



Another leatherback turtle spotted in the Hebrides

A report has been received of a leatherback turtle near Priest Island (Summer Isles)

On September 1st Mr Paul Worsley was out fishing when something strange caught his eye, *“I was fishing a reef with my father who actually sighted it first but he wasn't sure what he had seen. I am pretty familiar with the marine life found in the area so was very surprised indeed to see the turtle, which in all honesty was unmistakable”*. What Mr Worsley spotted was a leatherback turtle; the largest of all the marine turtles and recognisable from the black, leathery skin that covers its carapace (shell). This particular turtle was spotted a mile offshore from Mellon Udrigle (Wester Ross), surfacing a mere 20 foot from the vessel, something Mr Worsley attributes to the fact the engine was off and they were drifting, *“The moment we turned the key the turtle dived and we never saw it again”*. During their encounter the turtle, estimated to made about 8 short dives, surfacing to take breath.

According to the Marine Conservation Society, a total of five leatherback turtle sightings have been reported off Scotland's west coast in 2011, including a fantastic sighting from onboard HWDTs research vessel *Silurian* in June (the leatherback pictured is from that encounter). Leatherbacks undertake enormous migrations from tropical breeding grounds to temperate feeding waters. The turtles are typically seen in British waters during the summer months when the swarms of jellyfish they prey on are abundant. They are one of the largest reptiles on the planet with consequently few natural predators. However, leatherbacks are listed as critically endangered due to entanglement in fishing gear and marine litter (a plastic bag looks a lot like a jellyfish!). In some places, nesting females are killed for their meat and their eggs are harvested.

If you've spotted a leatherback or another sea creature we'd be delighted to know about the encounter. By reporting your sightings you are helping us build a better understanding of the species found in our oceans.