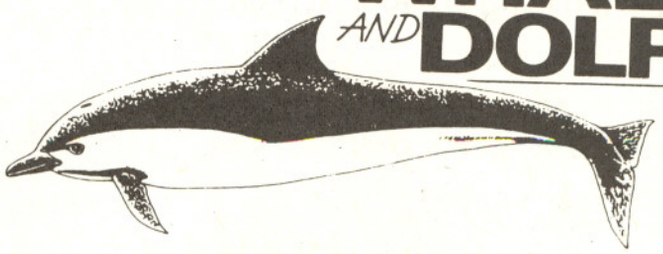
Issue seven

newsletter

THE IRISH WHALE AND DOLPHIN GROUP



The great leap forward?

Brendan Price looks back on the work already done by the IWDG and ponders on its future.

The tireless work of Simon Berrow and Emer Rogan in managing the sighting and stranding schemes continues and is the foundation of the group's work. They are aided in this by our regional co-ordinators, more vigilant than any beachcomber or scavenger. These in turn are supported by a coast-wide network of volunteers and nature watchers. Many of these co-ordinators work for the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Office of Public Works (OPW), and our network and information base is greatly strengthened by them. The IWDG is very proud of this working association between ourselves and State agencies. We are most grateful to Michael Canny and the NPWS staff and hope to have a meeting/workshop with them in the not too distant future, and hence build further on this informal but effective association. Many gaps still exist around the coast however, and more whale watchers are always needed.

While Irish waters are now a whale and dolphin sanctuary, there is still a very low level of awareness among the general population of this fact. We regularly come across this ignorance when we give talks in schools or to the public. Hopefully this year we can increase awareness and help spread the good news. Those who wish to know more can avail of our education service, or better still join us, and maybe even take on a project of their own.

In our winter newsletter, Simon Berrow commenting on the role of the IWDG, said, "There is still plenty that can be done but the group will only be as active as the people involved in it."

The momentum generated by the sanctuary has carried us this far, and further good news from the Department of Finance is that our proposal to appoint a marine biologist with responsibility for cetaceans will be realised later this year. The position within the NPWS will cater for non-commercial marine species. However, new initiatives and new people are needed to generate more momentum. We hope this bumper newsletter will bring a new crop of interested people into the organisation and help spread the work load more evenly. We are thankful to the contributors who have made this issue possible. We intend to meet in the autumn and prior to that we aim to circulate a Constitution for your approval or amendment. Hopefully this will help consolidate the group, as we can then have a committee elected by our members rather than just a steering committee. Please respond to Simon's appeal which echoes that of the late Gerrit van Gelderen—**get active!**

We need to promote the group's activities (sightings, stranding and constant effort surveys, fish farms) and educational services. The beautiful posters sponsored by BIM are nearly all sold and so we need to provide more, and newer, material. We need people to do research and to define policy for areas such as tourism, by-catch, etc.

If we want to promote further sanctuaries or to attain an EU sanctuary we have to regain our momentum and magnify it. It is your sanctuary and your group. The success of further meetings and newsletters is up to you. Our good wishes go with the Irish Commissioner, Michael Canny, who will travel to Mexico for the International Whaling Commission meeting. Ireland will once again play a prominent role supporting the French sanctuary proposal from last year to establish the southern oceans (Antarctica) whale sanctuary. This newsletter coincides with that event.

Whales, dolphins and porpoises in Irish waters

A guide to their field identification

There are still some ID posters left for budding field cetologists. The poster shows the key ID features of fourteen species likely to be seen in Irish waters. The posters, which have proved to be very popular, are now being displayed throughout Europe and in other parts of the world.

The IWDG is very grateful to BIM and the European Commission for sponsorship of the poster.

Copies are available for £3.00 incl p&p from the IWDG, c/o Department of Zoology, University College, Cork.

Answer the following question and win the above poster

In October 1993, reports of Herring Hogs were sighted off Achill. *Who knows the origin of this name? Are they large porpoises, Minke whales, False Killer whales or some other species?*

Address your answer the IWDG, c/o Department of Zoology, University College, Cork. The first three correct answers win this lovely poster.

Innuit whale sanctuary

David Cotter of Survival International in Ireland has agreed to liaise with the IWDG on the issue of indigenous peoples and their hunting rights.

The aboriginal hunt must be one of the most difficult of all to define or address. Recommended reading for anyone interested is *Indigenous Peoples and Protected Areas,* edited by Elizabeth Kemf and published by Earthscan Publications. This book contains an account of an Innuit whale sanctuary at Isabella Bay, Baffin Island, which is home to some 2–300 Arctic Bowhead whales. The WWF became involved in the initiative in 1983 at the invitation of Innuit hunters and trappers. The hope is that the sanctuary embodies not just a conservation ethic but reinforces a sense of self-determination among the local people who made it possible. Among their rights is 'traditional' hunting, if and when animal populations allow it. The Arctic Bowhead whale has not been hunted in this area in living memory.

Stop Press • Stop Press

Musings on the IWC meeting in Mexico

The role of the IWC is to regulate whaling. No account can overlook the possibility of a resumption of whaling and the crucial role to be played by Norway, a founder member, in that debate.

Norway believes that commercial whaling of Minke whales is again possible and does just that, legally, as it entered a reservation on the IWC decision and extension of the moratorium. Norway's position must raise questions about the changing role of the IWC? Is such a body defunct? Should it be replaced or its role revised? What legal standing has a sanctuary, or are whaling nations free to hunt beyond 12 mile limits?

What are the implications for an extended EU and how can Norway be accommodated? Norway originally sought, but later dropped, a derogation for the export of whale products into the EU. Must these questions all be addressed again?

