.7
Common dolphin	16	833	150	4.3
Harbour porpoise	108	342	29	28.8
Minke whale	53	72	4	14.1
Risso's dolphin	31	242	54	8.3
Unidentified small cetacean	6	52	8	1.6
Humpback whale	6	6	0	1.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>2809</b>	<b>484</b>	
Basking shark	17	21	0 (<4m)	



**Figure 3:** Distribution of public cetacean sightings during 2023



---

# SPECIES

---

## Bottlenose dolphin – *Tursiops truncatus*

In 2023 there were a total of **51** sightings of bottlenose dolphins and **104** sightings of Moonlight and Starlight combined from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.

## Common dolphin (short-beaked) – *Delphinus delphis*

In 2023 there were a total of **16** sightings of common dolphins combined from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.

## Harbour porpoise – *Phocoena phocoena*

In 2023 there were a total of **203** sightings of harbor porpoise combined from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.

## Minke whale – *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

In 2023 there were a total of **68** sightings of minke whales combined from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.

## Risso's dolphin – *Grampus griseus*

In 2023 there were a total of **36** sightings of Risso's dolphins combined from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.

## Basking shark – *Cetorhinus maximus*

In 2023 there were a total of **17** sightings of basking sharks combined from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.