

2024

# Annual Report



Manx Whale and  
Dolphin Watch

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# CETACEANS IN MANX WATERS IN 2024

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Manx Whale and Dolphin Watch

Jen Adams and Bryony Manley

“To conserve and protect whales, dolphins, and porpoises (cetaceans) in Manx waters through research and education.”

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# MWDW TEAM

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The Manx Whale and Dolphin Watch team in 2024 was as follows:

## Trustees and Core Team

Paul Cain – Chairman/Treasurer

Louise Chhertri- Trustee

Jen Adams – Secretary and Education and Outreach Manager

Bryony Manley – Trustee and Researcher

Tom Felce – Research and Science Support

## Dolphineers

Rose Pollard – Full-time summer placement from May to September

## Other Volunteers

Chris Kelly – IT and website Support

Richard Coase – Boat Maintenance and Skipper

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# YEAR IN SUMMARY

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In 2024 we struggled in terms of manpower, with just one full-time staff member and one full time Dolphineer. Survey efforts were restricted due to poor weather from June onwards therefore most fieldwork took place in May. Significant work was carried out to the MWDW Risso's photo-ID catalogue, which now stands at 102 well-marked dolphins, 80 which can be recognised from the left-hand side alone, and 77 from the right-hand side alone. Of these, 13 lefts have a corresponding right-hand fin in the catalogue. Regional matching took place for the first time since 2013, with 25 matches to Bardsey and Anglesey, none to Shetland/Orkney/NE Scotland and none to Brittany. There are matches with Cornwall, however this work is still in its early stages.

2024 was an excellent year for Risso's dolphins, with double the number of sightings (63) compared to (36) 2023. This species returned to Manx waters earlier than usual, with the first sighting on 11<sup>th</sup> February, one of the earliest on record. Their range extended higher up the north-east coast than usual, with sightings off Laxey and Maughold.

Numbers of short-beaked common dolphins have increased for the fifth year running, with a total of 40 sightings in 2024. This compares to an average of 16 sightings annually between 2020-2034, and 7 annually between 2007-2020. Pod sizes have increased substantially and are exceeding 200 individuals, with a high percentage of juveniles. This former exclusively summer visitor, is now seen year-round, including the winter months. This increase matches the boom in Common dolphin numbers throughout the west of the British Isles over the same period. In 2023 there were 2 sightings of Atlantic bluefin tuna and further probable sightings in 2024. These species typically feed cooperatively, and we expect to see more tuna in the coming years.

Bottlenose dolphins from other regions continue to gather in Manx waters during the winter months. These pods exceed 100 individuals and contain a high percentage of juveniles. In 2024 they used Laxey Bay as a regular foraging site. Local observers have reported Bottlenose dolphins within the Laxey Bay Marine Nature Reserve over consecutive days and weeks between October and March. In addition, this area has recently attracted the attention of Common dolphins. The importance of this site to delphinids should be noted. Bottlenose dolphins are no longer an exclusively winter visitor to Manx waters, and we now see smaller pods of <30 during the summer.

Minke whale sighting numbers were very low, probably the worst on record, with just 11 sightings. It is noteworthy that the east coast of England saw a big increase in Minke whale sightings in 2024, suggesting that the population that usually frequents Manx waters, may have moved elsewhere, following their northerly migration during the winter months.

Sightings of Basking sharks decreased from 17 in 2023 to just 10 in 2024. Huge aggregations of basking sharks were recorded all through the year off County Clare, Ireland and the Moray Firth area of Scotland.

In terms of public engagement, we carried out 6 days of stalls at carnivals and other shows, 10 fortnightly public sea-watch events at the Sound, 41 school sessions, 8 adult talks and 12 education workshops. We saw a healthy footfall of visitors to the MWDW Centre and an increase of people who have “come to the Isle of Man specifically to see whales and dolphins.”

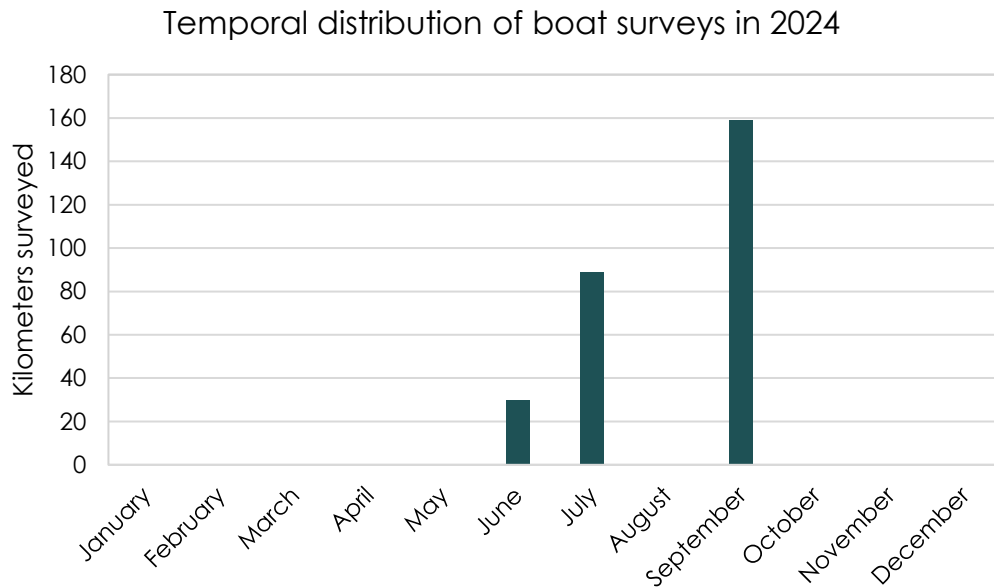
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# BOAT BASED SURVEYS