Teaching the teacher

The IWDG educational service has been supported by the European Commission. Contact Brendan Price, on 01–8354370 to arrange talks.

Sea Watch has provided us with exciting visual material and Dr Jonathan Gordon, IFAW, who introduced us to the acoustic world of the whale during the last Sea Week, has provided us with sound effects.

The indefatigable Leo Hallisey, organiser of Sea Week, arranged a whistle stop tour for our travelling show the same week. This proved to be a baptism of fire. Leo is now arranging for the educator to receive a crash course in the Irish language, as this weakness was most manifest in his early efforts. However, thanks to the co-operation and good humour of teachers and pupils throughout Conamara, the tour was most constructive. Pupils at Inverin are developing guidelines to be posted in wheelhouses of local boats advising on the release of by-catch dolphins. Their initiative could profitably be repeated around the coast. Another batch of students undertook a personal experiment in sensory deprivation by placing brown paper bags over their heads to empathise with dolphins in captivity.

This service has yet to be used to its full extent, however. Special thanks are due to Don Cotton—and the Sligo IWC—Gordon D'Arcy and Clare Hallisey, all of whom suggested adjustments which have led to an improved presentation.

We're all going to the zoo tomorrow

Michele Griffin, the Education Officer at Dublin Zoo, gives an overview of the zoo's latest exciting exhibition.

Following the very successful Dino Live exhibition last year, Dublin Zoo is now presenting Deep Sea Live between 26 March and 4 September.

Irish coastal waters, the home of some 23 species of whales, dolphins and porpoises, were declared a sanctuary for these animals in 1991.

This exhibition at Dublin Zoo, featuring life-size and life-like models, plus an education centre with information panels, quizzes and games, intends to promote an awareness of the need for preserving cetaceans.

The first models at the exhibition hark back to the dim distant past. *Andrewsarchus* was a large land-based mammal which lived about 40 million years ago; *Basilosaurus*, another ancestor of the whale, lived in the sea. These models outline the concept of evolution and extinction and set the theme for the necessity of conservation.

The *Atlantic White-sided dolphin* is featured with a young suckling calf. The interactive nature of the exhibition is further developed by the models of the *Sperm whale* and *Northern Right whale* which show the respective breathing processes and feeding mechanisms of a baleen and a toothed whale. The *Humpback whale* can be heard singing. Also featured is another visitor to our shores, the awesome *Killer whale*, the Orca, and the *Gray whale* which is found off the coast of California.

The exhibition is rounded off with models of the *Giant Squid*—in pursuit of gulper eels—and the *Great White Shark*. Both these models are included to indicate the difference between fish and mammals.

DEEP SEA LIVE

Opening times of Deep Sea Live

Monday to Saturday 9.30am–18.00pm
Sunday 10.30am–18.00pm

Admission rates

Adults	£5.50
Children (under 16 years)	£2.75
Children (under 3 years)	Free
Senior citizens	£2.75
Students	£3.75
Family (2 adults/2 children)	£13.00
Family (2 adults/4 children)	£15.50

Groups

Group of twenty or more	
Adults	£3.75
Children	£2.50

– one adult free with every ten children
– visits must be booked in advance
– payment made on arrival by one person

Unemployed

Adults	£2.75
Children (under 16 years)	£1.00
Family	£5.50

Strandings update

In 1993 the RSPCA's booklet *First aid for Stranded Cetaceans* was revised following a seminar held in 1992 to review the effectiveness of the advice offered in the publication in the event of a cetacean stranding.

Because our knowledge of, and experience with, the treatment of cetaceans has increased over the years, it was no longer considered appropriate that the booklet made no mention of rehabilitation in a captive facility as an option in the event of a stranding. The most satisfactory result in a stranding is the successful reflotation of the animal from the site of stranding. However, if this is not possible, rehabilitation in suitably equipped facilities should be considered and if neither of these options is possible then the animal should be humanely killed. No two strandings will be the same, but it is hoped that the new booklet *Whales, dolphins and porpoises—a first aid guide*, will offer sufficient guidance to improve the stranded animal's chance of being successfully returned to the sea or, if this is not possible, to minimise its suffering while on land.

Booklets are available from RSPCA Supplies Department at a cost of 50p. The RSPCA is providing the IWDG with sample copies of this booklet, which may be obtained by contacting the Welfare Committee—who participated in the revision of this booklet—through Brendan Price at 01–8354370.

A 'no euthanasia' motion was discussed at a recent RSPCA meeting in London, but it was not adopted as an option. Bill Jordan MRCVS, who was involved in tests for Euthatol, proposed the idea, and no doubt, as it is a thought provoking one, this is not the last we will hear of it.

The proposal to make use of disused dolphinaria, or even swimming pools, and to provide mobile facilities was adopted, and it will be interesting to see how this evolves.

We would like to thank Ryan Air for sponsoring a flight to London for this meeting.

Helen McLachlan, Wildlife Officer of the RSPCA, has been invited to Ireland to address a future meeting on the whole issue of strandings.

We still need to develop a stranding network to respond to such events and are currently compiling a register of people available around the coastline, as well as their skills and equipment. Sub-aqua clubs have already volunteered their services.

Anyone wishing to volunteer should contact the Welfare Committee.

Some whale ... some arch

James B. Fox of Athy, Co. Kildare, recounts a short history of whale arches.

The landscape around us often provides evidence of the happenings of the past. An event such as the beaching of a large whale is usually remembered by local people for a long time, but parts of its skeleton may sometimes outlive memories of the great beast's demise. When the provenance of spectacular whale bones cannot be traced, it may indicate that they are not of local origin, or perhaps that the story has been lost with the passage of time. Generally, the source of any bones mentioned in this article are unknown, unless stated otherwise.

