



# **Cetacean and Basking Shark Occurrence and Distribution in Isle of Man Waters 2025**

By Jen Adams

Manx Whale and Dolphin Watch

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



**MWDW**  
Manx Whale and Dolphin Watch

---

# Summary of sightings

---

## **Basking sharks** *Cetorhinus maximus*

Basking sharks returned relatively early in 2025, with the first reports coming through on the 29<sup>th</sup> April off Langness and Spanish head. Early May saw further sightings along the east coast as far north as Laxey Bay, which is unusual for the species. Sightings then followed around the Calf of Man, with reports continuing through the summer on the west coast. The final sighting of the year was on the 5<sup>th</sup> August, bringing a total of 26 sightings consisting of 29 individuals.

## **Bottlenose dolphins** *Tursiops truncatus*

Bottlenose dolphins normally use Manx waters as an overwintering ground between September and March, and of the 47 sightings reported, only one occurred outside of these months. Laxey Bay Marine Nature Reserve continues to provide an important habitat for this species, with 31 sightings reported within the 4km<sup>2</sup> area between Laxey head and Clay head, or just outside but still within 3km of Laxey bay. A further 10 sightings were recorded elsewhere along the east coast and only six sightings were reported along other coastlines. The largest pod size was 100 individuals, and the mean pod size was 22. A good percentage of juveniles were observed.

## **Minke whale** *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

For the second year running, Minke whales have been almost absent from Manx waters during the summer months, with only five reports between April and July. A further 14 were observed between October and December, 13 of which were within the Laxey Bay Marine Nature Reserve or within 1km of Clay head, further highlighting this area as an important feeding ground for cetaceans.

## **Risso's dolphins** *Grampus griseus*

The Risso's dolphins arrived on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, with the first two reports of the year recorded off the Calf of Man, followed by a spate of sightings along the east coast until early May. For the second year running, we received reports of Risso's dolphins in Laxey Bay and as far north as Maughold head, both locations previously uninhabited by this species. From May to October, most Risso's dolphin sightings were in the south and west of the island between the Calf of Man and Peel. The last report of the year was on the 17<sup>th</sup> October off the Calf of Man Lighthouses.

### **Short-beaked common dolphin *Delphinus delphis***

Common dolphins were again seen regularly through 2025. A total of 38 sightings were made all around the island as close to shore as 1km and as far out as the 12-mile limit of Manx territorial waters. The largest pod size was 100 individuals and the mean pod size was 24. As has become the case in recent years, this species is now seen year-round. A steady increase in pod size, distribution and seasonality, reflects an overall increase of Common dolphin sightings across other regions in the west of Britain since 2020.

### **Other Species**

Three **Fin whales** were recorded in 2025, with two seen off Port Cornaa on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October and another off Spanish head on the 15<sup>th</sup> December. The sightings were vetted thoroughly to ensure confidence. One **Ocean sunfish** was spotted on the 26<sup>th</sup> June, two miles off Douglas head, and three **Atlantic bluefin tuna** were reported off Marine drive in August and October. This is the fourth consecutive year that tuna have been recorded in Manx waters since MWDW was founded in 2006.

### **Moonlight and Starlight**

Starlight turned six in September 2025 and the mother-daughter pair continue to be resident to Manx coastal waters, as they have been since their arrival in 2019. Whilst they display a preference for our shallow, sandy bays, they are known to regularly circumnavigate the island. Moonlight and Starlight display behaviours associated with 'solitary social' dolphins, whereby individuals seek out human interaction over members of their own species. This phenomenon is seen in bottlenose dolphins more than any other species of Delphinidae. MWDW continues to work closely with sea-users to monitor and record interactions, and educate our community, both for the safety of these dolphins as well as humans. In 2025 MWDW worked with the Clyde Whale and Dolphin Watch to piece together the movements of Moonlight's family, five of whom now form a resident pod in the Firth of Clyde, just 80 miles north of the Isle of Man.

