

## **HEBRIDEAN WHALE & DOLPHIN TRUST**

### **News release**

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*Pictured: Minke whale in Hebridean waters / HWDT*

### **First whale week festival spotlights western Scotland's internationally important marine life**

A new annual week-long festival boosting the profile of The Hebrides as an internationally-important hotspot for whale spotting and conservation action will be launched on World Oceans Day on 8 June, in what is believed to be the first event of its kind in Scotland.

Humpback whales, orcas and bottlenose dolphins will take over Tobermory on the Isle of Mull between 8-15 June 2014, as conservation charity Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary with its first Whale Week.

A wide range of activities and events will increase knowledge and understanding of Scotland's spectacular whales, dolphins and porpoises – known as cetaceans – and The Hebrides' globally important marine environment.

HWDT hopes that the local community, schools and tourists will be inspired to help ensure the long-term survival of these remarkable marine creatures, which are facing increasing stress from human activities including climate change, habitat degradation, pollution, entanglement in fishing gear, and underwater noise. So far 24 cetacean species – including several national and international conservation priorities – have been recorded in the region.

“We want Whale Week to create a real buzz about western Scotland's wonderful whales, dolphins, porpoises and basking sharks. We are fortunate to have one of Europe's most important habitats for these remarkable marine creatures – and by raising awareness and protecting them we can bring economic and social benefits to the entire region,” said Eva Varga, HWDT Operations Manager.

Guests will be able to step onboard survey boats, hear talks by experts, and enjoy fun and educational activities. There will be a daily treasure hunt and displays at HWDT's visitor centre; touch tank sessions run by Tobermory Harbour Association and HWDT; a pub quiz and music evening in Tobermory's Mishnish Pub; and an award ceremony for artwork, music and writing created during the week and for the winners of a window display competition.

HWDT's unique research yacht *Silurian*, previously used in filming of the BBC's acclaimed series *The Blue Planet* and nicknamed the 'floating classroom', will return from pioneering research expeditions across the Hebrides to Tobermory on 8 June for four days. There will be opportunities to go onboard *Silurian* and *Celtic Mist*, the research vessel of the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group.

Presentations will highlight the latest research findings and discuss the killer whales of the North Atlantic, including the West Coast Community living in the Hebrides – a pod thought to be the UK's only resident group of orcas. The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group will discuss their research of humpback whales in the North Atlantic, while local company Sea Life Surveys will describe 30 years of respectful whale watching.

The closing day on 14 June will feature beach activities with competitions, demonstrations and creative activities for children, families and adults.

HWDT works to secure the future of western Scotland's cetaceans and their marine environment by enhancing knowledge and understanding through education, research and engagement with local communities. People can support crucial research by reporting sightings of cetaceans and basking sharks, or by volunteering alongside marine scientists on research expeditions.

For a schedule of Whale Week events, please call 01688 302620 or visit [www.hwdt.org](http://www.hwdt.org).

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