A whale arch can be defined as an archway, often at the entrance to some house or garden, composed of the two lower jaw bones (mandibles) of a large toothless whale (rorqual). None of the toothed whales have jaw bones long enough, and of the rorquals only a Sei, Fin or Blue whale are big enough to provide the gently curving jaw bones of fourteen to fifteen feet long which are necessary to form a decent sized arch. Much smaller arches with smaller and more curved jaw bones may possibly be provided by an extra large Humpback whale, or very old arches by the once very common Nordcaper or Right whale and now extinct in these waters. Only a mature Fin whale of at least 55 feet long is now likely to provide jaw bones for an arch in Ireland, and at present a suitable beast comes ashore on our south or west coasts every few years. Unlike other mammals, the lower jaw bones of these whales are not fused together at the front, and, instead, the separate left and right bones are connected by cartilage at the point of the chin.

A whale arch will probably deteriorate more quickly in an exposed site, or if smothered in thick vegetation, and some decomposition may have already started if the bones are taken from a very rotten corpse. However, on average an arch should last about a hundred or a hundred and fifty years, when exposed to normal weathering.

The earliest record of a whale arch which I have located comes from a Victorian monthly publication called *Notes and Queries*, which published correspondence on this subject between 1871 and 1878. The story goes that a great storm raged in the London area on the night of 3 September 1659, the night that Oliver Cromwell died. During this storm, 'a great whale' was washed up in the estuary of the Thames, near Dagenham, and the jaw bones were erected to form an arch in memory of 'the great Protector' at Chadwell Heath, about three miles distant on the main road from London to Colchester. Some correspondents clearly remembered seeing the arch in about 1840, but there was no sign of it in the 1870s. However, my nephew, Christopher Jarvis, tells me that today there is a 'Whalebone Lane' at Chadwell Heath.

In Ireland, the earliest date that I have found so far is one at Aghadown near Ballydehob, West Cork. Smith's *History of Cork* (1750) states that, several years previously, a prodigious large whale, 85 feet long, was stranded at Crookhaven and that the jaw bones were still to be seen forming the posts and arch of a gate at Col Beechers at Aghadown. When Dr Harvey was writing his *Fauna of County Cork* (1844), he mentioned this whale arch in the present tense, so it can be assumed that it was still extant then.

Neither of these two arches (see insert) can be located today, and the origin of these and many other sets of whale bones remain untraced. The theory that bones were imported from commercial whaling sources cannot be dismissed.

Dr Paddy Sleeman of University College Cork, in a paper in the *Irish Naturalists' Journal* of October 1988, mentions three other whale arches in Co. Cork. An arch at Glen Barrahane, Castletownsend, in very poor condition, had jaw bones measuring thirteen feet and is now preserved in the National Museum, Dublin. Another arch at Lis Ard House, Skibbereen, no longer exists, but a bronze plaque which used to be attached to this arch was located, and this states that these bones came from a 72 foot whale which came ashore at Rabbit Island, Glandore Harbour, on 30 September 1843. A third arch was in the park at Doneraile (as distinct from Drenagh Wood) and only the stumps remained in the ground. The bones were believed to have been mistaken for timber and cut down for firewood during the 1940s. These jaw bones were estimated to have been at least 23 feet long, but a

A copy of Harvey's *Fauna* which I acquired some years ago has copious marginal annotations in the hand of Revd Samuel Hayman (1818-1886), a Church of Ireland clergyman and a very well-known and prolific antiquarian writer from Youghal. He was one time rector at Doneraile, Co. Cork, and also later at Douglas, Cork. One note reads as follows:

"Arches of Whale Jaw bones are to be seen (1873) at Drenagh Wood, Doneraile (Viscount Doneraile's), and at Maryborough, Douglas (Mr E.E. Newenham's). It was a fashion to set them up, a hundred years since: Vide—Notes & Queries. Does not their frequency in Co. Cork prove that the Whale was far more abundantly found off the shores of Ireland formerly than now? Or, were the Jaw bones imported for gateways?"

photograph of the arch has come to light since the paper was published and this shows them to have been over 26 feet. Only an exceptionally large Blue whale would have jaws of this size and there is no record of a beast like this coming ashore in south-west Ireland since Hayman's time. If it had been present in 1873, Hayman would certainly have mentioned it, and Paul Gallwey, who visited the Park in the mid 1880s, did not refer to this arch in his account of the demesne. In the 1890s, the whaling fleets had developed to a stage where the fast swimming Blue whales were beginning to be caught in large numbers, and Viscount Doneraile just might have imported the bones specially to construct the arch. An examination of the Doneraile Papers when they become available in the National Library might establish the origin of these bones.

Other whale arches probably existed in many parts of the country. In his book on *Irish Whales and Whaling* (1981), Dr James Fairley lists former whale arches at Killybegs, Co. Donegal, Aran Island, Co. Galway and Portaferry, Co. Down. My father remembers hearing talk of a whale arch at what is now the Dominican College at Tallaght, Co. Dublin. However, Handcock's *History of Tallaght* (1870) relates that the skeleton of an 'immense whale' was brought from the coast of Mayo at great expense about in 1840, but that 'the Arch' was merely vertebrae strung on an iron bar. A similar kind of arch used to exist in St. Anne's Park, Raheny, and the remains of it are still to be seen in a section of the park not open to the public where the maintenance staff work.

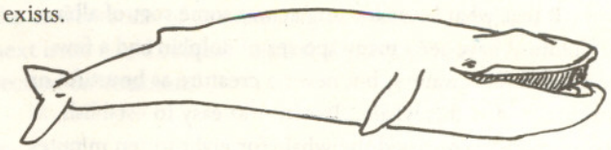
Existing whale arches

I am unable to verify whether the arch at Carntullagh near Killybegs still exists. However, my son has recently seen the arch at Cashel near Gortahork, Co. Donegal, which cannot be considered to be a classic arch as it consists of a single whale jaw bone resting across two gate pillars.