---

# Boat-based surveys

---

**Table 1:** Boat-based survey effort and sightings during 2025

<b>Number of surveys</b>	
Dedicated	1
Opportunistic	0
<b>Kilometres surveyed</b>	
Sea state 0 and 1	1.55
Sea states 2 and above	35.31
<b>Number of sightings</b>	
Basking shark	0
Bottlenose dolphin	0
Common dolphin	1
Harbour porpoise	2
Minke whale	0
Risso's dolphin	0

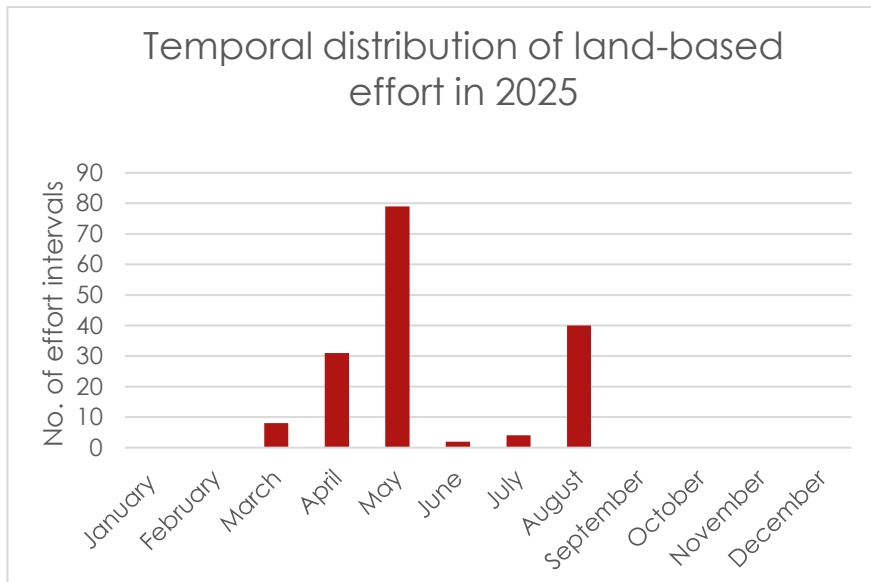
# Land-based surveys

**Table 2:** Land-based survey effort and cetacean sighting rate during 2025

Location	Hours of effort	No. of intervals	% cetacean +ve intervals
Calf Lighthouses	0	0	0
Calf East	13.15	53	15.8
Calf West	11.30	46	34
Marine Drive	4	16	13.5
Niarbyl	10.30	42	18.4
Peel Castle	1.15	5	0
Port St Mary	3	12	18.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>43.30</b>	<b>174</b>	

**Table 3:** Number of cetacean positive intervals, different sightings, and number of different individuals of each species recorded during land-based surveys in 2025

Species	No. of cetacean +ve intervals	No. of different sightings	No. of individuals seen
Basking shark	0	0	0
Bottlenose dolphin	0	0	0
Common dolphin	0	0	0
Harbour porpoise	43	21	41
Minke whale	0	0	0
Risso's dolphin	4	2	10
Unidentified small cetacean	0	0	0
Unidentified dolphin	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>51</b>



**Graph 1:** Land-based effort data collected per month in 2025

# Public sightings

**Table 4:** Total number of opportunistic (public) sightings, individuals and juveniles of each species observed during 2025

Species	No. of sightings	No. of individuals	No. of juveniles	% of total sightings
Basking shark	26	29	-	6.26
Bottlenose dolphin	47	1051	143	11.3
Common dolphin	38	894	113	9.1
Harbour porpoise	116	337	33	27.9
Minke whale	19	23	2	4.5
Risso's dolphin	46	288	29	11
Moonlight and Starlight	110	2	-	26.5
Fin whale	2	3	0	0.5
Sunfish	1	1	0	0.2
Atlantic bluefin tuna	3	3	0	0.7
Unidentified small cetacean	6	39	0	1.4
Unidentified large cetacean	1	1	0	0.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>2671</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>-</b>