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**Table 1:** Boat-based survey effort and cetacean sightings during 2024

<b>Number of surveys</b>	<b>4</b>
Dedicated	0
Opportunistic	4
<b>Kilometers surveyed</b>	<b>277.97</b>
Sea states 0 and 1	35.28
Sea states 2 and above	242.69
<b>Number of sightings (individuals)</b>	<b>7 (22)</b>
Bottlenose dolphin	0
Common dolphin	0
Harbour porpoise	6 (17)
Minke whale	0
Risso's dolphin	1 (5)

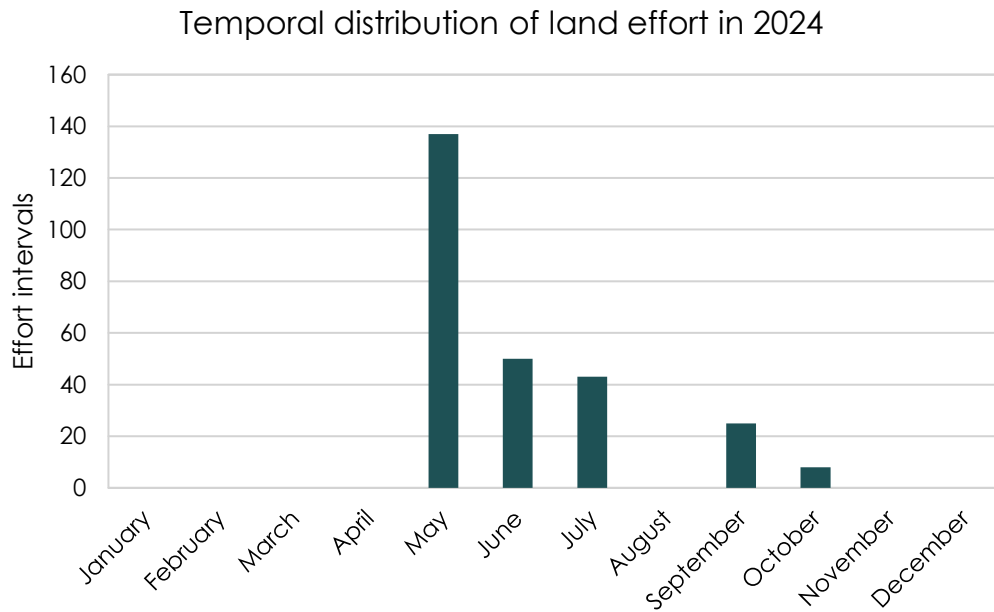


**Figure 1:** Temporal distribution of the kilometers of boat-based surveying during 2024

## LAND-BASED SURVEYS

**Table 2:** Land-based survey effort and cetacean sighting rate during 2024

Location	Hours of effort	No. of intervals	% cetacean +ve
Calf East	7	28	21.4
Calf West	6.25	25	4
Marine Drive	15	60	23.3
Niarbyl	7	28	17.9
Peel Castle	4	16	0
Point of Ayre	2.25	9	0
Port St Mary	2	8	62.5
Sound (car park)	22.25	89	1.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65.75</b>	<b>263</b>	



**Figure 2:** Temporal distribution of land-based effort intervals during 2024

**Table 3:** Number of cetacean positive intervals, different sightings, and number of different individuals of each species recorded during land-based surveys in 2024

Species	No. of +ve intervals	No. of different sightings	No. of individuals seen
Bottlenose dolphin	2	1	3
Common dolphin	0	0	0
Harbour porpoise	17	11	26
Minke whale	2	1	1
Risso's dolphin	14	4	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>42</b>