Mr J. A. Stratton Sharpe has a whale arch in his garden at Sandymount in Dublin, near the railway level crossing at Merrion Gates. It stands about twelve feet over ground and is now quite badly weathered. The arch was in the garden when he bought the house about thirty years ago and it is not known where the bones came from.

Another whale arch was drawn to my attention a few years ago near Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford. Towards the end of 1941, a large rorqual, probably a Fin whale, came ashore at Ballyhealy Strand near Kilmore Quay, Co. Wexford (*see* Newsletter Winter 1993, 'Wexford Whale No. 2'). The jaw bones were acquired by Dr Doyle of Bridgetown, who erected them in his garden, but, instead of putting the heavy rear end of the jaws into the ground, he placed the posterior part uppermost and cemented the narrow ends into the ground. In 1961, when Dr Doyle died, the arch was moved by cutting off the bones at ground level and recementing them into the ground at a new location. At present, the jaw bones stand ten feet above the ground and, allowing for what remains below ground at both sites, the original bones must have been at least fourteen feet long.

On 20 August 1989, the corpse of a decomposing Fin whale was washed up on a rocky shore just south of Black Head, Co. Clare. It was a sixty foot long male, and was even more decomposed when my wife and I viewed it on 13 May 1990 (from the upwind side). The winter storms had moved it further inland, but the lower jaw bones were missing. It looks as if some whale enthusiast may have acquired them, and perhaps another whale arch now exists.



The future for whale arches

It is likely that the odd new arch will be erected in the years to come, in spite of the rare occurrence of Fin whales and the difficulties involved in extracting the jaw bones from decomposing corpses on remote and possibly nearly inaccessible shores. Sometimes, the corpse is considered to be a health hazard, and the local authorities dispose of the carcass so quickly that there would be no chance to procure the jaw bones. Another problem is that, as the body of a dead whale decomposes, the jaw bones become loose and can easily be lost if the corpse is battered by heavy seas on a rocky shoreline. For example, a 59 foot decomposing Fin whale came ashore on 25 August 1988 at Belderg, Co. Mayo. On the next tide, it refloated and was seen alongside some rocks. The body was carried off by the sea on 30 August, having 'shed a number of bones on the shore in the intervening period'. The other problem which must be faced is the smell. It would require a very dedicated person to tackle removing jaw bones, as decomposing whales are very smelly and in a short time all of one's clothes and body would reek of a very unpleasant rancid odour. A 63 foot Fin whale came ashore near Bunmahon, Co. Waterford, in March 1983 and was considered to have already been dead for some weeks. Some time afterwards, I remember hearing a local man being interviewed on the radio, and it seems that he took possession of the corpse and was personally deboning it. He wrongly believed that he could sell the bones at a handsome profit, but at the time of the interview he anticipated that he would store the bones carefully until sale could be arranged.

Cobh sighting

Jim Wilson of Rushbrooke, Co. Cork recalls the rare occurrence of sighting a Beluga whale in the mouth of the river Lee.

On the evening of 10 June 1988, I received an excited phone call from Mark Carmody telling me that he had just seen a White whale in the water off Cobh. I immediately grabbed my binoculars and telescope and arrived at the site within minutes. To my amazement, there in the harbour was a White whale which we were able to observe from a height of 30 metres in excellent light conditions.

On observation through my telescope, I became even more amazed at what I was witnessing. I tried to convince myself that what I was looking at was some sort of albino dolphin. I have seen many species of dolphin and a few whales in Irish waters, but never a creature as beautiful or unexpected as this whale. Its size was easy to establish, as two fishermen pursued the whale for eight to ten minutes by rowing after it—with little success however. The whale was clearly as long, if not slightly longer, than the fourteen foot boat. Without optical aids the whale was easy to follow, even at over a kilometre, as its gleaming white form rose to and dived from the surface without exposing the tail. The bulbous head (without a beak), the complete absence of a dorsal fin and a distinct hump two-thirds down the back confirmed my suspicion of the animal being a White whale or Beluga (*Delphinapterus leucas* [Pallas]). The whale made nine or ten shallow dives of ten seconds duration before arching its back sharply and diving deep for three or four minutes. A single jet was seen coming from the blowhole on several occasions.

The whale came within 200 metres of the shore, just below our observation point at the east end of the town of Cobh, before turning and heading out of the harbour between Spike Island and Whitegate.

This is only the second sighting record of this species in Irish waters, the only other record being one sighted in County Mayo in September 1948. There are also five records of this species from Scotland.

White whales are well known for ascending rivers, so its presence at the mouth of the river Lee in Cork is in itself not unusual. Its presence in Irish waters is amazing. Our almost incredible experience would indicate that anyone seawatching for birds or looking for cetaceans would not overlook this fantastic whale.

This sighting was first recorded in the *Irish Naturalists' Journal*, October 1988.

Tribute to Bill Travers

A sad loss has been that of Bill Travers, star of *Born Free, Ring of Bright Water* and other wildlife films. Bill and his co-star and wife, Virginia McKenna, established the Born Free Foundation, one of whose involvements was the first ever release of captured dolphins back into the wild.

A talk and video of the "Into the Blue Project", as it became known, was shown by his friend and colleague in this endeavour, Bill Jordan(Care for the Wild), at Leo Hallisey's Sea Week a couple of years ago. One of his last projects was the "Free Willie Campaign", concerning the orca in the film of that name and still in captivity in Mexico, where this year's IWC meetings take place. A man's work and friends are his testament, and Bill's work to keep wildlife in the wild may yet free Willie, and make him a good friend to dolphin and whale.