---

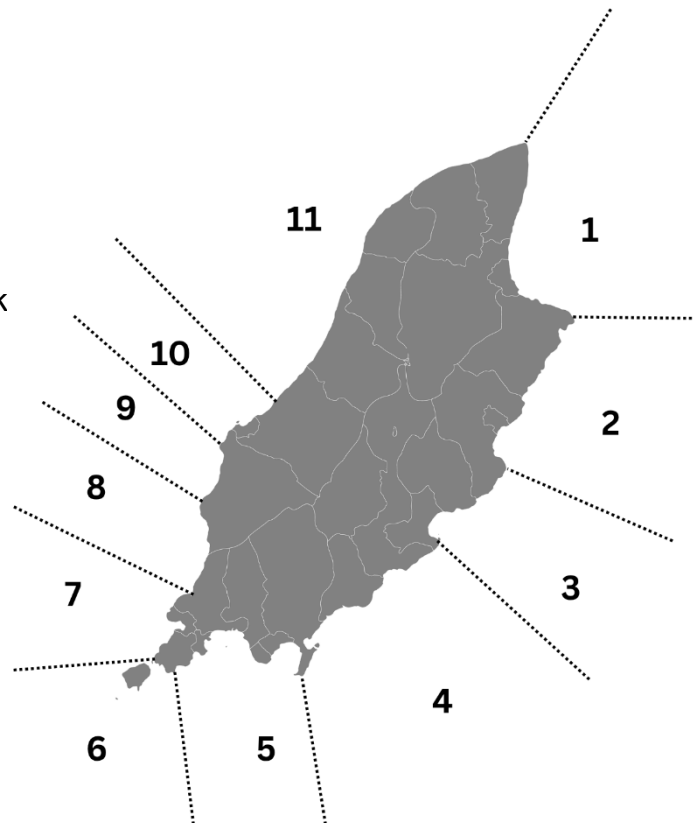
# Zones

---

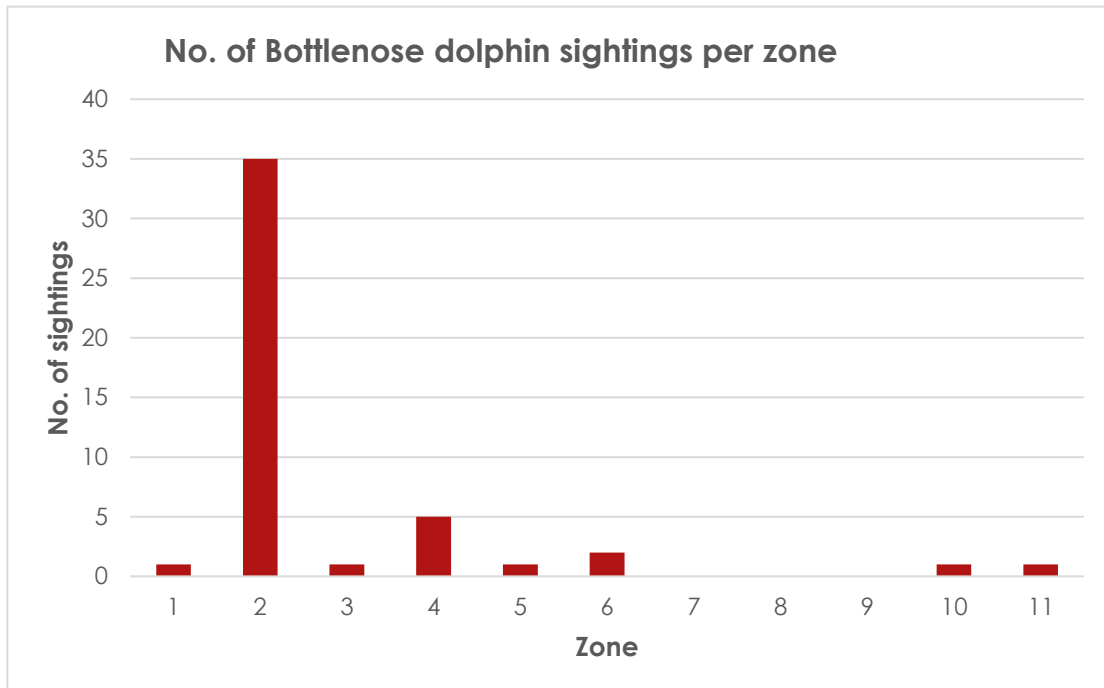
MWDW have recently divided Manx territorial waters into 11 zones to help better analyse and visualise opportunistic sightings data. Zones were carefully chosen using coastal promontories and similar habitat, and extend to 12 miles offshore, however, the majority of opportunistic sightings fall between 0 and 4km of the coastline. Further amendments to offshore zonation will be made for future analysis.

**Zones and length of coastline included:**

- Zone 1 - Point of Ayre to Maughold 16km
- Zone 2 - Maughold to Clay head 13km
- Zone 3 - Clay head to Douglas head 8.5km
- Zone 4 - Douglas head to Langness south 15k
- Zone 5 - Langness south to Sugarloaf 14km
- Zone 6 - Sugarloaf to NW Calf 5.5km
- Zone 7 - NW Calf to Fleshwick 8.5km
- Zone 8 - Fleshwick to Dalby 7.5km
- Zone 9 - Dalby to Contrary Head 5km
- Zone 10 - Contrary head to Devils Elbow 8km
- Zone 11 - Devils Elbow to Point of Ayre 28km

