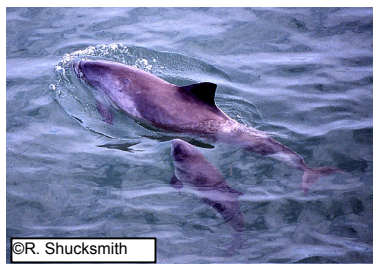


CARMARTHENSHIRE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

HARBOUR PORPOISE/ *PHOCOENA PHOCOENA*



Conservation objectives:

* No reduction, where natural processes allow, in the current geographical range and abundance of harbour porpoise within Carmarthenshire coastal waters.

What you can do to help:

- Report sightings to the Sea Watch Foundation
www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk
- Follow codes of conduct for fishing/wildlife cruises.
- * Report dead strandings to the Welsh Strandings Project (01348 875000).
- * Report live strandings to the RSPCA (0990 555999).

Further information:

www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk
www.strandings.com
www.gmmp.org.uk
www.wdcs.org

Harbour porpoises are deep divers, capable of reaching depths in excess of 200 m.



Ecology

The harbour porpoise is the smallest cetacean in coastal and inshore waters off Wales and is by far the most common cetacean in Carmarthenshire waters. Its blunt head and small triangular dorsal fin make it easy to identify.

Harbour porpoise are highly social animals, found in small groups (2–10) in inshore waters. Larger groups have been recorded in late summer and autumn, often associated with feeding activity. They feed on a wide variety of fish (e.g. pollack, hake, mackerel and sand eels) and within a wide variety of marine habitats, varying with the seasons and prey availability.

Females usually give birth in June, having 1 calf every 1–2 years (sexual maturity is reached at ~4–5 years). Calves are fed by their mothers for 8–12 months, and generally stay near-by for the following year.

Since the 1940s, there is evidence of a decline in the numbers of this species in UK waters. The main threats are thought to include entanglement in fishing nets, pollution and disturbance.

Distribution in Carmarthen Bay

It has become clear that the Bay is an important location for harbour porpoise. An on-going survey of harbour porpoise in south Wales, including Carmarthen Bay, has shown significant porpoise activity in the centre of the bay.

Legal status

The Harbour Porpoise is protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations 1994 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Why have harbour porpoise declined?

- * Incidental capture/drowning in fishing gear – up to 10,000/year around British waters.
- * Pollution (e.g. organochlorines and heavy metals).
- * Disturbance from underwater noise (e.g. from recreational boating activity, military tests and shipping) and also vessel behaviour.
- * Entanglement with, or ingestion of marine debris.
- * Reduction of prey species from over-fishing of stocks and habitat damage.

What is being done locally

- * Carmarthen Bay–Gower Peninsula–Swansea Bay Harbour Porpoise Project. This project has recorded porpoise activity in the bay from both the sea and from the shore.
- * A code of conduct to reduce disturbance to marine wildlife, has been produced by Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) and CCW.
- * Stranded animals can be reported to the Welsh Strandings Project to establish cause of death through post-mortem and tissue studies.