Our sincere sympathy to his family and friends.

Brendan Price

Constant effort sighting scheme

Observer packs to accompany this scheme are now available. If you are interested in regularly seawatching for cetaceans from a site near you, contact Conal O'Flanaghan at 41 Lorcan Grove, Santry, Dublin 19.

Seawatch Day

A Seawatch Day is planned for Sunday 5 June from Howth Head and Bray Head. Guides from the IWDG, IWC, IWF and Coastwatch who are familiar with many aspects of marine life will be available to help watchers enjoy the marine life around their shores.

If this venture is successful, a nationwide Seawatch Day is planned for August.

Contact Michele Griffin at 01–6771425 for further information.

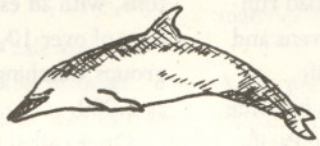
A. Whilde, *Irish Red Data Book 2: Vertebrates*, HMSO, Belfast

Simon Berrow reviews this recent publication.

A Red Data book is a register of threatened wildlife, including definitions of degrees of threat. Initiated by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), many countries around the world have now produced books of their own wildlife and this forms an important focus for conservation efforts.

The *Irish Red Data Book* for vertebrates has just been published and covers all threatened mammals, birds, amphibians and fish. In spite of the fact that over one half of Ireland's mammal species are cetaceans (23 out of 43 species), they have been omitted from the book "due to lack of information". Although stating that many species are threatened, the author concludes that there is an "urgent need for better information on their status, numbers, distribution and threats". Notes were made on seventeen cetacean species considered to regularly occur in Irish waters, including the rare Northern Right, Blue and False Killer whales, but omitting Minke, Fin and Sperm whales, which have been regularly recorded in Irish waters.

While acknowledging that information on cetaceans in Irish waters is scarce, there is some information on their status and distribution available, including population estimates for commercially important species from the International Whaling Commission. The *Irish Red Data Book* is an important step in the conservation of Irish vertebrates and should have attempted to review the available information. The author acknowledges the establishment of the IWDG, but the inclusion of cetaceans in the body of the book would have been a very valuable contribution to the conservation of cetaceans in Irish waters. Perhaps the next issue could redress this imbalance and have a large section on cetaceans!



Dolphin's role in aboriginal life

Burnam Burnam has studied law at the University of Tasmania, worked as parliamentary liaison officer to the NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and is currently researching a book on Aboriginal Australia. He writes here about the special relationship that existed between members of his tribe, the Wurunjeri, and wild dolphins. This article is reproduced here by kind permission of the Australian Geographic.

At the extreme point of the compass, the Australian mainland is flanked by four important Dolphin Dreaming sites: Monkey Mia, Byron Bay, Wilson's Promontory and Bamaga. These are the main dolphin playgrounds, but most other coastal areas are also frequented.

Australians, black and white, develop important 'connections' with living natural things and all of us have loving, longing memories of a spiritual affinity to 'our' special piece of land that gave us comfort and happiness during our early years.

Kookaburras, koalas, wombats, willy wagtails, platypuses, magpies, peewees, brolgas, owls, wallabies, turtles, dugongs, pelicans, whales, sharks and dolphins become important symbols to us. Their physical appearance and reappearance, generally during times of distress, become a comforting factor in self-healing.

To Aborigines like me, the physical appearance of our tribal symbols are read as important signs or messages about the well-being of the group, family members, or ourselves as individuals.

In our tribe, located on the far south coast of eastern Australia from Batemans Bay south to Mallacoota, the dolphin and Umbara, the black duck, became our tribal symbols. Meditating 'spotters' sat on sandy headlands and dunes communicating in silence with dolphins offshore. Using inherited techniques, these men were able to get the dolphins to round up schools of fish and bring them towards the beach where the tribe would net them. As with all pets, we would personally reward the dolphins by hand feeding them.

Through the communion process, answers relating to important tribal decisions would be conveyed from the dolphins to the elders. On summer nights, fires emitting smokeless blue flames from the *Xanthorrhoea* (the grasstree) would be used on beaches to re-enact in corroboree, singing and storytelling form, events of long ago.

From the sacredness of Mumbulla Mountain and Goolooga, the spirits of our departed go back to the dolphin and from the safety of offshore they guide and protect us as we take our journey through life in human form. It is sacrilege to hunt and kill dolphins, and to do so would invoke the wrath of the feather-footed man, the Gornge, the executioner. As long as the dolphins are there, our tribe feels safe from threat and this is how it has always been. All tribes salute the dolphin.

Metaphysical hit on whale-watch trip!

In February 1994, Derek Mooney of RTE and Don Conroy were invited by Baja Discovery to Baja California, to watch the Californian Gray Whales in their breeding grounds in the San Ignacio Lagoon (off mainland Mexico). In this piece Don recalls that trip.

After a seven and a half hour trip from Dublin, via Shannon, to New York, we took a connecting five-hour flight to Los Angeles. It was a week after the earthquake and the aftershock could still be felt. Next day, still intact, we flew by small plane to Loreto, followed by a day's journey by van across the Vizcaíno Desert. The ride was tough but fascinating as we travelled through this unique and amazing landscape. Giant cardon cacti stood like sentinels along the way. Brief glimpses of road runners, red-tailed hawks, prairie falcons, cactus wrens and coyotes told us that the desert was rich in wildlife.

Baja is called the last frontier, surrounded on one side by the sea of Cortez and on the other side by the Pacific Ocean. It is an enchanting mixture of desert, chaparral, rich agricultural valleys, forests, sand dunes and wetlands, with mountain ranges over 10,000 feet high.