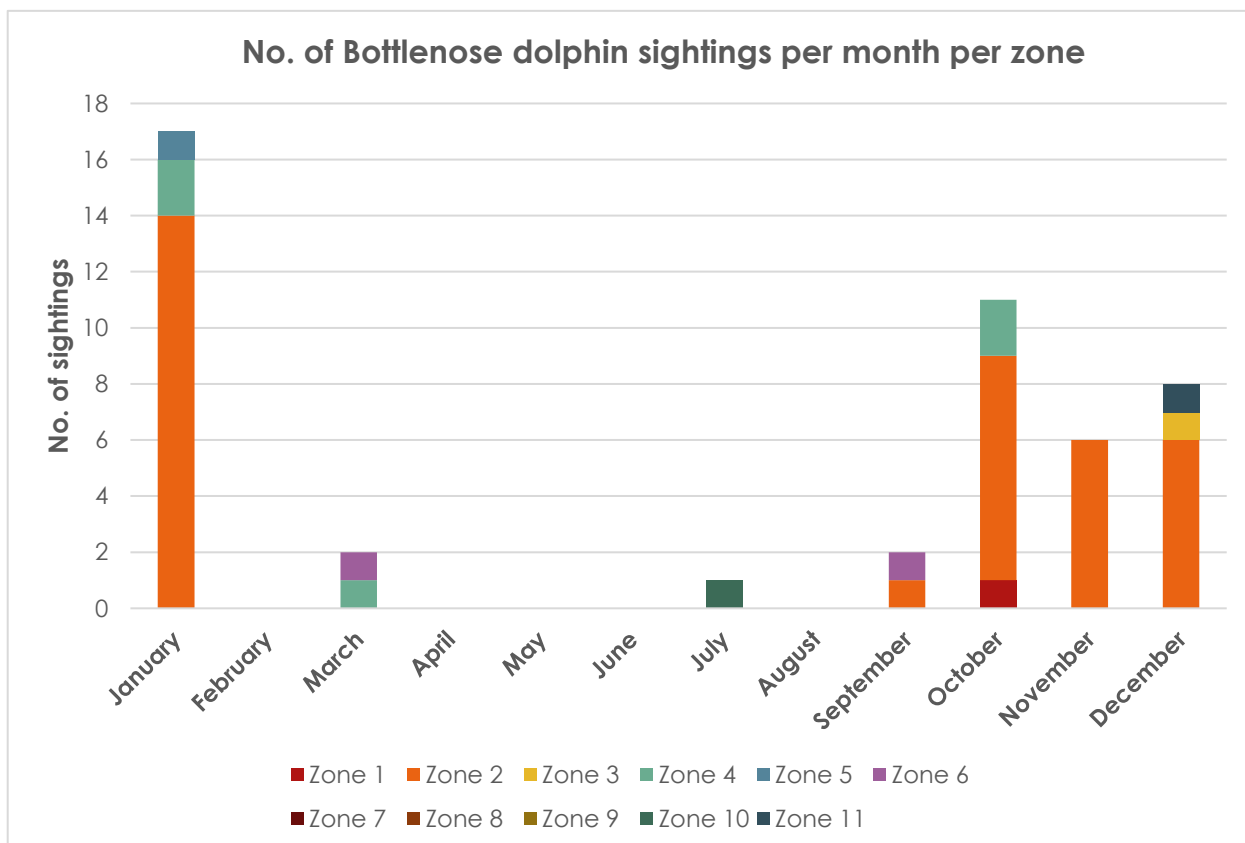


**Figure 1:** map outlining the 11 zones as identified by MWDW in 2025.

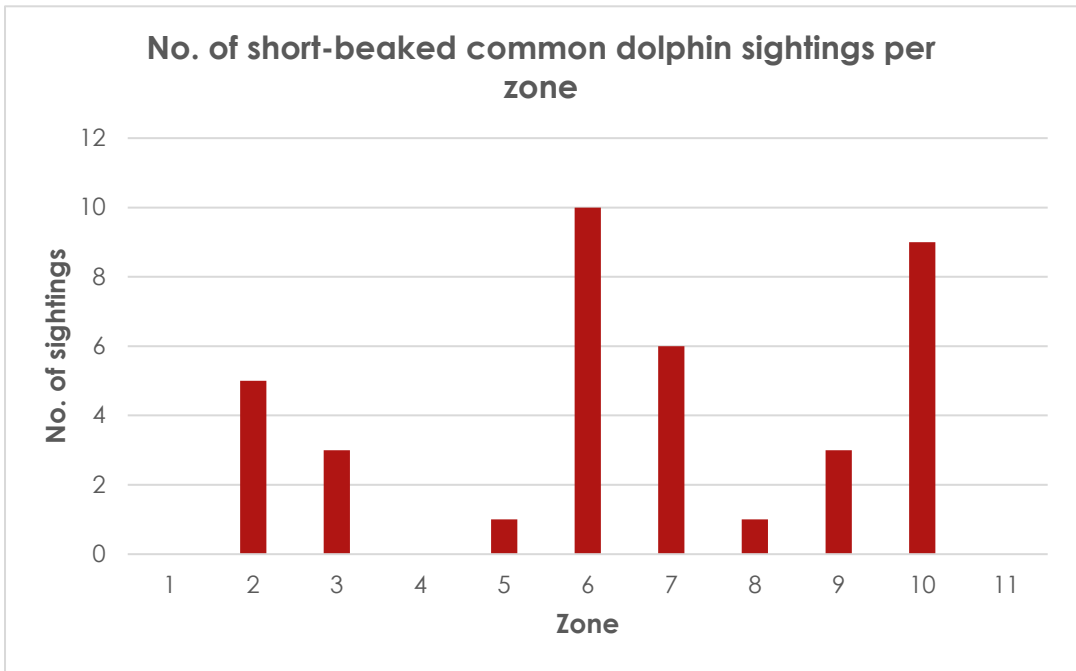


**Graph 2:** Frequency of Bottlenose dolphin sightings in each zone

**Graph 3:** Frequency of Bottlenose dolphin sightings per month per zone

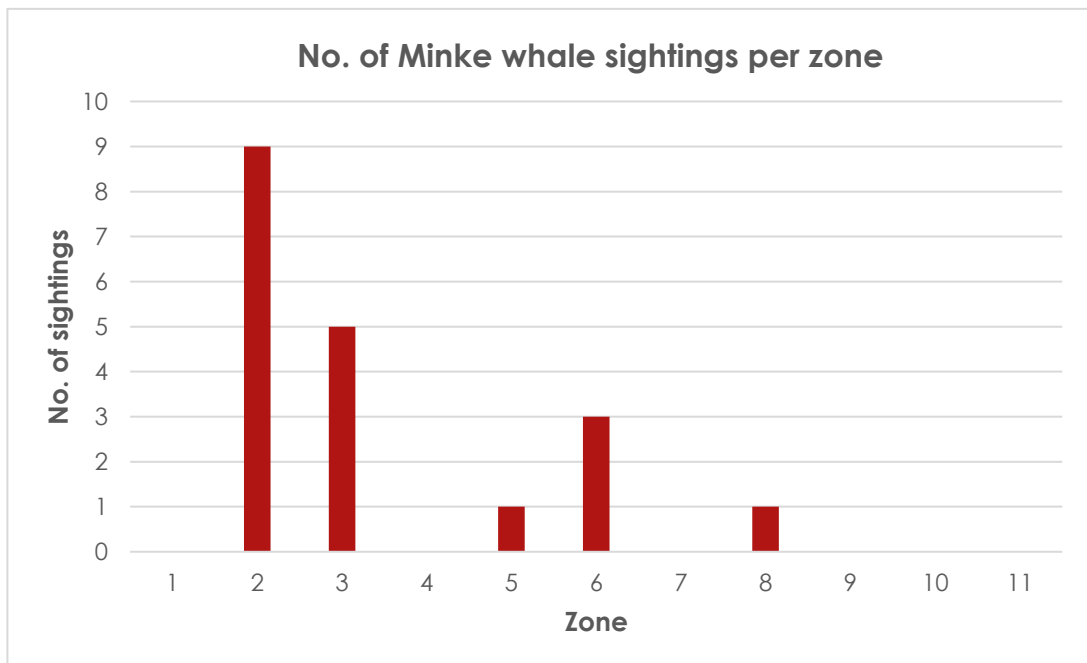






**Graph 6:** Frequency of common dolphin sightings in each zone

**Graph 7:** Frequency of Minke whale sightings in each zone



---

# MWDW Team

---

Due to a turnaround of staff and other personal factors, fewer boat and land-based surveys were conducted through 2025 than usual. Opportunistic sightings provided us with an invaluable insight into the relative abundance and distribution of our local species. These reports, made by our public sightings network, are invaluable to MWDW. We would like to thank everyone who has reported a sighting to us, thus contributing to this report and our ongoing studies.

**The Manx Whale and Dolphin Watch team in 2025 were as follows:**

**Trustees and Core Team**

Paul Cain – Chairman/Treasurer

Louise Chhetri - Trustee

Jen Adams – Secretary and Education and Outreach Manager

Bryony Manley – Trustee and Researcher

Tom Felce – Research and Science Support

**Other Volunteers**

Chris Kelly – IT and website Support

Richard Coase – Boat Maintenance and Skipper

*Cover image- Moonlight and Starlight in Port St Mary, Manuela Swiatek*

*Report reviewed and edited by Tom Felce.*