

The WiSe way to watch dolphins

Locals and tourists in Oban have been delighted over the last few weeks by a small group of common dolphins which have taken up temporary residence in Oban Bay. The Tobermory-based Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT), which studies whales and dolphins throughout the Hebrides, is particularly interested in the dolphins. Laura Mandleberg, HWDT Sightings Officer said “Common dolphins are seasonal visitors to our coasts, moving in from offshore areas to feed the abundant summer fish stocks. In the Hebrides, they are most often seen in groups of about 10-30 individuals, but can sometimes be found in much larger groups of several hundred. They are fast swimmers and can be very acrobatic at the surface.”

Laura Mandleberg continued, “It is unusual for this species to turn up in a busy, inshore area like Oban Bay, and even more unusual for them to still be here several weeks later. The dolphins appear to be healthy and behaving normally - they arrived of their own accord and will move out of the area when they are ready to do so. It’s great for us all to be able to see them, so it’s in both our best interests and theirs to make their stay a pleasant one and not to disturb them as they feed, rest and look after their young. It’s also important that boats stay far enough away to avoid any risk of injuring the animals – especially as the group includes calves.”



The Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust promotes the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code and recommends boat operators accredited by the WiSe scheme which encourages responsible wildlife watching by running training courses for boat operators.

Here are some tips on how to watch the dolphins without disturbing them:

- If approaching dolphins by boat, do so slowly and predictably and never from behind.
- Let the animals decide how close they want you to be – common dolphins are naturally inquisitive and often approach boats to bow-ride. Don’t chase them – let them go if they move away.
- Make sure the animals are not surrounded – try to stay together, but remember that the likelihood of disturbance will be greater as the number of people watching increases.
- Be careful not to split the dolphins up, especially mothers from their young.

For more information go to www.hwdt.org

For information on the WiSe scheme and the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code go to www.wisescheme.org and www.marinecode.org