When we reached our destination, there were small boats waiting to take us to our ultimate destination, Rocky Point—an uninhabited island. There we set up camp. The evening was cold and clear as we watched the stars twinkle in their celestial canopy. Time for bed. We were lulled to sleep by a chorus of coyotes.

Over the next few days we were treated to the most spectacular views of Gray whales as we circled around in our fibreglass boats, called Pongas.

Each year the Gray whale makes a 10,000 mile round trip from the Bering Sea in Alaska to the breeding grounds in Baja California travelling close to the shore which makes them easy to watch. Their average speed is 5 to 6 mph. The whales arrive in late December. The pregnant females arrive first, followed by the mature adults, then yearlings and immatures. They stay in Baja for a few months, resting, giving birth and mating. The lagoons provide a perfect nursery for mothers and calves, while also providing areas for single whales to mingle and mate.

The lagoons are well protected from rough seas, predatory sharks and killer whales. In March, the whales leave the lagoons to return to Alaska.

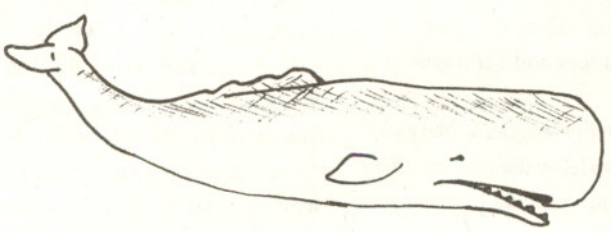
Gray whales become sexually mature at eight years. Females will mate once a year and give birth the following year. Californian Grays are baleen whales, unlike toothed whales. The baleen plates are used to sieve plankton, krill and small fish from the sea. Gray whales have no dorsal fin, but instead have a ridge of bumps and knuckles. Mature whales are 40 to 50 feet long and weigh 30 to 40 tons, with an estimated life span of 40 to 60 years. Numbers of over 10,000 are suggested in the lagoons, but the groups watching in Baja estimate the figures to be as low as 2,000.

Once called the Devil fish, for the Grays would attack the whaling ships when their young were slaughtered, today they are called the Friendlies as they will approach your boat and let you stroke them.

Well, after getting fantastic views of the whales breaching, spy hopping, sounding and mating, I spent the last evening watching the sunset and listening to their rhythmic breathing while a school of dolphins sailed by and flocks of pelicans flew in to roost.

I had a great sense of the mysterious, the sacred... One of our tour guides from California came to join me and I explained how I was feeling. "Gee, that's neat!" was her reply.

Then she added, "when I first came in '74, I had a metaphysical hit too!"



Tribute to Gerrit van Gelderen

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Sanctuary and the young and burgeoning Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, infant of the conservation movement in Ireland, would never have existed without Gerrit van Gelderen. The IWDG survives largely without money, and exists on high hopes and dreams for a world that is at one with nature. We have become, in Gerrit's prophetic words, "a nation full of nature watchers", united behind the whale, and all that is symbolised by the whale, both locally and globally.

We were all reared on Gerrit's programmes from an early age and, if conservation has a father, indeed a grandfather figure in Ireland, it is Gerrit van Gelderen. The colossus of the conservation stage in Ireland was, for his lifetime, Gerrit van Gelderen.

He was the true founder of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Sanctuary. He championed the cause through good times and bad, regardless of whether whales were in or out of fashion or political favour. In death, the mould is broken forever. There is no Gerrit II, but there is a nation full of nature watchers. In areas fraught with politics and division, he kept a steadfast path, and we are the result today. Despite ever new and real threats, we are left a legacy of optimism for the future—for whales, ourselves and generations to come.

The lovely, garrulous, quarrelsome, vocal, opinionated Gerrit concealed the sensitive artist, whose eye for nature, through a lens and sensitive hands (pens and brushes), brought wildlife into every Irish home. From war-torn Holland, he reunited the Irish with their own landscape and each other, and resurrected respect for wildlife. A tribute to Gerrit becomes a prayer, by any belief. Always questioning, and churched in the end, however reluctantly, beyond the little church in Kilternan, an entire nation comprising individuals and organisations of every hue and background were united in mourning his death. There were many unmarked ceremonies, memories recalled and fixed for all time, on the occasion of his passing from us. He could not make a programme without a social comment, shared his knowledge and wisdom with all, never said *No* to an underdog with a just cause and had immeasurable time for children, thus making Ireland a better place.

As a family man, our thoughts and prayers must now be for his family, and our gratitude for sharing him with so many of us.

As his programme "To the Waters and the Wild" took its name from W.B. Yeats' "The Stolen Child", so now other lines from Yeats commend themselves to us to defend the delicate natural balances of our Earth, and Gerrit's dreams:

Had I the Heaven's embroider'd cloths
Enwrought with golden and silver lights,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet,
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

Brendan Price

Whales

Whales are killed every day,
They dont do anything on us,
So why should they pay.
They should be able to live their life,
They dont get a chance to have children or a husband or a wife.
If I caught the people who kills the Whales,
I'd kill THEM and give them to the January Sales!

Poem by Marian McCabe
Aged 10 years and 6 months!

Picture by Michael Reidy
Aged 10

Black sails or killer whales?

Des Mills, an experienced fisherman from the Inishowen Peninsula, recalls an experience which he is unlikely ever to forget.

The killer whale is one of the most magnificent animals in the oceans of the world. Its fearlessness and utter disregard for other living creatures is well known. Films or television can give us some appreciation of the beauty, grace and power of these animals, but nothing can compare with actually seeing them in the flesh. Several years ago I was fortunate enough (although I did not think so at the time) to find myself in a small boat in the midst of a school of killer whales. I have been a fisherman for twenty years in a variety of boats around our coast and this was my one and only encounter with the killer whale.