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# PUBLIC SIGHTINGS

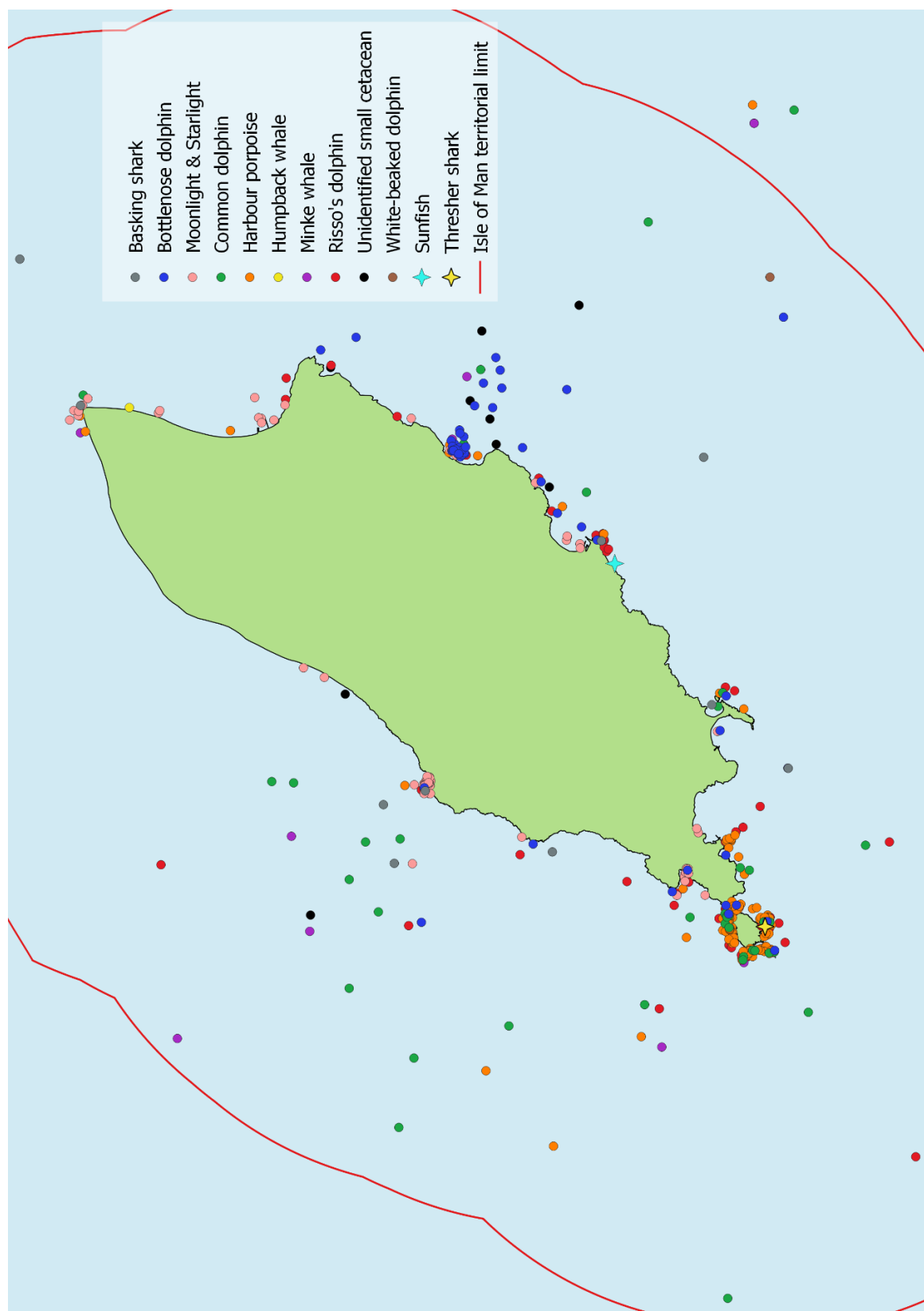
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**Table 4:** Total number of opportunistic sightings, individuals and juveniles of each species observed during 2024

Species	No. of sightings	No. of individuals	No. of juveniles	% of total sightings
Bottlenose dolphin	50	825	134	12.4
Moonlight & Starlight	77			19.1
Common dolphin	40	819	113	9.9
Harbour porpoise	157	475	53	38.9
Minke whale	10	11	0	2.5
Risso's dolphin	58	283	22	14.4
Humpback whale	1	1	0	0.2
White-beaked dolphin	1	8	0	0.2
Unidentified small cetacean	10	75	0	2.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>2497</b>	<b>322</b>	
Basking shark	10	10	0	



**Figure 3:** Distribution of public cetacean sightings during 2024



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# SPECIES

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## Bottlenose dolphin – *Tursiops truncatus*

In 2024 there were a total of **51** sightings of Bottlenose dolphins and **77** sightings of Moonlight and Starlight combined, from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.

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

In 2024 there were a total of **40** sightings of Common dolphins combined, from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.

## Harbour porpoise – *Phocoena phocoena*

In 2024 there were a total of **174** sightings of Harbour porpoise combined, from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.

## Minke whale – *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

In 2024 there were a total of **11** sightings of minke whales combined, from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.

## Risso's dolphin – *Grampus griseus*

In 2024 there were a total of **63** sightings of Risso's dolphins combined, from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.

## Basking shark – *Cetorhinus maximus*

In 2024 there were a total of **10** sightings of Basking sharks combined, from boat-based, land-based, and public sightings.