I live on the Inishowen Peninsula in North Donegal, half-way between Malin Head and Lough Foyle. It was one of those rare summer mornings in late July as we set out to check our lobster pots. The sun was hot in the sky at seven o'clock in the morning and the sea was mirror calm. The distant headlands of County Antrim seemed to be floating in a shimmer of haze. We were two miles off Kinnagoe Bay and nearing our first marker buoy. I was daydreaming, looking towards the shore, thinking how very different the weather must have been when the great Spanish galleon, *Trinidad Valencera*, was pounded to pieces off the rocks four hundred years ago. Something caught the side of my eye to seaward, and I can only describe what I saw by telling you what I thought I saw at the time. I thought I was looking at three or four yachts with black sails. I remember thinking how strange that the yachts should all have black sails. Then they disappeared, spouting water as they did so, and I realised immediately that we were very close to a school of killer whales.

There were three of us in out twenty-eight foot boat and without speaking we seemed to agree that we would like a closer look. In less than a minute we had the boat out of gear and were in the midst of a maelstrom of moving life. There were between twenty and thirty of these magnificent animals, ranging from a huge bull almost as long as the boat—and probably twice as heavy—to the smallest calf of about six feet. They circled the boat, played and cavorted with a definite interest in our alien intrusion. The sight was breathtaking. Eventually the patriarch, the big bull with a black fin of over six feet, turned, faced the boat and dived! The three of us looked at each other without speaking, not knowing whether to move the boat or leave it where it was. In the end we did nothing and the huge animal surfaced ten feet in front of our boat! The mixed feelings of utter fright and sheer thrill was unbelievable. Oh, for a camera at that time, but then I probably would not have been able to hold it steady enough.

After what seemed like hours—about twenty minutes in fact—the school began to move away, destination unknown, chasing the ever-moving shoals of fish. We watched them into the distance before finally returning to our day's work. What remained is an experience which I will cherish for the rest of my life and one which I will certainly never forget.

Projeto Cetaceos

In July 1993 Jane O'Connell visited a cetacean project in the townland of Sao Joao da Barra on the northern coastline of the state of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. She gives us a report of her trip.

The research project began with the intention of monitoring the incidental catch of dolphins by local fishermen. The dolphins are not deliberately killed, but die when entangled in gill nets and other fishing gear. Environmental education is also one of the goals of the project, and the biologists give lectures to schools, community groups and universities.

The research entails collecting dolphin carcasses from the fishermen, with whom they have developed a good working relationship. Following a fishing trip, the fishermen complete a form detailing the cetaceans observed while at sea and any that are accidentally captured or drowned. Each carcass is weighed, measured and examined for parasites. Using this information the biologists hope to build up information on levels of incidental take as well as accumulating information on population size, movement patterns and stock identity. Such information is sadly lacking on the two species of dolphin most commonly caught locally in gill nets—*Pontoporiablainvillei* (more commonly known as the franciscana) and *Sotaliafluviatilis* (more commonly known as the tucuxi).

Both these species are listed as insufficiently well-known in the IUCN Red Data book on whales and dolphins, but are suspected to be vulnerable if not endangered. Catches of *Pontoporia* have been high in the past (723 taken in South Brazil between 1976 and 1985). *Pontoporia* is the smallest of the platanistoid dolphins and the

Continued opposite

North from Novia Scotia

Fiacc O'Brolchain tells of his trip north in a 96 foot gaff ketch.

We left the port of Lunenburg in Nova Scotia in early June. Our route was to take us via the Azores, as early in the year the shorter more northerly route could contain ice and was a more uncomfortable journey.

The vessel was a 96ft gaff ketch that had been used for harbour charter work since it had been rebuilt in Canada some ten years previously. Though sturdy and well equipped, our vessel needed a lot of love and attention in order to improve the standard of comfort and ease of running.

The good weather at the start of our journey could not last. After all, we were heading out onto the Grand Banks, that notoriously foggy area where thousands of cod fishermen have lost their lives. When we had been out for a day, a fog came down which lasted for five days.

One day later, it blew a gale for a while with an attendant swell of eighteen to twenty-four feet. This we were told by a passing cargo vessel which had better long-distance communications than ourselves. As we had no horizon, no sun and no stars, we were on dead reckoning and our sextants remained safely in their boxes.

Apart from the bitter, bitter cold, with this crew member wearing up to nine layers of clothes, this part of our journey was uneventful enough. Radar was our eyes and with mostly light winds we motor sailed through the fog towards the small islands in mid-Atlantic.

I do not believe that I will ever forget the owner of the vessel calling me to go on watch at 4am on the morning of the sixth day. "The fog is behind us," he said. "We have reached the Gulf Stream, there is a small display of Northern lights and it will be a beautiful morning." The difference was amazing.

Behind us we could see the line of fog. Off in the northern sky were the faint curtains of the Northern lights. The watch was spent removing clothes, by midday we were in shorts. About bloody time!

The next week was the steady rhythm of looking after the vessel with all the daylight hours making and mending. A ration of two bottles of beer a day just before dinner, a relaxing end to a satisfying day's work.

This well-run vessel was immediately up in a heap when one of the watch shouted "whales astern". All discipline was shot to hell. The crew were all up in the rigging for a better view.

There were three of them. They seemed to be as big as our small vessel. They swam by us with absolute ease even though we were doing six or seven knots at the time. Rolling over to look up at us looking down at them, they passed within thirty feet of us.

After a short time, the whales seemed to start to take an erratic course. I could not figure this out until I looked at the helmsman who had also fallen victim to our extraordinary companions and left the wheel.

I have never been able to identify the three properly. They were Right whales of some sort, with a fin very far back. They were probably in reality between 55 and 65 feet long.

The next day we raised Flores and its small companion, the most westerly of the Azores. An excellent landfall was greeted by the most extraordinary sight any of us had ever seen at sea.

Our course was to take us through the channel between the two islands. Land was a novelty after our time at sea, so all the crew were on deck. Half an hour before sunset, right in the middle of the channel, the sea suddenly became alive. As far as the eye could see there were dolphins. It seemed like there were thousands of them all leaping and swimming towards us. It was the most splendid sight, with a degree of carefree spirit that was very exciting.

This demonstration lasted about half an hour before the dolphins went on their way and the sea became quiet again. The crew of ten had a good number of years at sea behind them, yet none of them had ever seen a display like this.

Twenty-four hours later we were in Horta, the end of that part of our voyage. The rest of our trip was ahead of us, but that was our last encounter with whales.

Continued from Page 10

only one which occurs in marine waters. Set gill nets with a 30 cm mesh size are the most dangerous for it. The biologists are examining ways in which the nets could be modified in order to reduce dolphin mortality, no easy task as the fishermen cannot afford replacement nets.

Sotalia lives in the river Amazon, but also in estuaries and along the coast. The status of its population is virtually unknown. It is not hunted directly, but is easily captured accidentally in monofilament gill nets, shrimp traps and seine nets.

Three biologists are carrying out the excellent work on this project and have published papers which add to the existing knowledge of the species. Hopefully, their research will also come up with a conservation strategy.

National co-ordinators

Simon Berrow
Department of Zoology
University College
Cork
Telephone: 021 276871 ext 4053
Fax: 021 277922

Terry Bruton
Ulster Museum
Botanic Gardens
Belfast
Telephone: 08 0232 381251 (from within RoI)
Fax: 08 0232 665510 (from within RoI)

Regional co-ordinators

Region: Counties Louth, Meath, Dublin
Name: John Woodlock
Address: 42 Hillside Gardens, Skerries, Co. Dublin
Telephone: 01 8492268
Name: George McCormack
Address: 'Colonsay', South Strand, Skerries, Co. Dublin
Telephone: 01 8492015

Region: County Wicklow
Name: Declan Murphy
Address: 37 Oakley Park, Blackrock, Co. Dublin
Telephone: 01 881873

Region: County Wexford
Name: Jim Hurley
Address: Grange, Kilmore, Co. Wexford
Telephone: 053 29671

Region: County Waterford/East Cork
Name: Pat Smiddy, *OPW National Parks and Wildlife Service*
Address: Ballymacoda, Ballykeneally, Co. Cork
Telephone: 024 98286

Region: South Cork
Name: Simon Berrow
Address: c/o Zoology Department, UCC
Telephone: 021 276871 ext 4053

Region: West Cork (Clonakilty, Mizen, Bantry)
Name: Declan O'Donnell, *OPW National Parks and Wildlife Service*
Address: Direenlomane, Ballydehob
Telephone: 028 37347

Region: West Cork (Beara Peninsula)
Name: Danny Osbourne
Address: Garranes, Beara, Castletownbere
Telephone: 027 73086

Region: South Kerry (Kenmare Bay)
Name: Michael O'Sullivan, *OPW National Parks and Wildlife Service*
Address: Ardshillane East, Sneem
Telephone: 064 45257

Region: Mid Kerry (Castlemaine Harbour)
Name: Pat Foley, *OPW National Parks and Wildlife Service*
Address: Boultens, Castlemaine
Telephone: 066 67235

Region: West Kerry (Dingle Peninsula)
Name: Kevin Flannery
Address: Garfinny, Dingle
Telephone: 066 51267

Region: North Kerry (Tralee Bay)
Name: Tim O'Donoghue, *OPW National Parks and Wildlife Service*
Address: Upper Ballybrenagh, Tralee
Telephone: 066 24725

Region: County Clare
Name: Paddy O'Sullivan, *OPW National Parks and Wildlife Service*
Address: Drumcliffe, Ennis
Telephone: 065 22940

Region: County Mayo (Achill Island)
Name: John O'Shea
Address: Dooagh, Achill Island
Telephone: 098 43112

Region: South Conamara
Name: Padraic de Bhaldraithe
Address: Fornis, Leitir Mealláin, Co. na Gaillimhe
Telephone: 091 81126

Region: Counties Sligo and Leitrim
Name: Dr Don Cotton
Address: Rathrowan House, Rathaberna, Sligo
Telephone: 071 43261 (w) or 071 43251 (h)

Region: County Donegal (South)
Name: RichardTimony
Address: Elisnor, Donegal Town
Telephone: 073 22363

Region: County Antrim
Name: John Greer
Address: Portrush Countryside Centre, 8 Bath Road, Portrush
Telephone: 08 0265 823600 (from within Republic of Ireland)

Region: Counties Derry and Down
Name: Terry Bruton
Address: Ulster Museum, Botanic Gardens, Belfast
Telephone: 08 0232 38125 (from within Republic of Ireland)

The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group is dedicated to the study and conservation of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) in Irish waters. It has established and co-ordinates a network of regional co-ordinators (see above) who will visit stranded animals and collect records of those sighted at sea. If you find a whale, dolphin or porpoise washed up, observe one at sea or from the shore, or are interested in learning more about the group, contact your regional co-ordinator or the national co-ordinators.

This newsletter is published by the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group and funded by the European Commission.

Print preparation by Red Barn Publishing (028-38259).

Please send comments and contributions to:
IWDG, c/o Zoology Department, University College, Cork.